

**Minutes from  
UMass Extension Board of Public Overseers  
Monday December 10, 2019 - 1:00 -4:00  
UMass Collaborative Services Facility, Shrewsbury**

**Members present:** John Lee, Ted Wales, Deb Phillips, Ashley Randle for John Lebeaux, Michael Lueders  
**Members Absent:** Patricia Bigelow, Karen Heymann, Matt Barron,  
**Guests:** Scott Soares, Winton Pitcoff, Jay Healy  
**Staff/Faculty:** Jody Jellison, Joe Shoenfeld, Bill Miller, Linda Horn, Heather Lohr, River Strong, Clem Clay, Lynne Thompson, Kathleen Geary

1. The meeting was chaired by John Lee due to the lack of a chair or vice chair. He welcomed members and others and introductions were made. The minutes of the 6/10/19 meeting and the 9/17/19 meetings were approved after noting the Patricia Bigelow should be removed from the list of members present.
2. Two new CAFE staff members—Assistant Director for Administration Kathleen Geary and Extension Agriculture Director Clem Clay—said a few words about themselves in introduction to the group.
3. Jody Jellison and other staff provided a summary of news from Extension:

Jody Jellison:

- Jody Jellison updated the board on issues with Extension at the federal level that are proving challenging. NIFA staff has been significantly reduced due to the move from Washington to Kansas City. Smith-Lever funding, primary federal funding for Extension, along with much other federal funding, is currently on its second continuing resolution in Congress. She reported that Extension is expecting a reduction of 5% on this funding for the year.
- On the state side, Jody reported that we are expecting a 1-2% cut, which is unsurprising and within the pattern of the last few years. While manageable in the short-term, cuts of this kind do have significant implications for long-term well-being of Extension.

Joe Shoenfeld:

- Joe Shoenfeld discussed the job search for a new 4-H educator in Worcester county. Three candidates will soon be interviewed and there are hopes for a quick selection.
- Further HR updates from Joe included the news that Linda Horn has been named interim 4-H Program Director for a year following the retirement of Sherrie Guyott, that a second search for a web developer for CAFE is in progress following the retirement of Beth Armour and the failure of the first search. He also told the group that Melissa Ocana, who has been a research fellow, has been hired as climate adaptation educator by Extension

- The Pittsfield office of the 4-H Program will be closing at the end of January following the termination of Extension's lease in the Federal Building in Pittsfield. The two staff based in that office are being relocated to Amherst.

Bill Miller:

- Bill outlined work to expand the presence of Extension in Springfield. Extension faculty member Michael DiPasquale has recently secured new grants to relocate and augment the makerspace he founded there, Make-It Springfield. He also recently had a research project approved by CAFE for Hatch funding on urban green infrastructure.
- Bill reported on two 'integrated research and extension' projects currently in their first years, both involving cranberry production. One is a collaboration between Hilary Sandler of the Cranberry Station and Ana Caicedo of the Biology Department involving applied research on dodder, a major weed pest of cranberry crops. The second is by Ben Normark of the Microbiology Department on armored scale insects.

Lynne Thompson of the Extension Nutrition Education Program (NEP):

- Lynne noted that NEP's SNAP-Ed Program and EFNEP Program are both completing their three- and five-year plans and are now conducting listening sessions around the state to collect data and feedback on the next set of plans. On specific aspect she mentioned was the finding that schools are much ahead of NEP in their use of technology in their teaching.

4. Funding initiative for the Soils and Plant Tissue Testing Laboratory ('Soils Lab')

Agriculture Program Director Clem Clay discussed the Soils Lab equipment funding initiative. Since the Lab is a fee-based operation, Extension cannot use federal funding to support it nor can we use state funding, declared as match for the federal funding, for anything prohibited on the federal side. While the Lab pays all its salaries from fees collected, funding for equipment replacement is lacking. We are working to raise money from other sources by soliciting donations, and that individual Lab customers are making modest donations. Jody commented she finds this meaningful because it shows the appreciation for the value Extension is providing in this case.

Jay Healy noted that the Mass. Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA), of which he is a trustee, has supported these sorts of efforts in the past, on an ad hoc basis, but he believes that we should find a better way to meet these sorts of high ticket needs by planning on a more long term basis.

Jody Jellison remarked that if we were a private entity, we would be including profit in the price of the service, but since we serve the public, we try to keep the fees as low as possible. If we are trying to develop a fee schedule where we are paying off loans as well as trying to anticipate future purchases, then we would have to be charging much more, which might then price us out of the market.

Ted Wales said that if the state is serious about the Healthy Soils Initiative, then they should provide funding for the Soils Lab to do the work necessary. Winton Pitcoff described the effort made to plead the case for this funding for the Lab last year to the legislature. 30-40 supportive organizations made the case for additional funding for the Soils Lab, talked to House Ways and

Means chair. \$166,000 (amount requested) was termed a “rounding error” for the state budget by a legislator, so it is not a question of whether or not the money is there. Winton said that this time around, it won’t be a new issue, and there is hope that it will get through with minimal effort. It will be good to point out to legislators the fact that UMass has to have a bake sale—his words-- to keep the Soils Lab going. Scott Soares, another MSPA trustee, noted that it takes money to maintain a long-term service like this. Jay Healy said that we have to keep seeking a better system, it has to be done thoughtfully and collaboratively.

Jody noted that the University’s major large monetary expenses tend to be facility driven. The Cranberry Station was given as an example. The Station needs expansion and renovation. While there was \$5M authorized in the state’s last environmental bond, it has not been released, with the exception of a small amount of money for the design process.

Discussion about different ideas about how to fund the Soils Lab moving forward were tossed around. The University does provide the space and the overhead for the Lab. If we are able to raise funds privately, it will also show the legislature that the people of the state are committed to the Healthy Soils Initiative, and thus so should the state be.

Jay Healy suggested that if fees were raised, we could sell it as a service because there are scientists who can then discuss results with customers, with a greater depth of knowledge that other private labs might do. Jody mentioned that we have restructured the fee structure of the Lab, got rid of a costly test, and by doing that have been able to continue to provide the core services that are expected.

John Lee suggested that a drafted letter of support for this ask would be appropriate. Jay said that showing what Extension has already received, and that we are working to get the funding would show that Extension isn’t just looking for a handout ...and would be helpful when it comes to making the ask. He wondered if there is a way to go to larger nurseries and tree companies and ask for donations at the end of the year. John said that we would like to be seen as leveraging other people’s money.

Clem will start a listserv or populate a Google Doc page to start coordinating efforts as to who will speak to whom in funding outreach to get some commitments of solid figures to support instrument replacement in the Lab.

#### 5. Discussion of future needs

Jody spoke about areas of work that we are not involved in that might be seen as reasonable by the public, areas where we might be providing service to constituency and we are not, for example - opioid addiction. She referred to one of the handouts that lists potential future Extension positions for the Board’s consideration...she asked which would be valuable to BOPO and the groups they serve?

Deb Phillips asked what are the basics of serving on BOPO? What are the people serving on this board here to do? Is it to identify needs and then engage the community to help create a way to address them?

Jody spoke about how BOPO began. BOPO was put in place because there was a feeling that Extension wasn't serving the public needs as well as they could and that a board of the communities they serve could provide oversight of Extension activities. The hope now is that BOPO members can learn what we do, can support our funding initiatives, and can provide insight and communicate needs of communities they represent.

Mike Lueders echoed Deb's query saying that he too has struggled with the role of the board. Are the BOPO members intended to be a sounding board or to offer direction? Jody views it as an opportunity for discussion, for us to communicate what we are doing, and for BOPO members to communicate current needs of the segments of populations they represent.

Ted Wales recapped the reasoning behind the formation of BOPO and stated that he feels like the best thing the board can do is to lobby the legislature on behalf of Extension, to present to the legislature the ongoing work being done and when and why that work needs attention and funding.

Mike questioned whether we need to come up with a new model to promote Extension to especially the eastern part of the state. Ted asked about hosting seminars and workshops at the Newton campus to promote extension: "Extension Weekend at Newton Campus."

Winton Pitcoff said that the BOPO role is to advise and assist. He asked "are these the right people to be at the table? To be on the board is not just to show up at meetings but also to take it back to the communities they represent and discuss how they can support and promote extension? We need to support these programs so that Extension can grow and have a greater impact." Winton asked whether the structure could be changed to better define what it is that needs to be done and how to do it most effectively.

Joe said that the composition of the board is a legislative prerogative. Is there enough legislative interest to even compel a change of the board, its composition or its mission? Bill Miller said that while the Board's work is not just about money, it is noticeable that the current members seem to know how to address some of the needs of Extension and access resources on behalf of Extension in a way that is more engaged and enthusiastic than in the past.

Jody added that it also is effective to have people at the table to bring different opinions, even if they aren't members of the actual board. She mentioned that on the handout 'municipal regulations compliance' should be added to the list under #7.

John Lee echoed Ted's idea for an "Extension weekend at the Newton Campus" to introduce to a large amount of the state's population the facts of what Extension is, what it does, and how it benefits communities. He also asked whether it would be worth Extension reaching out to the 351 cities and towns and telling them what we do and asking them to come.

Jody responded by "our lack is not the desire to serve the needs of every community, it is the lack of resources and people to provide the services." She used the Extension Nutrition Education Program as an example – people we serve are a drop in the bucket compared with the number of people who actually need our services.

Deb raised the idea of looking at who else is doing the same sort of work and how can they collaborate with Extension to be more effective and get more done.

Mike asked whether there things that Extension should back away from?

Jody responded “yes, there are some programs that could certainly go away...but Extension has this way of letting programs die on the vine, rather than making a clean break and cutting more ruthlessly.” She agreed with Deb that Extension should continue to look at creating partnerships in some areas.

Joe added that Extension has a bit of a unique role ...the expertise we provide comes with a certain ‘purity.’ We should question whether when we make an alliance with an outside partner, are we thereby guaranteeing their ‘purity’?

Jody noted that Extension cannot lobby the legislature itself and Winton commented that there must be a way to connect allied organizations to take Extension’s case to the legislature.

#### 6. Bylaws

Matt Barron has requested an annual meeting in January and quarterly meeting thereafter. That meeting would likely be to nominate a new chair of BOPO.

#### 7. Other comments

Ted Wales asked if the members of BOPO could be invited to the next Extension Retreat.

4:05 p.m. Meeting is adjourned