Meeting Minutes
Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council

DATE: September 27, 2012
TIME: 10:00 AM
LOCATION: State Room, State House

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Janet Coit, Director, Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Michael Fine, MD, Director, Department of Health (HEALTH), Richard Licht, Director, Department of Administration (DOA)

ATTENDEES: Angela Ankoma (HEALTH), Ken Ayars (DEM), Becky Bessette, Department of Health (RIDE), Dara Chadwick (HEALTH), Kimberly Clark (Farm Fresh RI), Hillary Costa (DOA), Laurie DiOrio, Department of Human Services (DHS), Perry Gast (HEALTH), Gemma Gorham (Brown, RI Food Policy Council), David Heckman (HEALTH), Kathleen Heneghan (HEALTH), Lorraine Hynes (DOA), Eliza Lawson (HEALTH), Kelly Mahoney (Governor’s Office), Steve Morris (HEALTH), Ana Novais (HEALTH), Leo Pollock (Southside Community Land Trust, RI Food Policy Council), Nicole Pollock (DEM), Sandra Powell, Director (DHS), Ronald Racine (DHS), Allison Rogers (DOA), Andrew Schiff (RI Food Bank, RI Food Policy Council), Catherine Taylor, Director, Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA)

Agenda

1. Welcome from Council members
Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Director Janet Coit called the first Council meeting to order at 10:00 AM by welcoming attendees and Council members and acknowledging Department of Health Services (DHS) Director Sandra Powell and Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA) Director Catherine Taylor. Director Coit recognized that the focus of the meeting was to talk about nutrition, food safety, sustainable food systems, wellness, and the Council’s role in jobs and small business creation. Before inviting the other Council members to speak, she offered three basic goals for DEM:
   a. To increase consumption of local food in RI from 1% to 3%
   b. To increase access to RI farmland
   c. To grow the RI agricultural sector

2. Opening remarks from Governor
Dr. Fine, Director of the Department of Health (HEALTH), expressed Governor Chafee’s regret of being unable to attend the meeting and communicated the Governor’s enthusiasm for this new Council. Dr. Fine spoke about the effect that poor nutrition has on rising health and health care costs.
Director Licht talked about DOA’s purchasing responsibility for state facilities and noted that the state of Rhode Island purchases food for the state’s hospitals, prisons, and other facilities. He also noted the role of Statewide Planning, which falls under DOA’s jurisdiction, as well as the connection between agricultural issues, zoning, and other planning and local issues. He reported that this year, HEALTH and DEM Directors were added to the Statewide Planning Council and shared his enthusiasm to support the work of this Council moving forward.

3. Remarks from the prime House sponsor
Representative Deb Ruggiero, the prime sponsor in the House, talked about her excitement for the public law creating this Council. She explained the two main parts of the bill and their importance:
   a. Local food promotion that will help small farmers get access to grants from both federal and foundation money
   b. Creation of the Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council

4. Review Public Law 2012-038 The Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council Act
Director Coit read directly from the statute and reviewed the Council’s purpose as it is written in Public Law 2012-038.

5. Election of Chairperson
Director Coit asked Council members to elect a Chairperson, reminding members that a report will be due to the General Assembly in March. Director Licht nominated Dr. Fine. Director Coit seconded and all voted in favor of Dr. Fine as the Chair of the Council.

6. Brief presentations from DOA, DEM and HEALTH and consideration of further study on agency food practices
Newly elected Chair, Dr. Fine, invited presentations from the three agencies.

Lorraine Hynes, Director of the Division of Purchases at DOA, presented about RI food purchasing and existing food contracts. The state spends approximately $10 million annually on food. She presented on DOA’s recent work to incorporate local foods into state purchasing and discussed Senate Resolution S0998, Section 9 of Procurement Rules and Regulations, and RI General Law 37-2-8. She expressed her hope that there will be future collaboration with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to conduct a pilot to purchase local foods and provide healthier menus. She also discussed her division’s efforts to promote local in the dairy contract. She shared that an upcoming opportunity will be to look at incorporating healthier choices into the vending machine contracts in state facilities, which will be expiring in 2013. Director Licht commented that not only should the Council explore state purchasing but it should explore how the state universities are purchasing and also communicate with the three vendors contracted by the municipalities for school lunch and breakfast programs. Director Fine proposed that a presentation from these institutions may be an agenda item of an upcoming meeting.
Ken Ayars, Chief of the Division of Agriculture from DEM, presented on DEM’s efforts to promote, market, and regulate local farming and fishing. Additionally, he provided a history of agriculture and past legislation in RI that has supported RI farming. He also offered state statistics including that RI has the highest real estate value, highest taxes on land, and most farmland lost on a percentage basis than any other state (besides NJ) and how the department works to address all of these issues to increase agricultural opportunities for Rhode Islanders.

Eliza Lawson, Program Manager from the Initiative for a Healthy Weight at HEALTH presented about the relationship between health and nutrition including increased health care costs associated with rising prevalence of chronic diseases and obesity. She discussed how a healthy food system supporting good nutrition, as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, can prevent disease and lower health care costs as well as address social determinants of health such as poverty, employment, and education. She talked about the reality of our food environments and how we are constantly surrounded by unhealthy food choices in institutional settings like early care and education centers and schools. She also briefly mentioned some of the HEALTH programs that are heavily involved with food including the Division of Food Protection and the Women, Infants and Children program.

Dr. Fine thanked all presenters and suggested having the three agencies complete white papers regarding their roles with food and nutrition and that they create action steps and recommendations that adhere to the goals of the Council. Director Coit endorsed this suggestion and recommended that the white papers could be a chapter in the report that is due to the General Assembly in March. She also invited collaboration with other RI Departments to provide input regarding their interactions with food and nutrition. They agreed that their respective departments would commit to providing white papers and that input would be sought out from other agencies as well.

Director Licht discussed Governor Chafee’s recent request to all state departments and agencies to accelerate their evaluation of regulations for any adverse effects on small businesses. Director Licht also expressed his desire to better understand how to support Rhode Island agricultural small businesses. After some discussion among the Council members, Director Licht suggested that a Rhode Island agricultural organization could be invited to a Council meeting to present on the basics economics of farming operations and how Government can support this industry to make it viable.

7. Discussion of Healthy Eating at Events Policy
Director Licht began the conversation about the Department of Health’s recently adopted Healthy Eating at Events Policy. He would like to see an inventory of different types of meals or snacks that are served in public places. He suggested that we need to be aware of a potential clash between supporting local businesses that may not necessarily provide healthy options. He noted the Council will need to keep this under consideration moving forward. Dr. Fine offered to lead this inventory process and Director Coit agreed to this arrangement. Director Licht then commented that while an inventory is being conducted,
it does not mean that the department could not move forward with the basic tenets of the policy by adding healthy food choices at events. Director Coit said that she plans to adopt and implement the policy at DEM and can report back about the process. Also, she commented that DEM and HEALTH should be clear about what this policy applies to and areas of flexibility. Dr. Fine concluded that an inventory will be conducted and brought to the Council’s next meeting.

8. Public comment on agenda items
Dr. Fine asked for public comment on agenda items. Becky Bessette from Child Nutrition Services at RIDE introduced herself and expressed that she would be able to provide any information needed.

9. Next Council meeting announcement
Dr. Fine commented that the Council meetings will be targeted for approximately three times a year with the next meeting in December or January. He then thanked the Council Members and staff members.

10. Adjournment
Dr. Fine invited a motion to adjourn and all members were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM