

**UMass Extension Board of Public Overseers**  
**Thursday, July 29, 2021, 1:30-3:00pm**  
*Conducted on Zoom*

**Original Agenda**

- 1:30 Welcome, introductions, approve minutes of previous meetings (Matt Barron, Chair)
- 1:35 Membership & Fundraising for Clean Energy Project (Matt Barron)
- 1:45 Extension Overview (Jody Jellison)
- 1:55 Program Reports
  - Clem Clay, Agriculture
  - Tracie Gillespie, Nutrition Education
  - Linda Horn, 4-H Youth Development
  - River Strong, Clean Energy
- 2:10 Mount Ida (Joe Shoenfeld)
- 2:20 Soils Lab (Clem Clay)
- 2:35 Integrated Research and Extension Projects (Bill Miller)
- 2:45 Discussion
- 3:00 Adjourn

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Matt Barron, Chris Dunn, Karen Heymann, John Lee, Mike Lueders, Ted Wales.

**Members Absent:** John Lebeaux, Deb Phillips.

**Guests:** Ed Bourgeois.

**Staff and Faculty Attending:** Jody Jellison, Joe Shoenfeld, Bill Miller, Clem Clay, River Strong, Tracie Gillespie, Kathleen Geary (recording minutes).

Jody Jellison introduced Tracie Gillespie, Interim Director for the Nutrition Education Program, and noted that Lisa Sullivan-Warner has retired as Program Director. BOPO members and Ed Bourgeois introduced themselves to Tracie.

Tracie introduced herself and described her history with NEP.

***The board set aside approval of the minutes of the April 13 meeting until the next meeting because there was not a quorum.***

Joe Shoenfeld received permission from those present to record the meeting on behalf of a faculty member.

**Membership & Fundraising for Clean Energy Project: Matt Barron**

Matt Barron gave an update on membership. He had nothing new to report on the nomination of Ken Nicewicz by the Farm Bureau. He noted that he emailed Rep. Hogan's office about a possible member but didn't hear back. He had nothing new to report on a representative from the 4-H community. He noted that Sen. Anne Gobi is seeking appointment on the advisory committee, with Rep. Doherty seeking appointment on the House side. It was stated that it would be good to have representation from the apiculture sector and from the livestock community,

Matt Barron informed attendees that on July 12 he and Dwayne Breger had a Zoom meeting with an Eversource Foundation representative, and they made a presentation of a funding proposal. The Eversource Foundation asked for a letter of support from the Department of Energy Resources. The proposal has received some support from the Massachusetts Arborist Association and the Massachusetts Tree Warden Association. They have asked for support from National Grid, Unitil and the New England Public Power Association. They are hoping for a commitment of funds from Eversource, that will help leverage money from other sources, and they would like to raise enough money to qualify for state funds.

Total budget for project: \$630,500. Matt noted that there are pieces that could be taken off the proposal to achieve a smaller budget if needed. Ted Wales asked if Matt had been in touch with the state of New Hampshire about their wood burning power plants. Matt noted that this proposal is for thermal heat, not for electricity generation (which he characterized as a current “hot button” issue).

### **Extension Overview: Jody Jellison**

The University is looking for a “nearly normal” fall semester with students returning to in-person classes and staff returning August 2 (with continuing opportunities for hybrid and remote work). Some meetings will very likely remain on the Zoom platform.

On the agricultural side of Extension, things have been moving forward to “nearly normal.” 4-H programs are being presented in hybrid modes, while NEP has been shifting back to some in-person programming.

The University has been looking at potential enrollment numbers, with an eye on how to continue to run a safe and appropriate campus while providing students with the best opportunities.

Jody stated that the most probable funding scenario for the coming year is a 2% increase in USDA Smith-Lever funding, which would result in stable funding for 2022. Extension continues to be challenged to meet the required 1:1 match. Possible opportunities for other funding include infrastructure initiatives, climate change (outreach and research), and workforce development funds.

Jody noted that the University farm budget was increased to cover ongoing teaching related costs.

The Urban Ag position is moving forward and will be located at Mount Ida. It will not meet all needs of the Eastern part of the state, but it is a first step toward increasing educational resources there. On the human resources side of things, we have been able to fill some of the positions needed. The 4-H Director search is moving forward, and the Production Agriculture Leader search is moving along.

Mike Lueders asked what kind of duties would be associated with the Urban Ag position at Mount Ida. It was noted that this position would entail some work with the green industry, but also with other pieces of urban ag, particularly with food production. There is hope that at some point we can expand and have a more comprehensive unit at Mount Ida.

Ted Wales asked if there was any news about the healthy soils action plan, as he thinks that the Mount Ida campus could be a valuable teaching tool in the Boston area to help people learn

about healthy soil. Clem said that he is not sure what the hold-up is. Ted then noted that it seems like an opportunity to show the legislators how important Extension is to the state.

## **Extension Program Reports**

### **Clem Clay, Agriculture**

The teams are happy to get back to “nearly normal” – the fruit growers event at the orchard, Turf Field Day, and the field day at South Deerfield were all successful events. It was great to see stakeholders out there interacting with the educators in person. Staff members are turning more gradually to attending meetings hosted by others out in the world. Team members continue to work to figure out how to navigate the return to campus.

The Mass Agriculture Club will be meeting at Cold Spring Orchard in the next couple of weeks. Clem reported progress on hemp, as the plant diagnostic lab is accepting samples from licensed hemp growers. Rob Wick is offering field analyses as well (and is retiring at the end of the year).

In the Soils Lab, Clem reported that we lost a recently hired manager to a lab in Maryland. The soils lab team has been working really hard, and finally got down to the 10-day turnaround time on soil test results.

Clem noted that he is putting together thoughts on the Urban Ag position now, and is receiving input from both external and internal stakeholders. Also on the HR side, Hannah Whitehead was hired as a Vegetable Educator. Clem explained that he is working with others to reformulate the Soils Lab manager position, then will search. Additionally, Ag will be hiring for the dual-use solar that DOE is funding.

Matt Barron noted that there are many urban gardening groups in Cambridge, Boston, etc., and asked if the Urban Ag position will be a resource for them. Clem responded that this will be just one person with statewide responsibilities, and that their focus will be less on the urban gardening side, and more on urban agriculture. He noted that there are many organizations that provide opportunities for urban gardeners in a variety of ways. Joe added that the position is focused on community based urban ag rather than on corporate urban ag.

### **Tracie Gillespie, Nutrition Education**

The NEP team is trying to figure out what the “new normal” looks like for their program. Tracie is beginning to evaluate staff needs, and she would like to be in a position to start conducting in-person programs in September when schools are anticipated to reopen. Educators have been teaching remotely all summer, with some “in-person” farmers markets (which is mostly dropping off materials at markets for distribution).

NEP’s “Technology in the Schools” project has been in the works for a couple of years now. NEP staff members are conducting interviews with nutrition educators and with schools (in all areas), trying to assess the technology used in schools and how to align NEP programming with the technology available. Tracie noted that all of the virtual lessons that we adapted are available as curriculum through Google Slides. There will be some use for that even when returning to in-school work, as educators can take the Google Slides with them to schools.

### **Bill Miller, 4-H (On behalf of Linda Horn)**

Bill noted that some in-person 4-H programming has begun, and that many of the fairs are going forward. This is a combination of fairs that 4-H manages on its own, and fairs that 4-H does not

manage but has a prominent role in. The 4-H program really distinguished itself during the pandemic by engaging youth from a distance, and kept the program engaged with kids during a difficult time. The virtual nature of programming also engaged youth who couldn't participate in person, due to location or other circumstances. Bill noted that 4-H participants community service projects became part of online programming.

Bill described the change to the Big E involvement with 4-H. The Big E is no longer willing to host 4-H as part of the large fall event, so that has led to an event at the Big E grounds just for 4-H. It was further clarified that the Big E is no longer hosting families on site, as has happened in the past, yet there was still reasonable attendance at the event. There will be livestock demonstrations at the actual Big E by 4-H youth.

Bill noted that Cynthia Bushey is the new Norfolk/Bristol 4-H Educator who started in May. He also noted that we are moving forward with a search for a new Northeast 4-H Educator. Bill stated that Linda Horn has worked to consolidate some statewide functions of 4-H, i.e., enrollment, verification of volunteer credentials. Her efforts will make things more efficient and free up folks in regional offices for other activities.

Joe Shoenfeld then talked about the lease of a new Auburn office for both NEP and 4-H, which will also include the 4-H office formerly located in Walpole. The new office is very easy to find and reach, and actual move-in will take place in late September. Jody commented that both 4-H and NEP have met their challenges well, with an online format - which will hopefully be maintained - combined with returning to face-to-face programming.

Matt Barron shared information on the MDAR 4-H Young Farmers Program.

### *River Strong, Clean Energy*

The team is in final negotiations with DOE on an almost-\$2M grant for applied research on dual agriculture-solar installations. The project will include eight site trials, three solar developers, and multiple UMass partners. It looks right now that this will have a September launch.

The Pollinator Friendly Solar Certification Program has certified eight projects to date. These projects generate 15 megawatts of solar energy on 200 acres of land.

Solar siting in rural communities – funded by U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory Solar Energy Innovation Network – helps rural communities “take back their solar destiny.” This also includes financing so that communities will have more tools to figure this out. The team should wrap this up at the end of August, then they will start rolling out outreach. The three pilot towns are Blandford, Wendell, and Westhampton.

The team was awarded a grant last week to address DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) in the offshore wind workforce. This will expand access to offshore training/certification and match up people with industry partners.

<https://www.masscec.com/about-masscec/news/baker-polito-administration-awards-16-million-expand-access-offshore-wind>

Ted Wales asked about the rural solar siting project. He had a question about taking into account the benefits of forested and open areas of vegetation in terms of carbon sequestration. River noted that there are people doing some deep analysis on trees vs solar, and that the answer isn't always clear. The CEE team is trying to give information from studies to

communities to inform their decisions. Ed Bourgeois noted that trees also provide other ecological benefits.

### **Mount Ida: Joe Shoenfeld**

In general, people are very interested in seeing Extension at Mount Ida. There is interest in integrating 4-H into other efforts on the campus, and in using the campus for IPM scouting, for landscaping particularly.

The brand-new funding for the urban agriculture position (not repurposed funding) is specific to Mount Ida, as UMass is interested in creating a more “lively” campus. Joe and Jody’s conversation with the director of the campus was positive. Jody added that she is hoping to put more than this position here, perhaps another urban ag position, and a pollinator related position. She hopes to ultimately have a large enough footprint there to offer summer internships in our areas. There are currently five positions under the CAFE umbrella that are housed at Mount Ida.

It was noted that IPM is one of the places where we could expand our capacity. Jody added that we can provide some significant educational services. IPM cuts across different sectors, so we can serve multiple stakeholders through something such as IPM. Ted Wales stated that it sounds very exciting. IPM has huge potential for having a positive impact on communities, including on homeowners and landscapers. Jody added that pollinator services also could be a core service offered at Mount Ida.

### **Soils Lab: Clem Clay**

Almost two years ago, we began trying to identify funding for equipment replacement in the Soils Lab. Clem reported that in the last year over \$40K has come in from industry partners and from individuals to fund lab equipment. Clem talked about the staffing challenges at the soils lab, while noting that it was a successful year financially. The lab can make a financial contribution to the equipment replacement fund, which is about halfway to the goal of \$200,000. Clem noted that the actual purchases will likely be less than that. Clem noted that he has been reviewing instrument options with some of the faculty, thus laying the groundwork for the focus moving forward.

Clem is looking at developing the soils lab position to be more managerial/professional, and he hopes to bring someone on in this capacity in the winter. Matt Barron asked about the soils lab budget item that failed the previous year. Clem said it failed again this year, while Joe added that it did not make it out of the chambers. Matt Barron asked about accessing American Rescue Plan money, and Chris Dunn suggested that there is likely a lot of competition for those funds. Joe talked about the recent HVAC challenges in the building where the Soils Lab is located. Jody noted that “the positive attitude and the perseverance of the group [in the soils lab] is amazing.”

### **Integrated Research and Extension Project Updates: Bill Miller**

Bill Miller had a slide show for this portion of the meeting. He noted that up to \$30K may be provided to faculty and staff to fund projects that integrate research and outreach (extension). This allows for partnerships between otherwise disparate people/projects,

Examples of current projects:

- Spotted Lanternfly (Tawny Simisky, Jaime Piñero)
- Marsh Resilience for Coastal Communities (Katie Kahl, Jonathan Woodruff)

- ECAN: Ecosystem Climate Adaptation Network – (Melissa Ocana)
- Cover Crop Management to Maximize Nitrogen Availability and Carbon Sequestration (Ashley Keiser, Marco Keiluweit)
- Immigrant Women’s Experiences with Health and Food Access (Lorraine Cordeiro, Lindiwe Sibeko)

Bill noted that the way that these projects have an expectation of a close working relationship between the researcher and the extension person. Ted Wales stated that all of the projects are very important, and that collaboration between research and extension is also very important.

Ed Bourgeois shared that for about the last year he has been involved with the UN Food Systems Summit, which is to take place in NY in late September. There is a significant effort being made to address hunger, climate and food systems. The goal is to get significant funding, and there has been a commitment to get the funding to institutions. Ed thinks that Extension is a potential recipient of some of these funds. He added that there are opportunities for small and medium operations to benefit.

Jody Jellison thanked the board members and all for participating.

**The meeting adjourned at 3:00pm.**