

April 6, 2021

Coventry Farmers' Market Operating Committee
Special Meeting Minutes
Via Zoom video conferencing

Call to order:

The meeting was called to order by Nelson at 8:05 am.

Roll Call:

Erica Pagliuco, Katrina Weaver, Barbara Barry, Jean Nelson, Anne Marie Charland, Jamie-Lynn Connell, Alexa Gorlick, Janine Coughlin, Michelle Pesce, Eric Trott

Also in attendance: Mike Bergeron from Riverview Farms

Adoption of Minutes:

A motion was made by Weaver and seconded by Pesce to adopt the minutes of March 23, 2021. The motion passed unanimously.

Vendor appeal of Committee Decision:

Members of the Committee and other attendees introduced themselves.

Mike Bergeron from Riverview Farms was in attendance.

Jean described the procedures for the hearing.

Jean quoted from the Vendor Regulations as to what section had not been complied with and was the basis for the decision rendered by the Committee on March 9 to not invite Riverview Farm to the 2021 Market season. Section 2.1 - Actions not becoming of a vendor, - including use of profanity, abusive language and inappropriate behavior to Committee members, volunteers, and staff during the 2020 season.

A phone call with Jean, interactions in the field with Erica and Katrina, and actions at the vendor meeting in July are the occasions where the Committee noted concerns and violations to the Vendor Guidelines. Mike Bergeron acting in an abusive and threatening manner is the concern and the basis of the Committee decision.

Mike does not recall that he was swearing or being abusive at the vendor meeting. He feels it is not fair that he is being kicked out based upon a phone call where there was a disagreement. His business was being very negatively impacted last year and he was wasting a great deal of product and it was very frustrating for him. He was concerned that he would lose his business.

Mike does not recall that he was swearing at Erica and Katrina. Erica indicated that he did not swear, but Mike was acting in a verbally assaulting and aggressive manner. Katrina indicated that Mike was using a very angry tone and despite Erica's and Katrina's efforts to have a calm conversation, Mike continued in a verbally accosting nature which made them both very uncomfortable. He was argumentative, angry, and appeared to be only concerned about his own well-being as opposed to the health of the vendors/volunteers/committee members during the pandemic as well as the success of the overall Market.

Erica indicated that despite all efforts to help Mike understand the decision of the Committee, which was a difficult one, the repeated negative tone and lack of attempt to understand what the Committee was trying to do created an ongoing difficult relationship. The nature of how Mike communicated with staff, Committee and volunteers made it very hard to work with him.

Mike thought the Committee wanted the farmers to stick it out with the Market and not leave during the 2001 season. He continued to attend thinking he was doing the right thing, but he thinks that perhaps he should not have attended and maybe he would have been able to attend this year. Mike claimed that has dedicated a lot of time and effort to support the Market. He is sorry if his words affected people and stated that he was trying to simply save his business and feed his family.

Jean indicated she is disappointed that it took the entire hearing to finally have Mike offer a half-hearted apology. The decision that the Committee has rendered is not taken lightly and realizes that it will have an impact. She stated that the Committee is a very dedicated group of individuals who care very much about the Market and its well-being.

The members were sad to hear that Mike did not reflect on his actions, but instead justified his actions and offered an empty apology.

Barbara suggested the idea of not having him attend this season, but be considered for next year. Barbara stated that Mike's dedication, years of attending and offering a consistently good product is something that could be considered.

Anne Marie suggested that it appears that Mike was taking it personally as opposed to looking at how everyone was impacted by the pandemic. Could he put on probation instead?

Katrina indicated Mike could have done things differently with his operation during the pandemic and how he interacted with the committee and volunteers. Verbal abuse to volunteers cannot be accepted and could impact the ability for the Market to maintain volunteers. Mike's negative actions and verbal accosting were in a public setting in front of customers, and traffic safety professionals that left a negative impression.

Other vendors who wanted to discuss the situation with the season spoke in a private setting in a respectful manner to Committee members and volunteers and did not do it in an aggressive and angry manner.

Janine said if all the vendors acted in a manner like Mike, the committee and volunteers would not have continued last season.

Michelle was not subject to the verbal abuse, but wonders if a probation is possible. But, she understands that the negative behavior cannot be tolerated due to creating an inappropriate working condition.

Jamie Lynn is sympathetic to Mike's situation, but understands that the verbal abuse actions cannot be tolerated.

Erica is concerned about the potential of ongoing negativity if Mike continues as a vendor and the implications with other vendors. The phone call to Jean was deeply affecting and unwarranted and should not have occurred. If Mike continues, then it raises question on the capacity of the guidelines if they are not enforced. It is unacceptable for staff, committee members and volunteers to be verbally accosted. The situation did not occur just once, but happened on several occasions with multiple individuals during the season.

With other vendors, despite their dissatisfaction with the season, they did not act in a negative manner to others involved with the Market operation. It was agreed that Mike was acting in a bullying manner.

Another point that is important to reflect on is that it was noted that he appeared to attempt to coerce and encourage other vendors to turn against the Market efforts, committee members and volunteers. This further erodes the ability of the Market to function effectively.

Jean made a motion that the Committee ratify the decision of the Market Operating Committee that was rendered on March 9, 2021 to exclude Riverview Farm as a vendor of the Market, due to noncompliance with the vendor guidelines, specifically section 2.17. The committee believes that after speaking with Mike Bergeron of Riverview Farm, he did not understand that his negative behavior towards Market volunteers, staff and committee members was unprofessional and inappropriate, he lacked remorse for his negative behavior, and he was not representative of what was best for the Market as a whole. On multiple occasions, including a phone call with the Chair Jean Nelson, an in the field meeting with Erica and Katrina during the 2020 season, in front of customers and hired contractors of the Town (who also noted the negative exchange), Mike Bergeron's inappropriate and aggressive behavior, profanity, shouting and behavior that

was unbecoming of a vendor, was a general disruption to the Market and was in disregard of the structure, stability and greater good of the Market. It was further a lack of trust and respect for the difficult decision of the Committee on how to operate the Market in 2020. These are the reasons that the Committee has stated to support the decision to not invite Riverview Farms to the Coventry Farmers' Market. Barbara seconded the motion.

Votes: all voting members were in favor of the motion, which passes unanimously.

Discussion of 2021 Market Season Planning:

The to-do list continues to be worked on behind the scenes.

Vendor apps continue to roll in.

A site visit of the field has occurred to prepare for pre-season work by DPW.

Janine indicated that she has been asked by folks who would like to volunteer this season.

Jean reached out to Sue Ruggiero after the last meeting. She is not able to be in the field, but with her event experience, will meet to discuss the possibility of organizing events this season. A subcommittee can be formed to do this.

Music performance is planned to occur. Separation from customers a distance of 12' is needed. Collecting covid tests is a recommendation of the State but cannot be accommodated by the market. The market layout map can be updated and forwarded to EHHD for their review. A 12' circle can be drawn around the performers to make it clear in the field.

The 2019 event calendar can be used as a template for the 2021 season.

Next Meeting:

April 20 - 8am via Zoom.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development