

Farm to School Steering Committee Meeting Notes

June 29, 2007, 12:00-3:00 pm

Center for Urban Horticulture

In Attendance: Tim Crosby, Tom French, Sylvia Kantor, Alison Leber, Tricia Sexton

Unable to Attend: Goldie Caughlin, Mary Embleton, Erin MacDougall

1. Recap of last Steering Committee Meeting

People remembered being frustrated at the end of the March meeting, and noted that the work begun at the Steering Committee retreat was never completed.

Last meeting established the need to define goals, make a roadmap, and clearly define the structure of the group. At that meeting, there was a stated goal for F2S Connections to become a clearinghouse for information, and the group identified the need for staff to coordinate info and outreach and serve as liaison. [Tricia is not in the referenced role, but is instead the WSU King County Extension F2S program coordinator]

2. The Role of WSU King County Extension

Tricia Sexton has been hired as Event Coordinator at WSU King County Extension, with part of her job defined as the coordinator of WSU King County Extension Farm to School Program, which includes the F2S Connections Team work, but also other work. Sylvia and Tricia have discussed their role in relation to the F2S Connections Team, and see the most positive and feasible role as being a strong resource base for those working in Farm to School, or seeking information on starting projects. They hope to build the repository of information, including a resources database for models that have succeeded here and elsewhere, sources of information and funding opportunities, evidence of benefits of farm-to-school programs and an improved and accessible web interface. WSU King County Extension Office will continue to administer the Farm to School Connections Team monthly meetings, and to be accessible for those with questions about how to get involved or start work on programs.

Sylvia and Tricia raised the issue of limits to what the WSU role can be, in relation to the strategic goals and objectives in the draft Steering Committee Strategic Plan. They suggested a review of those goals and objectives and identified the need to look at who else is working on these projects and could take on some of the more detailed, on-the-ground goals that require larger commitments of staffing, expertise and funding than is currently available to WSU and the F2S Connections Team.

Feedback from the group was enthusiastic, with lots of brainstorming and questions for each other. Members felt that the monthly Team meetings are successful and provide a good resource for exchanging info and meeting partners, etc. When looking at some of the broader farm-to-school goals, the question was raised: Outside WSU is there an entity that has capacity or is in a position to house the whole big thing? Not really.

3. The Role of the Steering Committee

With the renewed commitment for WSU King County Extension administration of Farm-to-School Connections Team meetings and information, the group discussed the role of the Steering Committee.

Questions about the role of the Steering Committee have been ongoing. Is the Steering committee a formal body, separate from the Connections Team? Is it an active group, or an advising group?

There was consensus that the Steering Committee has accomplished a great deal in developing the Strategic Plan as a roadmap for the region and in clarifying the needs and issues arising from Farm-to-School efforts. The group also agreed that the Steering Committee has reached the end of its productive life (scheduling is difficult, structure is undecided, next steps are unclear, etc.) and needs to transform in order for next steps to be accomplished. Tim mentioned a couple of limitations to the current steering committee model. One is the issue of bandwidth for action: how much time does everyone on this committee have to throw at the identified issues? He also noted that there are a variety of obstacles in a movement this big and the current Steering Committee does not have the expertise to confront or solve all of them. Tim and Tom both mentioned that it is important to recognize when something has run its course and needs to be reborn in a new form or allowed to sit until something new emerges.

It was agreed that the current steering committee members would be appropriately moved into an advisory board position to discuss and make recommendations to the WSU Extension staff coordinating the Farm to School Connections work. It may also be prudent to review the skills and organizations represented in the group, and invite a few more people to fill in any gaps. There is room for school system decision makers and legislative staff, for instance—those with other expertise and roles. George Sneller and Shakti Hawkins were given as examples.

Tom mentioned that Sustainable Seattle is a potential model for an advisory body. It has a Board of Directors and an Advisory Council. The Advisory Council meets annually and the Executive Director approaches the Advisory Council for specific needs and feedback throughout the year. This allows for involvement but not excessive scheduling burdens for the group as a whole.

Tom (or Tim) noted that the Acting Food Policy Council is closer to governmental acceptance level than this group and may be able to work on the plan toward next steps and possible growth. Sylvia said that the AFPC is interested in farm-to-institution and has identified need for more information. Someone from the F2S policy committee will speak to them soon and brief them. Tim noted that it might be a good idea to differentiate private or public institutions, because the needs and obstacles are somewhat different between the different kinds of organizations. Tom noted that many are working outside of King County. Some efforts will involve partnerships outside Seattle/King County.

4. The Strategic Plan

[From Agenda: “Questions To Be Asked: What Strategic Goals and Objectives are accomplishable by WSU Extension, by the larger Connections Team, and by existing committees? What Strategic Goals and Objectives are outstanding, lacking leadership or funding, may be addressed through partnerships or otherwise need to be addressed?”]

In reviewing the WSU role in the F2S Connections work, Sylvia and Tricia found that parts of the Strategic Plan were feasible in the current structure, staffing and funding and others were loftier goals requiring much more input of time, money, expertise and partnership work.

As the group had just decided to disband the Steering Committee, they decided it was important that the Strategic Plan be a complete document that can be posted or otherwise presented to a larger community as a roadmap, and that the goals not being met by the current group can be out there to inspire anyone who already is, wants to, or has the capacity to work on them. The remainder of the meeting was spent reviewing the Goals and Objectives to reach consensus and clarify the language. The new draft is being sent with these notes to current Steering Committee (now Advisory Board) members for review and comment. Once final, it will be posted on the WSU Farm-to-School website and is open for use by anyone who wants to take the goals forward.

5. Next Steps

It may be appropriate to hold a summit or stakeholder meeting to celebrate the development of a strategic plan and to invite people to find a way into the bigger projects. This may be a final role for the members of the Steering Committee, it may be a way to identify new Advisory Board members, or it may just be a way for us to get an update on Farm-to-School activities in the region and for further networking. Tim noted that the Strategic Plan doesn't include an Implementation Plan, and suggested that recommending a summit or stakeholder meeting for people to choose next directions and move the Plan forward is a good Implementation Plan for the document.

Tom wondered whether others are already implementing parts of the plan and asked whether this group needs to define that next step now? Is this group able/ should it do the implementation plan? Can it just be let go now and part of the question to be asked is when advisory board is reformed, that it be part of that group's question about summit or other movement forward? Sylvia noted that we should keep in mind the need for funding and management for a summit but likes the idea, since the Farm to School Connections Team arose out of a summit a few years ago and it would be nice to come full circle and inform people of accomplishments.

It was decided to include under Implementation Plan a general recommendation for a larger stakeholder meeting in hopes that next steps will develop from that.

As for the more general way forward for the F2S Connections Team, Alison recommended that members (attendees) of the Team be given a voice about what the structure is and how they are served. She cited some who have felt they didn't have a place there. Tim advises WSU to consider what is the F2S Connections Team audience; who is needed for the change that's required? Discussion ensued about ways to serve and involve such a diverse group? Alison noted that parents have to be informed and updated. Tricia stressed the need to convey the complexity and challenges to all stakeholders, so that the range of participants understands obstacles and opportunities from the perspective of others necessary to the effort. Tim warned that we must be careful to avoid paralysis by overwhelming with the complexity, and stressed that we should strive to **End all meetings towards the hope.** (a phrase I love-TS) to provide a pathway of vision for moving forward.

Tom thinks the Steering Committee members should receive a plaque and a dinner for their service. All agreed. Tom said he'd cook! We ended the meeting towards the hope that he wasn't joking!