

MEETING MINUTES

Under the provisions of G.L. c. 30A, MetroWest Moves conducted an Open Meeting on
Friday, May 27, 2016

9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

MetroWest Health Foundation
Suite 202
161 Worcester Road
Framingham, MA 01701

I. **Call to Order**

- a. **Meeting convened:** May 27, 2016 at 9:30 a.m.
- b. **Present:** Alex DePalo, Jack Hunter, Janie Hynson (MetroWest Moves Coordinator), Marianne Iarossi, Nicole Isabelle, Helida Johnson (WIC), Amanda Loomis

II. **Materials Distributed:**

- MetroWest Moves Project Updates Sheet (5/25/16)
- Draft MetroWest Moves 2016-2017 Work Plan
- Map of Poverty in MetroWest
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program Materials

III. **Community Updates**

- a. **Project Updates Sheet:** The Coordinator distributed a list of project updates.
- b. **SRTS:** A Walking School Bus was launched at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School on May 4th (National Walk and Bike to School Day). About 24 students, 6 parents, the Principal, several police officers, Melissa Green and Diane Hanson (SRTS), and the Coordinator participated. Amanda Loomis and Marianne Iarossi participated in a walk assessment before the Walking School Bus was launched. The Coordinator shared photos from the event during the meeting. Press about the event included:
 - <http://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22791>
 - <http://framinghamsource.com/index.php/2016/05/04/wilson-elementary-launches-walking-school-bus/>
 - <http://patch.com/massachusetts/framingham/new-woodrow-wilson-walking-bus-good-kids-environment-0>

IV. **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Initiatives**

- a. **WIC Programs:** Helida Johnson, Community Coordinator, Framingham/Waltham WIC presented to the Steering Committee. WIC has offices in Waltham, Framingham, and Marlborough but they also serve Northborough and Hudson. WIC is hosted by the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC). The program is a federally-funded nutrition



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program for low income pregnant women and children up to 5 years old. They are working to expand eligibility for children up to 6 years old because there is a gap between when children are out of the program and before they start school. During that time, children are unable to get benefits such as school lunch and other programs. WIC offers nutrition consultation with a registered dietitian and free food (including milk, fruits and vegetables, canned fish, yogurt, etc.). The income guideline is a bit higher than other programs. If a family is receiving SNAP or Mass Health then they are automatically approved for WIC.

- b. **Good Food Project Program:** During the summer, WIC offers coupons for farmers' markets. They began piloting a program last year, the Good Food Project, to encourage participants to combine SNAP and WIC benefits to shop for healthier options at farmers' markets. The WIC coupon for the farmers' market is for fresh fruits and vegetables; recipients cannot buy dairy or meat with the coupon (but they can buy these items with SNAP benefits). The WIC benefit is up to \$40 per family, but last year redemption at the Framingham Farmers' Market was only 53% (redemption was higher at the Marlborough and Natick Farmers' Markets which are open on weekends). If WIC continues to have low redemption at the farmers' markets, then their budget will be cut. Helida notes that the program is vital because there is a high obesity rate among children in Framingham. Through this program, participants can also come to Cooking Matters classes (offered 3-4 times per week) to learn to cook food that they can buy with the WIC card. The program involves the whole family, and fathers are encouraged to participate in WIC programs as well. Family Access TV interviewed the nutritionist, which brought many interested participants. So far the program is only open to WIC participants, but they hope to expand it to the wider community. WIC has also brought the class to Common Kitchen in Natick.
- c. **WIC Redemption at the Framingham Farmers' Market:** Regarding low WIC coupon redemption rates at the farmers' market, WIC has been talking with participating families about reasons why they did not go to the farmers' market. Many participants in Framingham said that they do not feel comfortable going to the current location (Village Green, Edgell Road & Vernon Street) of the farmers' market and/or that the times (Thursdays 12 - 5:30pm) are not convenient for their work and childcare schedules. About 40% of the WIC participants are from other cultures, and WIC has talked with the Framingham Farmers' Market about bringing in more diverse food selections. WIC staff create recipes based on what is available at the farmers' market and provide food samples when participants come to pick up their coupons. Greater variety at the market would attract more people. The coupons can only be used at the farmers' market (not at individual farms), but since redemption was so low one of the farmers last year offered to bring produce to the WIC/SMOC



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building parking lot. It was too late in the season last year to get approval, insurance, etc., but WIC would like to try again this year.

d. **Potential New Farmers' Market Location/Extended Hours at Current**

Location: Helida talked with Jacqueline Meninno (Framingham Farmers' Market Manager) last year. The farmers' market was previously downtown but it did not work because there was unsafe activity/loitering occurring. There is a very large parking lot at SMOC/WIC, so potentially a market could be opened there on Saturdays. However, liability/insurance and other details would need to be confirmed and WIC and SMOC approval would be needed. Helida said there were about 8,000 WIC participants eligible for coupons last year, so there could be a large number of customers. SMOC also hosts 26 different programs for low-income families, who might also be customers at the farmers' market. Helida thinks it would be beneficial to have the farmers' market on site on the same day that WIC recipients receive their coupons. Helida would also like to have cooking demonstrations at the market. The Edward M. Kennedy CHC has also expressed interest in hosting a farmers' market on their site, so this could be another potential location.

e. **WIC Approved-Farmers:** Farmers must be approved to accept WIC coupons, but it is not a difficult process. WIC cannot ask farmers to become WIC-approved but others in the community can educate them about the opportunity and explain the process. Some farmers' markets match SNAP benefits, which in addition to the WIC coupon is an amazing benefit to families. There are currently 3 farmers in Framingham who are WIC-approved. Helida will share the list of Framingham, Natick, and nearby WIC-approved farmers with Amanda Loomis to encourage others to become WIC-approved.

f. **Framingham Farmers' Market Working Group:** An initial meeting will be convened with Helida Johnson (WIC), Jacqueline Meninno (Market Manager), Paula Kaminow (Edward M. Kennedy CHC), Holli Andrews (Framingham Downtown Renaissance), Amanda Loomis, Marianne Iarossi (Framingham Planners), a contact person from SMOC, and the MetroWest Moves Coordinator to discuss the possibility of a new farmers' market location and/or extended hours at the current location. Jeff Cole (Executive Director of the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers Markets), Suzanne Garcia (Resident Service Coordinator at Framingham Housing Authority), and Maria Rosado (Resident Services Manager at Pelham Apartments) will also be brought into the discussion after the initial meeting.

V. Finalizing the New Work Plan (Effective July 1st, 2016)

The Coordinator shared a draft new Work Plan with the Steering Committee, which was reviewed and discussed as follows. Any additional changes to the work plan

should be sent to the Coordinator by July 1st. The Work Plan is due on July 8th, 2016 though is effective starting July 1st, 2016.

a. **New Work Plan Strategy: Farmers' Markets**

The Coordinator shared a map showing low-income populations in MetroWest and reminded the group that one of Mass in Motion's major priorities is targeting low-income populations. The group compared the locations of each of the current and proposed farmers' markets in relation to low-income populations shown on the map. Each of the MetroWest Moves communities is in a different place regarding farmers' markets, as discussed below:

- **Framingham:** Framingham has a farmers' market but the Steering Committee discussed increasing awareness about the farmers' market, particularly among families with children and WIC participants; increasing the hours of the current farmers' market; initiating CSA drop-offs; and/or opening another farmers' market on the South Side of Framingham on a weekend day. We also plan to connect with Family Access TV to increase promotion of the farmers' market. As noted above, a working group will be formed to advance this strategy. Increasing promotion of the farmers' market, increasing the number of WIC and SNAP-approved vendors, and increasing WIC coupon redemption rates will also be activities for the Work Plan.
- **Hudson:** Hudson does not currently have a farmers' market but is interested in starting one. Jack Hunter spoke with a downtown landowner in Hudson who is willing to lease their land for the farmers' market. The Hudson Farmers' Market Work Plan would focus on launching the farmers' market. There will be an internal Hudson meeting to begin planning for the farmers' market and connect with the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers' Markets.
- **Marlborough:** Marlborough started a farmers' market last year with about 12 vendors and also tried to do a winter market. The focus of the Work Plan will be increasing promotion of the farmers' market, increasing the number of WIC and SNAP-approved vendors, and increasing WIC coupon redemption rates.
- **Northborough:** There is no farmers' market located in Northborough, though the Shrewsbury Farmers' Market is very close to the Northborough line and has Northborough vendors. The focus of the Work Plan will be to promote the Shrewsbury Farmers' Market to Northborough residents. Helida does not think that there are any WIC-approved farmers in Shrewsbury so encouraging farmers to be WIC-approved could be another activity.
- **All Communities:** There should be events, music, cooking classes, etc. to draw people to the farmers' markets. Each community should contact Helida to discuss the WIC process at each farmers'



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market. Incorporating the WIC Good Food Project and cooking lessons, working to increase the number of WIC-approved vendors, and working to increase WIC coupon redemption rates at each of the farmers' markets will be added to the work plan for each of the communities.

- b. **Considered Strategy - Mobile Market:** Considering the transportation and food access issues in the MetroWest Moves communities, the group discussed the possibility of launching a mobile market (rather than focusing on farmers' markets). Alex DePalo explained that this has been explored extensively in Hudson, as they originally considered this to be an ideal option. They talked with funders about it, but given the need for storage, refrigeration, staff, financing, distances between the four communities, and other logistics it does not seem feasible at this time. The group decided to move forward with the farmers' market strategy instead.
- c. **New Safe Routes to School (SRTS) activities:** The Steering Committee also reviewed a draft of the SRTS Work Plan. Any changes or feedback should be sent to the Coordinator by July 1st.
- d. **New Complete Streets activities:** The Steering Committee also reviewed a draft of the Complete Streets Work Plan. Framingham is currently working on their subdivision rules and regulations and Hudson will be hiring an Engineer to start this process soon. Any other changes or feedback should be sent to the Coordinator by July 1st.

VI. Administrative

- a. **Approval of Meeting Minutes:** The Steering Committee did not vote on whether the previous meeting minutes can be approved. Approval will be postponed until the next meeting.
- b. **Review of Tasks/Action Items:**
 - Steering Committee members are asked to review the New Work Plan and send feedback to the Coordinator by July 1st, 2016.
 - Each community should communicate with Helida Johnson (WIC) to work towards increasing WIC redemption rates at the farmers' markets and encouraging farmers/vendors to become WIC-approved.
 - A Framingham Farmers' Market Working Group will be formed and an initial meeting will be held to decide how to proceed with the farmers' market strategy in Framingham.
 - An initial farmers' market planning meeting will be held in Hudson.
- c. **Next Meeting Date/Time:** The next quarterly meeting will be held in August and a poll will be distributed to select the date. The Coordinator will continue meeting with communities individually before then.

VII. **Adjourn:** The meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.