



CITY OF HARTFORD ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY

c/o Hartford Food System, 190 Wethersfield Ave, Hartford, CT 06114
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Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

Virtual Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2020, 3:30 – 5:15 PM

Present	Absent	Guests
Val Bryan, Mary Cockram, Angela Colantonio, Valentine Doyle, Martha Page, Sofia Segura Pérez, Cary Wheaton	Brunella Ibarrola, Andrew May, Danielle Smiley-Daniel	Yahaira Escribano (Foodshare), Chris Goodwin (KNOX), Meg Hourigan (Hartford Food System), Abbie Kelly (Hands on Hartford), Stefanie Robles, Laura Settlemeier (Hartford Land Bank)

Topics

Introduction and Official Business

The meeting was called to order at 3:35. Val moved to approve the meeting minutes from July with amendments; Valentine seconded; the minutes were approved.

Hartford Land Bank

Laura Settlemeier of the Hartford Land Bank presented.

Land banks are government entities or nonprofits focused on the conversion of vacant, abandoned, and/or tax delinquent properties into productive uses that match community priorities.

There is a common pattern of a vacant property being tax delinquent, getting foreclosed, sold at auction, bought by a speculator who doesn't do anything with it, and once again becoming tax delinquent. Land banks break this cycle by acquiring the title and converting it into something new. So far, seven properties in Hartford have been identified, and they range from single family homes to "perfect six" rental units. Before thorough inspection, they do appear to be salvageable.

The City of Hartford last held a deed sale in April 2019 to acquire more properties.

The board of the Hartford Land Bank currently includes: Melyn Colón, executive director of SINA; Steve Harris, Northeast resident and retired firefighter; Rex Fowler, Hartford Community Loan Fund; Elda Sinani, City of Hartford; Jim Horan, Local Initiatives Support Corporation; and Raul Irizarry, landscape architect. Commissioners suggested adding a public health perspective to the board.

Philadelphia has several land bank success stories. Beautifying land bank properties in Philadelphia generated lots of interest and ultimately connected the land bank to more properties.

The current available properties in Hartford do not present many opportunities for growing food this season or next season.

Hartford Land Bank's acquisition policy is to acquire and release a property within 36 months, but in practice are working toward one year (starting and ending the year with zero properties).

What are the points of resistance/concern? Community fears of gentrification can lead to distrust of the land bank. The land bank's goal is to increase property values without displacing residents – this includes aiming to fill the properties with neighborhood/city residents and prioritizing people of color in the process. Property tax also presents a barrier: there may be opportunities to create tax incentives for residents to buy the properties.

The Commission can work on securing funding to encourage growing food on vacant properties and

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reach out to Laura with recommendations for board members (they prefer Hartford residents and former Hartford residents who have been displaced). Martha will connect the Hartford Land Bank to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture for possible funding opportunities. Using vacant properties to grow food should be part of garden/farm education throughout the city. The Commission is also interested in opportunities to temporarily grow food on the properties until they have been transferred.

Feeding Hartford Awards

The awards will be held virtually on Monday, September 14 from 6 to 7:30 PM. The Commission will also recognize individuals and groups who have taken action to keep neighbors fed during the pandemic.

Some Commissioners are donating to cover the costs of the artwork (\$600). Commissioners volunteered to present different awards for the evening.

General Updates

Knox is on track to sell two tons of produce to schools.

A composting company is willing to arrange for delivery of composters if people would buy them – they cost about \$100. How would we do this / connect it to the Commission's work? People interested can reach out to Val, Andrew, and Mary with questions/ideas.

Breakthrough North is designing a new garden growing potatoes, beans, and corn for fall events.

Urban Alliance is continuing to partner with World Vision on the Farmers to Families food box program, which distributes produce, dairy, and meat to families.

The Healthy Food Access working group continues to meet, and created a flyer to promote farmers' markets and show how they're practicing social distancing and what benefits they're accepting.

Gilma with Hispanic Health Council has scheduled Spanish language interviews about the farmers' markets to reach more residents.

The Healthy Food Access working group is also following up with WIC offices and farmers' market managers to identify more ways to support them through the end of the season. Anecdotally, WIC FMNP and fruit and vegetable voucher redemption are low.

An issue for the Commission to examine is working with schools to grow and donate food while school is out of session.

Wrap-up, Adjournment, and Next Meeting

The next meeting is Wednesday, October 14, at 3:30 via Zoom.

The meeting ended at 5:15 PM.

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