

**UMass Extension Board of Public Overseers Meeting**  
**Thursday, September 17, 2020, 11am**

**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

**Members Absent:** Patricia Bigelow, Michael Lueders

**Guests:** Ed Bourgeois

**Staff and Faculty Attending:** Jody Jellison, Joe Shoenfeld, Bill Miller, Kathleen Geary, Christine Hatch, Clem Clay, Dwayne Breger, Linda Horn, Lisa Sullivan-Werner.

**Agenda**

11:00 Welcome, introductions, approve minutes of previous meetings, Matt Barron, Chair

11:10 Selection of Vice-Chair of Board, Matt Barron

11:25 Coping with pandemic times, news from Extension and UMass Amherst, Jody Jellison

12:00 Program changes during the pandemic and other program news

- Agriculture Program, Clem Clay
- Clean Energy Extension, Dwayne Breger
- 4-H Youth Development Program, Linda Horn
- Nutrition Education Program, Lisa Sullivan-Werner

12:40 Discussion

1:00 Adjourn

**Roll Call**

Chair Matt Barron called the roll of the Board.

**Selection of Vice-Chair: Looking for nominations**

The Chair invited nominations for position of Vice Chair. Ted Wales nominated John Lee. Because items requiring votes (including approval of the minutes and of the nominee for vice-chair) required a quorum, the item was tabled until later in the meeting, after the arrival of members Chris Dunn and Deb Phillips.

**News – Jody Jellison**

Jody Jellison provided a snapshot of the landscape at UMass Amherst. There are a limited number of students on campus. Some staff and faculty are working on campus but the density is being carefully controlled. Anyone working on campus undergo weekly asymptomatic testing for COVID-19.

The CAFE farms and the Cranberry Station have been subject to restrictions but have been mostly open during the pandemic. They are subject to all restrictions of state and university. 4-

H and NEP field offices have remained closed. Pest surveys and field testing have happened, with appropriate social distancing protocols. Laboratories were closed for a time, but have now reopened with restricted access.

There is a university hiring freeze in place, regardless of funding source, and with very few exceptions. Temporary hourly staff were laid off across the university early in the pandemic. There were also retirements during this period, including Sonia Schloemann, Mary Owen, Tracy Allen, several members of NEP staff, 4-H staff. Student employment is allowed for those who work remotely or on the farms and Cranberry Station. At the end of the summer, the university announced indefinite furloughs of over 800 staff (mostly dining and maintenance). Additional furloughs were due to be announced the day of the meeting. It is unlikely that CAFE will be asked to furlough folks indefinitely, however some staff will be subject to 10-day furloughs before the end of the calendar year.

### Funding

Dr. Jellison says she is hoping for level funding for FY21, particularly Smith-Lever funds from USDA. FY22 funding is quite uncertain at this time. The Experiment Station received a no-cost extension to carry funds forward for research that didn't happen this summer due to the conditions of the pandemic. Funding for NEP seems stable. Program revenue was greatly reduced, particularly for the labs that were closed. State and university funding is a "wild card" – this is a 1:1 match normally. The Governor's Office released funding for the renovations at the Cranberry Station (\$5.75 million, added to \$2 million committed by Chancellor). This was greatly facilitated by two legislators, Sen. Mike Rodrigues and Rep. William Straus. Thanks are also due to the MDAR Commissioner for support on this and others. Jody noted that all program units have stepped up and made strong adaptations to online programming.

Matt Barron asked: "If we don't fill positions due to hiring freeze, does that endanger Smith-Lever funding?" Jellison noted that she has been in conversation with the university administration on this. University contributions already made to Cranberry Station renovations could perhaps serve as part of the match.

The question was asked: "should BOPO members reach out to their representatives in Congress?" Jellison stated that we have had strong support on the federal level for capacity funds. The folks who represent us understand how important Smith-Lever funding and other (including SNAP-Ed) funds are to Massachusetts. She suggested that we wait for Chris Dunn to join the call, to explore the interaction of state and federal funding. She also noted that advocacy at the federal level has to be targeted to the entire 50-state capacity funding program.

John Lee asked: "Is it better to advocate with Gobi and Kane (food caucus) at the state level, or at the federal level? Where do we get the best leverage?" Dr. Jellison replied that we get different leverage at different levels. Capacity funding is usually buried in a larger allocation, supported in both the House and the Senate at both the state and federal levels. This is mediated by APLU, which advocates for all of the land grant universities.

Ted Wales commented that "We stated our needs very clearly at the CARET meeting back in March, thanks to Clem. If legislators are serious about climate mitigation, they need to be sure

that there is funding available to Extension to continue research and outreach. Are we going to do that on Ag Day? We should also address that the Farm Bureau doesn't seem to support Extension. On Ag Day, a group of BOPO members should set up meetings with important legislators, representing Extension." Matt Barron agreed. Wales further stated that we need to show how forestry, agriculture, turfgrass are important to climate change mitigation. Extension is the source of information and is best suited to educate the citizenship of the state about how to increase carbon sequestration.

Mr. Barron talked about the "budget by the month" issues at the state level. Deb Phillips noted that food sovereignty and sustainability have a benefit for the state: "We don't want to fall into food crisis as we face the economic and health crises." Barron also noted that if you want to reduce the cost of MassHealth, getting ahead of dietary-related illnesses will be important, and NEP does that. Jody Jellison noted that this is an unusual time to be a child (or a parent), and the work that Linda and members of the 4-H team are doing to provide education during new circumstances is very important. Many of our youth will have restricted opportunities for enrichment in STEM and other areas, and 4-H is providing that. Karen Heymann stated that all of our "asks" are good. There are nonprofits doing advocacy on the hill, with green/environmental budget requests. We can ask these folks to include Extension as an important thing to support, thus amplifying the Extension message.

#### **VOTES:**

Once there was a quorum present, motions were made and seconded and votes were taken on a number of items:

Approval of May 18 minutes – Unanimous approval

Approval of February 11 minutes – Unanimous approval

Approval of December 10, 2019 minutes – Unanimous approval

Selection of Vice-Chair: John Lee had earlier been nominated – Unanimous approval

Chair Matt Barron mentioned a vacancy on the board representing Mass 4-H Foundation. When he gets a name/names, he will "try to bird-dog along" (was a challenging process with previous vacancy).

Barron had been working with faculty members Paul Catanzaro and Malcolm Itter in the Department of Environmental Conservation. Because he is currently working with clients on the election, and he will have no time until after November 3 for fundraising. He asked Jody Jellison if she could talk to Curt Griffin, the chair of the department. She noted that August and September have been crazy months, particularly for the teaching staff. She suggested to him that he reach out to Catanzaro and Griffin once again. If that doesn't work, Matt Barron will let Dr. Jellison know, and they will set something up.

Barron thinks that a Biden administration could bring re-investment in land grant universities, thus funding might see better outcomes. John Lee noted that the food policy council and food system collaborative have made great strides in bringing ag to the forefront. It is interesting

that we have now three “nests” of ag ideas: Farm Bureau, food policy council (and others), and the fin and shellfish industry. These three groups don’t communicate very well, with the marine fisheries council in their own silo, and other groups in their own silos. He suggested that Extension approach Farm Bureau rank and file, or county bureau presidents, and suggest more collaboration. Jellison noted that it is in no one’s interest to have such a lack of collaboration with the Farm Bureau. Clem Clay has been actively working to bring together partners for our efforts, and is trying to move closer to folks who show many of our values and objectives. One example of overlapping objectives is the soil analysis lab. Clem Clay stated that at the level “closer to the ground,” many of his team have a productive relationship with the Farm Bureau.

#### Presentation by Clem Clay, Extension Agriculture Program

In his presentation, Clay shared images of responses to the pandemic. He highlighted the InsectExaminer videos and virtual Green School. He noted that they have created more webinars, offerings that would have been done in person but have had to find other ways of getting the information across. The partnership with MDAR has been important, particularly with regard to pesticide exam preparation, which has transitioned to online delivery. Inquiries to educators have been greater this year across all programs, which Mr. Clay attributes to people spending more time thinking about the land where they live. The team continued to put out normal email publications such as VegNotes, etc.

One trend that has been noted with the transition to online programming is that we see more participants than we get in person on average, as well as more geographic diversity. On the flip side, there have been some challenges – and everyone is struggling with this – in that instructors can’t always know if someone is really present in remote offerings, and some folks don’t have appropriate technology resources or training.

Overall, Clem Clay told the board that he has been really pleased and proud of group and the work that they have been able to do. However, they are operating at lower capacity, as you can see in the word “vacant” splashed across the organizational chart. How to handle that diminished capacity is the question, and how to think about getting through the coming 6-9 months as successfully as possible, while keeping people sane, and then long term, how to grow back over coming years. He noted some exciting things “in the hopper,” including a food security infrastructure proposal, a focus on the soils lab, and a solar grant pending with DOE.

#### Budget Challenges and Working With Legislators

Matt Barron asked Chris Dunn to address: (1) preservation of Smith Lever funding, (2) state budget challenges, (3) how best to work with federal and state legislators.

Mr. Dunn responded that most of the budget is built around level funding in FY21. The university has been hit pretty hard financially, with the real hit on the auxiliary revenue loss (both in the spring and currently). This lack of revenue has caused a lot of fiscal issues for the campus. The state needs funds from the federal government to level fund from FY20, and it can’t run a deficit. The Commonwealth can only spend what it brings in tax revenue. The second bailout has a couple of things, including direct support to higher education (there was

some in CARES act, some more in HEROES), direct money to states to help their bottom lines, and the “maintenance of effort” (this last refers to when the federal government gives money to a state, that states agree not to cut line items in budget below certain levels). All of this will have a direct impact on Extension and every other aspect of the University. If we have a large state budget cut and do not get a federal bailout, it will get exponentially worse. Much like the state, the University can’t run a deficit. All of this takes planning, and tough decisions. Personnel changes are the last resort, after cuts can’t be made elsewhere.

Barron noted that one of the concerns is that if the hiring freeze keeps us from filling open positions, our USDA funding may be impacted. How do we engage legislators to help head that off? Dunn responded that when federal matching dollars are on the line, that tends to be the first thing the state supports.

#### Presentation by Dwayne Breger, Clean Energy Extension

Dwayne Breger noted that his team is relatively small compared to what Clem Clay showed in his org chart, with four FTEs, a post-doc, and a number of students, all working fully remotely since March. He expressed concerns with constraints on support services, grants and contracts, and administrative, both at the college level and at the departmental level. There is excitement about pollinator friendly PV program. They are in the process of certifying seven projects in the months since launch of program, which is gaining interest in Mass. and in other states. There is incentive from state in Mass. with the SMART program, and also more rigorous certification – these have to be strong pollinator friendly habitats, and they need recertification every 3 years.

The other project Breger has been excited to work on is a grant from National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL). His team members have been working for about four months on a year-long grant which is moving toward community-driven solar siting. They are piloting the program with Westhampton, Wendell and Blandford, and working with other local groups in the region. There has been a lot of pressure to place solar development in rural communities, and this puts leaders and citizens in a tough spot, not always knowing how to proceed. This program aims to help communities to be more proactive with siting solar, putting out RFPs, and maximizing economic development.

CEE continues to serve MDAR and DOER. In reviewing applications for dual use solar projects, the team has reviewed 25 applications to date including five in 2020. There is a proposal out to the US DOE solar technology office to researching the effects of dual-use solar on agricultural productivity. This is a proposal for \$2 million to work with partners on a public-private research partnership, with six site trials being developed. The proposal has progressed well so far through the review process, will hear in October or November, with a start in early 2021 if awarded. More broadly in energy issues, there has been an effort to potentially establish an energy transition institute on campus, and to make an energy transition that supports equity goals. That is ongoing work amongst various groups on campus

Question on pollinator program: will it look at agricultural uses, such as small ruminant grazing and vegetable growing? Breger clarified the distinction between dual use and pollinator friendly solar installations. Pollinator friendly solar installations are generally \*not\* eligible for dual-use,

because it is not producing a commodity. Ed Bourgeois asked a question about maintenance of the pollinator plants, once the installation is there. Dr. Breger responded that there are detailed guidelines for establishment and maintenance of pollinator plants, both for initial eligibility and for continued certification.

Ted Wales asked: “Has research been done to look at converting rural land to solar farms? Is it better to convert to a solar farm as opposed to maintaining it as conservation land, in terms of benefits of solar vs benefits of carbon sequestration?” Breger answered: This is an issue that property owners and municipalities are grappling with. The land may offer many dimensions of values to owners and abutters (and to us generally as a society). How do you weigh these values, forest vs open land vs solar vs agriculture? These can be tradeoffs that have to be grappled with by stakeholders. From a strictly carbon perspective, cutting down forest to put in PV, you can get a pretty good payback on your carbon, but you lose capacity for carbon sequestration. For Massachusetts conditions, from carbon in the atmosphere perspective, solar makes sense. We need more solar on rooftops and on parking lots, although that is also a tradeoff because of the extra cost of installing in those areas. The project with NREL is looking at this, and Alison Bates in the Department of Environmental Conservation is doing a survey on this, trying to get a sense on these trade-offs. Breger provided a link to the Pollinator Friendly PV Certification program, which includes info on the certification requirements and best management practices. <https://ag.umass.edu/clean-energy/services/pollinator-friendly-solar-pv-for-massachusetts>

#### Presentation by Linda Horn, Extension 4-H Youth Development

Linda Horn noted that early in the pandemic, she and her staff knew that they couldn't continue with the traditional way of doing activities, so they “flipped the learning” and changed the way that they delivered programming.

- All members and volunteers (and all involved with 4-H in some way) get a weekly emailed newsletter, and all things listed there are available to all 4-Hers in the state not just those in a particular county (for example, someone in Plymouth County might deliver a program that can now be accessed by 4-H participants anywhere in the state).
- There are a wide variety of activities that are being held online. Linda highlighted the 4-H career exploration series offered through a 4-H educator that brings a new person on each week (for example, she has brought on an audio engineer, a vet, a legislator, a microbiologist, an ag extension educator, an astronomer...). The highlighted speaker talks about what their job entails, what they needed to become this, what was their path? Youth from all around Massachusetts and the country have attended these – our programs are being spread to people outside Massachusetts.
- “Spinning your 4-H story” is another online project. 4-H participants talk about what they have accomplished. As a way to get the more engaged, we ask them: – what if your project could write the story? It's a creative writing project, and an author volunteered her time to help the youth write their stories. They are excited about it, and we will expand on it by adding a category to the Visual Presentation project already in place.

- We have taken the babysitting program that has been an in-person program and turned it into a virtual learning opportunity. We provide a list of things needed to participate ahead of time, and the training is interactive.
- Walk Across America: 4-H has teams that walk and then convert their local walks into miles, plotting their way with this from Boston to San Diego.
- They offered a gardening project over 6 weeks: analyzed the soil, taught about how plant seeds work, and participants took photos of their garden plots and shared them.
- 4-H held the first ever Massachusetts Virtual 4-H State Fair. Youth went online and signed up for the “classes” as they would take at an in-person fair. Most animal projects were a video of some sort. Horn thinks that they will still offer a virtual fair, perhaps prior to in-person fairs, to give participants an opportunity to get some early feedback.
- Dr. Horn shared some quotes from participants, including one from a youth who started a farmstand from participating in the program.
- What’s next? 4-H staff will continue to provide a lot of different types of 4-H programs virtually, and they are currently brainstorming new ideas. They are also working on “4-H in a box,” which will allow youth to participate using the materials they need for projects.

Deb Phillips asked: “What pieces of the virtual offerings should programs maintain even when we can be in person again? It seems to be an effective way to gain support for Extension, to show off what we have and gather national support for it.” Horn noted that the circumstances forced 4-H to try something new. She noted that 4-H in Massachusetts is now collaborating more with other 4-H programs across the region. The virtual offerings also encourage youth to bring friends to 4-H more easily.

#### Lisa Sullivan-Werner - Nutrition Education Program (NEP)

Nutrition staff were pulled out of doing community-based programs at the beginning of the pandemic, as schools and other partners were all closed. Sullivan-Werner noted that her team also has the unique challenges of working with low-income audiences, and with nonprofit collaborators. At the beginning of the pandemic there were 55 staff in six different sites with a total of only seven laptops. It was challenging for team members initially to participate in Zoom, and in other technological offerings.

They developed a weekly newsletter, Nutrition Bites, to stay in touch with collaborators and with program participants. They encouraged collaborators to share on social media. The newsletter has been very popular, extensively used throughout the state. They also did a lot of staff training, including on policy systems and environmental change, and learning about online platforms and tools. They worked to repurpose educational materials to be taught online and set up work teams across the state.

They brought kits to community partners to distribute with lunches, which continued even as schools were closed. For example, they might have a piece on better beverage choices along with a reusable water bottle. Sullivan-Werner shared an issue of the Nutrition Bites newsletter on screen, and she noted that they were doing this once per week in the summer, alternating

every other week with a “produce spotlight.” The newsletter provides food safety tips, recipes, nutrition tips, and more. In addition, they have produced some videos of preparing recipes. One significant project they have been working on is improved use of technology with schools, an effort they had planned even before the pandemic. Ms. Sullivan-Werner and her staff are looking at how to retain what they do virtually. She noted that it is important to understand inequity and disparity among those served by the program, and that there is a huge disparity in how schools have been able to serve their students during this time.

Jody Jellison thanked the presenters for their work and for their teams’ work. She commented that it is remarkable what they have been able to put together. Dr. Jellison indicated that she welcomes the comments on how these will make our programs stronger as we move forward.

Ed Bourgeois noted that Extension used to hold a summit to invite people associated with Extension to meet each other, and to see collaborations. He understands that it ended because it became very expensive to hold it. With Zoom, much of that expense goes away. Ed believes that it could build more connection to Extension, with stakeholders, if BOPO along with Extension could talk about putting together a virtual summit series mid/late winter on Zoom to connect and talk about these things. This would reach across all areas of Extension. It would be a much easier way to engage, and we would be prepared with exposure for Ag Day, and possibly invite legislators in for some of these discussions.

Ted Wales stated that he thinks that would be a very useful thing to do. He also thinks that the annual Extension retreat was doing this to some extent. It would be a great way to be better prepared for Ag Day and for lobbying to advocate for Extension. Deb Philips suggested that breakout rooms on Zoom could be helpful for such a virtual gathering. John Lee suggested that we invite county farm bureau directors. John Lee invited Mr. Bourgeois to put a little more thought into this, and Matt Barron invited Bourgeois to circulate something to the group. Bourgeois invited others to think about this idea as well, as winter would be a good time for such a gathering.

Chairman Barron adjourned the meeting at 1:11pm.