July 15, 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 8:13 am.

Roll Call:

Eric Trott, Erica Pagliuco, Jean Nelson, Katrina Weaver, Barbara Barry, Janine Coughlin, Joe Martin, Amanda Backhaus

Adoption of Minutes:

A motion was made by Barry and seconded by Weaver to adopt the minutes of June 5, 2020 as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report:

Amanda emailed the Committee an update on the Market financials. Due to the nature of the operations, much less revenue has been generated by the Market. Some expenses have been reduced, but significant ones, such as traffic management have not. Ultimately, as the season progresses the overall financial losses to the Market will be more pronounced, which will have an adverse impact on future operations and sustainability.

Review of the 2020 Market season:

A discussion outline was prepared by Erica and was reviewed by the Committee.

The experience with Local Line has been problematic from the start. It is running ok now but ongoing fixes and upgrades are required. Since we don’t precisely fit their model of operations it has been a challenge to make this work. It has not met the needs of the Market as presented by the owner, but we have done all that we can do to make it as functional as possible.

Customers and vendors continue to direct their frustrations at Market Staff, volunteers and Committee members over the fact that we did not have the Market in the field this year, despite the issues with the pandemic. A great deal of anger has been projected at Market Staff, volunteers and Committee members.

Most vendors have done very little or nothing to assist in marketing their products or the Market, despite the efforts to encourage and assist by Market Staff. It is imperative that the vendors connect with their customers as well as share details with Market Staff regarding the products
that they have available. Without this, it is very difficult to inspire shoppers and interest in the Market. The vendors have failed to adapt to the needs of the current Market, despite all of the efforts by Market Staff.

It has been noted that vendors who attend other Markets have been posting more and marketing more at other Farmers’ Market and do not make the effort to promote our Market. This lack of support is creating low sales and attendance.

It is clear that we are not a typical Farmers’ Market. Customers view the Market more like a country fair and that has been a big attraction for many years and has caused for a great deal of success that has been shared with the vendors. Now that the fair atmosphere cannot be accommodated, and only a true Farmers’ Market can be operated, it has reduced interest.

The expectations of the vendors and the customers for us to return to a ‘normal’ type of operation is unrealistic due to the impacts of the pandemic and the limit of volunteer resources. Plus, the Governor’s executive orders limits our capacity to no more than 500 at any one time.

A great deal of effort by Market Staff and Committee members has occurred to work with Local Line and with the vendors to set up their platforms and assist them with the process. Despite all the efforts and investment of time and financial resources that have been applied this year to the Market by the Staff, Committee and volunteers, the time and energy that is needed by the vendors to support the operation has not occurred for the most part. The current operation and situation surrounding the Market is not a sustainable model moving forward.

A lengthy discussion on options moving forward occurred.

An ‘in field’ option is not feasible at this time. Due to the volumes of customers, capacity limits, logistics necessary, limited volunteer resources, the fact that most of the volunteers are in the ‘at risk’ age bracket, and most importantly due to the potential of risk of COVID infection, it will not be pursued.

Another option is to continue the operation as it has been occurring. This presents significant challenges due to the negative behavior that has been occurring with the vendors, the fact that the vendors have not supported the marketing efforts with their own platforms or with the Market’s, the Market is running on a financial loss and will continue to do so which effects future seasons. Unless there are significant changes in how the vendors work with the Staff, volunteers and Committee this option is also not sustainable or a positive situation to continue.

A final option is to put a ‘pause’ on the season and end it early. This would reduce the financial impact to the Market. However, it may create a negative scenario with the customers who are
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trying to support the Market and the small number of vendors who have done what has been requested of them.

It was agreed to have a face to face meeting on site between 12:30pm and 1:30pm after the July 26 Market between the vendors, Staff, Committee and volunteers to review the current situation and ask the vendors for their cooperation and commitment to maintain a team environment and support the Market so it can be as successful as possible, during a very difficult time with the pandemic.

The Committee and Staff firmly believes in the mission to support the farmers/producers, especially during these challenging times and that is why there has been so much effort made to enable the Market this season. However, the negativity and lack of teamwork from the vendors needs to be addressed for the balance of the season to continue and be successful.

An agenda will be prepared for the meeting to help guide the discussion and keep things on track. This will be sent out prior to the 7-26 Market day.

Next Meeting:

July 22 - the meeting will be via Zoom.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric M. Trott
Director of Planning and Development