March 14, 2020

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

Call to order:

The meeting was called to order by Nelson at 8:08 am.

Roll Call:

Michelle Pesce, Jamie Lynn Fontaine, Barbara Barry, Eric Trott, Erica Pagliuco, Amanda Backhaus, Jean Nelson, Ann Marie Charland, Janine Coughlin, Katrina Weaver

Adoption of Minutes:

A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Weaver to adopt the minutes of February 4, 2020 as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report:

The current financial statement was distributed and reviewed. The numbers look solid for the preseason time of year.

Planning for 2020:

The discussion centered on how the season can be planned during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to limit exposure to the virus by all who are involved with the Market – volunteer, staff, vendor, customer – while honoring the mission of the Market which is to support the farmers’ and producers.

Erica and Jean have explored what other Markets are doing nationwide to continue to be in operation during the pandemic. Westport, CT is doing an online approach with a designated time slot pick up. Others are doing a similar approach but different pick up options.

The Department of Agriculture protocols for Farmers’ Markets during the pandemic was discussed and a copy was shared electronically with the members.

It is clear that sampling, demonstrations, education, and music will not be part of the program this season.

One option involves configuring the Market field in a manner that can allow the 6’ separation rule to be complied with by all present. The physical layout of the vendors, customer lines needs to be carefully considered and mapped out. Concerns involve policing the separation of people,
maintaining one way flow, managing the flow of customers from the parking field to the Market field and minimizing exposure. This seems like it would be a difficult challenge to execute such an approach.

Food trucks could still be involved, but the separation of the customers in the line is critical. More space will need to occur between the trucks in the laneway.

Another option involves an online shopping experience with the vendors and create a product distribution process by using the parking field. Vendors could be configured along the access road ways. Customers would drive up to the vendor at specific time slots and the vendor puts the products in the trunk of the vehicle. No face to face contact needs to occur. Volunteers would be necessary for traffic circulation and locating vendors in the field, but the exposure is greatly reduced.

The vendors would need to be carefully trained to establish an online shopping process. Some are already offering this to their customers.

It was agreed that it would be prudent to share the idea with a handful of the farmers and producers to get an idea of how open they are to taking this type of approach. This will help guide the planning by knowing who is involved from the early planning stage. The full time vendors would be the focus and would be all that could likely be accommodated in the parking field, considering the circumstances.

The vendor fees will need to be discussed for this season, since we are not offering the same Market experience as in previous years. The Friends of the Market program will also need to be evaluated for this season. An analysis from a financial perspective as to what the Market’s break-even point would be helpful.

The CT Department of Ag is offering grant opportunities to prepare the type of approach that we are considering. This would help to defray some of the costs to develop such a platform.

Next Meeting:

April 20 at 8am.

The meeting will be via Zoom.
Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:22am.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development