

UMass Extension Board of Public Overseers Meeting
Tuesday, December 1, 2020, 1:00pm

MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via videoconference (Zoom) during the pandemic emergency, when the open meeting law was temporarily suspended.

Members Present: John Lee, Matt Barron, Ted Wales, Karen Heymann, Commissioner John Lebeaux, Deb Phillips, Chris Dunn, Michael Lueders

Members Absent: Patricia Bigelow

Guests: Ed Bourgeois

Staff and Faculty Attending: Jody Jellison, Joe Shoenfeld, Bill Miller, Kathleen Geary, Christine Hatch, Clem Clay, Dwayne Breger, Sandy Thomas, Linda Horn, Lisa Sullivan-Werner, Lynn Adler, Hannah Whitehead

• **Agenda**

Welcome, introductions, approve minutes of previous meetings, Matt Barron, Chair

- News from UMass Extension, Jody Jellison
- Program presentation on pollinator health, Lynn Adler, professor of biology, and Hannah Whitehead, extension honeybee educator
- Brief program news highlights
 - Agriculture Program, Clem Clay
 - Clean Energy Extension, Dwayne Breger
 - 4-H Youth Development Program, Linda Horn
 - Nutrition Education Program, Lisa Sullivan-Werner

Minutes of the September 17, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.

News from Jody Jellison

The University is still operating under significant constraints associated with the public health challenges. Jellison described the University's "RLOP" (Research and Libraries Operating Plan) process that allows CAFE to continue with its work. She also mentioned very stringent limitations on hiring, even for pre-authorization for previously occupied, funding-secure positions. The University has authorized some higher priority positions to be filled. Some of the highlights:

- Extension has expanded the reach of programs, technologically. Hoping that some of the new programs we have put in place during this time will be able to continue. Don't know what spring semester will look like.
- It seems as if federal capacity funding will be stable for this year (October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021). No final numbers for federal allocation.
- Revenue generation from grants has been quite good, in NEP, Ag, and more.
- Did have six VSIP (incentivized) retirements that impact us. The federal portions that supported those positions remain with Extension, while state funding portions have been eliminated.
- Diagnostic labs are back on track, although there are space and staffing constraints.
- Things are moving forward with much needed structural improvements at the Cranberry Station.

Dr. Jellison noted that "World Soils Day" is December 4, and there are virtual programs in which people may participate.

Ted Wales asked “When extension does educational programs, is there a committee to review and approve the program?” Jody responded that “Normally the answer would be no. This year, however, there are some additional constraints on programs that started in March as the University began to shut down. The RLOPs mentioned earlier include a review of the processes and procedures that are being used to allow the work to continue in a safe way. Each of the farms has a RLOP. For example, the orchard has a u-pick operation, thus they put together a proposal on handling money, spatial distancing, etc. It is not a review of the content but of the proposals around how the work can be done safely.”

Cranberry Station Construction

Joe Shoenfeld reported on previous week’s construction committee meeting. The architectural firm and subcontractors are working to finalize RFP for construction and are hoping to get this out to bid within the next couple of months. It is hoped that construction can begin on the site in late spring or early summer, with a plan for an 18-month construction and renovation process. Different phases in the construction plan allow researchers in and out of the lab areas so that they can do research during critical times of the season. There is work already beginning on the renovation on one of the labs in that building for a new USDA-ARS scientist, who will be the second USDA-ARS scientist to be based there, along with their support staff. The USDA is paying the renovation costs on this lab.

Waltham Property Sale

Matt Barron inquired about the sale of the Waltham facility, in which he understands the University will receive \$17 million. He asked whether any of these funds will find their way back to Extension? Jody Jellison responded that she continues to be hopeful and thinks that this has not been resolved. Chris Dunn confirmed that there has not yet been a closing, and that they hope to conclude the process early in the new year. Wales asked Dunn “so it’s undecided where the money might be used?” Dunn responded “there is a University Board of Trustees rule that if money comes from an asset, then it has to go to something permanent, and can’t be one time or operational spending. Deb Phillips asked whether there is any limit to where it can go within the University system? Dunn replied that such decisions are the purview of the President and Chancellor. Wales stated that “the sale of the Waltham facility takes away some of Extension’s ability to provide services that the state needs. This will be clear once Extension focuses more on climate change, and there arises the need to have a facility somewhere in the metro Boston area to educate citizenship on climate change and on solutions in which they can engage.” Mr. Wales stated that funds from the sale of the Waltham facility should go to the Newton campus to support and further develop that facility.

Ms. Phillips inquired whether there is a mechanism to make a request about the use of the funds, to which Mr. Dunn replied that communication with the Chancellor was probably the most appropriate. Ted commented “once the Healthy Soils bill is finalized, the legislature will realize there is not an Extension presence in the greater Boston area to educate people around best management practices. Deb repeated “Who are the decision makers?” and asked “(1) Do we want to influence this? And (2) Who would we contact about it, if we want to do something proactively?”

Joe Shoenfeld commented that the Mount Ida campus in Newton has many buildings in good shape, and that 4-H and Agriculture programs already have presences there, and that he believed that there is plenty of room if we had money to hire more people.

Ms. Phillips asked “What do buildings at Mount Ida need in order to serve the mission of Extension?” Dr. Jellison replied that “there are good facilities currently at Mount Ida. There have been thoughts about using some of the space for demonstration gardens, for teaching and for outreach. It is less driven by the need for facilities and more by the need for operational funds.”

Mr. Barron asked whether there are capital needs at the Hadley Farm, or Cold Spring, or in Deerfield? Jody Jellison replied that “yes, and some of this need is slowly but surely being addressed by the University. The largest capital need was at the Cranberry Station, and it is a tremendous relief that this is moving forward.” She also told the Board that there is a federal infrastructure bill for land grant colleges in process that might be a real opportunity for some of the routine maintenance needed at our facilities. Ed Bourgeois asked whether the federal government has any say in what happens with the Waltham facility, given that Extension activities occurred there? Jellison replied that they did not, because it was a University-owned facility without federal involvement. In answer to Deb Phillips’ question as to the decision-makers, Jellison replied that Deputy Chancellor Steve Goodwin has been involved with the sale.

Items Raised by the Chair

- **Fundraising:** Matt Barron had a meeting with professors Paul Catanzaro and Curt Griffin in October. He asked them to put together a list of funding needs, and to discuss them with Jody Jellison. Jellison noted that Catanzaro and Griffin have not reached out to her, and that they would have to also reach out to Dean Tricia Serio, particularly if it had to do with funding that implied a long term commitment. Matt noted that BOPO is supposed to have its annual meeting in January, and he asked if it is possible to provide a one pager on creating a trust fund that is dedicated to soliciting funds for the needs that we have identified. Mr. Barron noted that BOPO has standing committees that could reactivate to work on funding projects if desired. Ed Bourgeois asked about the by-laws clause about fundraising from the enabling legislation. Ted Wales said that was a great idea, and added that also if BOPO knows the critical needs for Extension then members can go to legislators and get them on board for funding.
- **Board vacancies:** Matt Barron reported that he is going to remain active on the 4-H Foundation vacancy. He is also hoping that Farm Bureau vacancies can be filled from the county farm bureau level.
- **Next meeting:** Mr. Barron requested to hear from LNUF (Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry) team. He has spoken with Jason Lanier about identifying growers interested in heated greenhouses, and he would like to discuss LNUF presence at future meetings. Clem Clay noted that the LNUF team is expecting an invitation to the next meeting. Ted Wales said that he would love to hear from Jason Lanier and Randy Prostack, about the research that Stockbridge is doing when it comes to turfgrass, landscapes and urban agriculture.
- **Advisory Board:** Mr. Barron noted that Article 4 of the BOPO bylaws calls for an advisory board of at least 5 and no more than 15 members. A member of the House of Representatives and a member of the Senate are two of the members (appointed at the legislative level). Ted W: Great idea – would like to put this all together and have it happen on Ag Day (although he doesn’t think this will happen in person). Ms. Heymann asked “who are the members of the UMass Extension Advisory Board? The membership includes the director (or designee), one member each of the House of Representatives and Senate, and other members (up to 12) named by BOPO.” Karen Heymann suggested reaching out to Speaker and Senate President’s offices with a letter, then follow up with staff. John Lee suggested reaching out to Winton Pitcoff to ask his opinion on who would be interested in serving from the House and Senate. It was noted that the Food System Caucus is the second largest caucus on the hill. Matt will draft an ask letter. Karen Heymann asked for clarification: “When reaching out to House and Senate leadership, would we be asking them to send one from each side, from the food caucus? How many legislators are we going to invite into this? If we are only inviting one member from each (HoR and Senate), who will we send the ask letter to, as we don’t want to overlook appropriate leadership?” The by-law states “appointed by the Speaker and the Senate President” so they will be recipients of the letter. Heymann suggested some language for the letter that embraces the food caucus and the environment committees. Letter will be drafted by Matt Barron, and Joe will provide Matt with the email list that he uses. Jody Jellison asked that they

consider having a representative from MDAR on the Advisory Board. Ted Wales asked about addressing a letter to the Secretary of Energy and the Environment since he believes that it's important that they be aware of Extension's needs and abilities when it comes to climate change. Ms. Heymann commented that at the next meeting, BOPO should talk more about who to cc on the letter. Dr. Jellison suggested that the letter should go to Mike Malone, Vice Chancellor for Outreach and Engagement, with a cc to College of Natural Sciences (CNS) Dean Tricia Serio.

Joe Shoenfeld then suggested that we allow the scheduled presenters to speak before further discussion on this topic.

Deb Phillips said that maybe we should send out information on standing committees and see where each member could best serve.

Program Presentation by Lynn Adler on Pollinators

Dr. Adler talked about disease spread through human populations, and how some of the same concepts may apply to insects and plants – they forage, fly, and spread whatever they pick up. Flowers could be important “hot spots” as to how diseases spread among pollinators.

She has been working with the common eastern bumblebee, which is the most abundant bumblebee species we have in Massachusetts (not in decline). She studies the pathogen *Crithidia* – a gut parasite – transmitted when an infected bee defecates and then this is consumed by another bee. It's not the “baddest of the bad” as far as harm, but it does have negative impacts. *Crithidia* is primarily a bumblebee parasite and is present in 80% of bumblebees in Western Mass. Are plants playing an important role in pathogen spread? In these experiments, they used canola in “tents” – some were just canola, and some were planted with flowering strips – either with low transmission or high transmission species. Then they introduced a micro-colony with infected bees. The bees foraged, and Lynn's slides showed the results. Infection just about doubled in the tents that had high transmission plant species, and did better with any flowering strip.

Another large area of research shows that sunflower pollen dramatically reduces pathogen nodes in bumblebees. They have seen almost no *Crithidia* after a week of exposure to sunflower pollen. Even goldenrod pollen is effective at fighting pathogens for both worker bees and queens. A new line of research seeks to discover what it is about the sunflower that makes the pollen have this impact.

Hannah Whitehead on Honeybee Extension Work

Hannah Whitehead provided an overview of honeybee extension work over the last few years. She developed a pollinator resources section on the CAFE website, which contained both existing resources and newly created resources. She talked about a project she is working on with MDAR and with small scale beekeepers in Massachusetts (although it is part of a national project). Whitehead visited beekeepers hives to collect data on the hives. She hopes to explore a queen rearing method that would make it easier for small scale and hobbyist beekeepers to raise queens adapted to the conditions of northern states. Hannah Whitehead discussed the hands-on workshops in 2018 and 2019 that reached over 150 beekeepers, and her talks to beekeeper groups that reached over 800 people.

Another project grew out of a problem Whitehead kept hearing from beekeepers, which is that beekeepers don't know where to get antibiotics (specifically for foul brood in honey bees). She is training veterinarians around this. Hannah has connected with over 60 beekeepers on in-depth research projects, and she has MDAR and SARE grants to continue this work.

The sunflower pollen grant will end in April, thus Whitehead is now trying to figure out what this will look like long term. Hannah Whitehead was asked how many beekeepers are there, are we able to reach

out to all of them and help them to give them best management practices? She currently works with 4,500 beekeepers in the state, mostly hobbyist beekeepers. There is a lot of outreach through county bee associations and through Mass Bee. There has been discussion of having people register their hives in the event of a disease outbreak, but there has been resistance to that idea.

Dr. Jellison expressed her appreciation for the work of Whitehead and Adler as well as for the support of MDAR. Commissioner Lebeaux echoed appreciation, and Karen Heymann agreed that the connection with MDAR is a mutually beneficial relationship.

Clem Clay, Program News from Agricultural Extension

- Green School went virtual this year, and it has been going very well, has another week or so to wrap up, 160-170 students enrolled in three tracks (higher than normal enrollment).
- Winter Turf School (a collaboration with Stockbridge School) is also going virtual, spread out January through March. It has already broken enrollment records, now at 60 with a waiting list of 10.
- Comment: Interesting to see that even for these indepth certificate programs the interest and demand is really high, and people are reporting that it is a good experience
- The fall wrap-up, typically held outdoors, is taking place virtually later this week.
- Garden calendar sales are high this year, so much that extra copies were ordered.
- The fruit team has been working with extension services in other New England states to put together a series of virtual winter fruit meetings.
- Pushing more into soil health with labs, hopes to report progress in that direction in the coming year
- Comments: Good to hear that enrollment is up in Green School and in Turf Winter School, and that requests for the calendar have increased. Seems the citizenship of the state is ‘waking up’ to see the value of Extension.

Dwayne Breger, Clean Energy Extension

Dr. Breger talked about the recently announced US Department of Energy grant to his program, which supports work around dual use solar power and agriculture. CEE received one of four awards in that category, across the country. Work will take place over the next three years, using \$1.8 million from federal funds, and about \$0.5 million matched by solar industry partners. This will look at what the impacts really are on agricultural productivity, as well as on farm viability (both on the individual farm level and on the economy in Massachusetts). They are hoping to launch in March 2021. This is an opportunity for CEE to have close working collaborations with colleagues in Ag Extension and at the Cranberry Station, as well as a partnership with UMass’s Department of Resource Economics. Externally, CEE is partnering with American Farmland Trust and three solar industry partners, and is receiving support from MDAR and from DOER. CEE will conduct research oriented site trials, co-located in dedicated areas of larger commercially oriented solar arrays located across Massachusetts. Work will include cranberries, other crops, and grazing. The selected sites were already under development, and discussions had already occurred between farmers and solar developers (thus the sites came from solar developers who had already connected with farmers on these sites). Breger also talked about the pollinator friendly certification program, which certifies solar projects in Massachusetts as pollinator friendly. They have certified seven projects to date.

Linda Horn, 4-H Youth Development Program

All 4-H programming in Massachusetts is currently completely virtual. Staff has done a lot of professional development to better deliver programming online while keeping youth participants engaged. They are trying to intersperse virtual presentation with kits and interactive quizzes, so they are not just being talked to throughout a program.

Massachusetts 4-H is offering new programming: 4-H staff members propose new ideas for activities they want to do, and in most cases they have been able to move forward. There has been some “new life” in 4-H programs, for example, “walking across America” where they were able to compile shorter walks into longer treks. They use math to convert miles, as well as geography and geology as they “visited” places in the “walk across the country.” Participants then do a “story map” to show what they are learning as they “walk” across the country.

Dr. Horn also talked about the new gardening series in which 4-H participants learned about soils, and some youth sold their produce. Part II of the series, being offered over the winter, includes how to test soil and what winter crops they might grow. Some will construct mini-greenhouses inside using commonly available materials. Part III of the series will be offered in the spring. Winter Workshops, which usually happen in person for youth and adults, will be held virtually over two weekends, with about 16 activity choices per day. Examples are crafting, virtual community service activities, or something specific about their animal projects.

4-H will keep some of these online activities in place, even when returning to in person programming, so that people have more choices. Linda is generally happy with how things are going. 4-H has been partnering with companies, including Jo-Ann Fabrics, which has allowed staff to send out fleece kits to make hats and more that will all be donated to shelters. 4-H staff are currently looking into other community service activities that folks can do at home with guidance and these “kits.”

Lisa Sullivan Werner, Nutrition Education Program (NEP)

The program staff have been paying attention to the demand. The impact of the pandemic on already low income people has been disproportionate, and there's been a huge increase in the demand for SNAP benefits and food pantry services. The free school meal program has been extended by USDA through the rest of the school year. The NEP team is focusing a lot on those issues and around food access, and working to reach people as they are accessing food and looking for food resources.

All NEP staff members are still working remotely and keeping communication running smoothly among those on the team. The leadership team meets every two weeks, and the full NEP team meets monthly, while each of the five regional offices meets weekly. Boston and Worcester site leases are expiring. Joe Shoenfeld is working with staff from UMass Facilities to address this.

Lisa noted that there is a three year plan for SNAP-Ed and a five year plan for EFNEP, and they are in the first year of both. This is working well with some of the initiatives already planned.

Matt Barron left the meeting, and Vice-Chair John Lee asked if there was any other business. Hearing none, there was a motion to close the meeting: moved by Chris Dunn, seconded by Ted Wales.

All agreed to close the meeting, which adjourned at 3:10 pm.