



**University of Illinois Extension  
8751 S. Greenwood Ave., Suites 112-122  
Chicago, IL 60619  
Cook County Extension Council Meeting  
Thursday, March 21, 2024  
Minutes**

**Meeting Attendees:** Richard Juarez Sr., Eric Meredith, Dedra Ries, Chera Parham, Monique James.

**Staff Attendees:** Willene Buffett, Michael Neil.

**Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves and provided a brief biography.

**County Director's Updates**

- **Recent meetings with stakeholders, Director Buffett:** March 13 was Agriculture Legislative Day in Springfield. 27 County Directors first met with the Lt. Governor's office, which was supportive of agriculture in Illinois. Director Buffett also met with representatives Nickols, Meyers-Martin, Hernandez, and Ford to provide updates on programming across Cook County and workshops conducted in their districts.

She could not schedule a meeting with State Rep. Sonia Harper, who has oversight of the Agriculture Appropriations Committee, and State Senator Elgie Sims, who is involved in the budget allocation process. A meeting with both at their local office should be a priority.

- **3-year Civil Rights Compliance Review, Michael Neil:** Because we receive federal funding, Extension has an obligation to make our programming available to all county residents and reflect the demographic makeup of our county regarding staff, volunteers, and participants in our programs.

Every three years, an internal review is conducted to determine strengths and identify things we can improve upon when it comes to inclusivity; providing reasonable accommodations for disability and Limited Language Proficiency (LEP); making our programs available to all; and constituting councils, committees, and volunteer rosters that reflect Cook County's demographic makeup.

This year's review is scheduled for June. Representatives from the council are encouraged to participate in the review if available.

- **Annual Civil Rights Report, Michael Neil:** Annually, we report on five things: the progress we made towards our inclusion goals and the strategies or actions that were most effective. Steps taken to address alleged discriminatory practices by an organization we work with. The demographic makeup of our volunteers, council, and committee members. Race and ethnicity parity in 4-H enrollment. Our efforts to notify protected classes about our programs.

After Neil's report, it was asked if our volunteer demographic profile aligned with the areas we serve. This sparked a conversation about ways to increase volunteer participation in certain areas and the challenges the unit has historically faced.



The conversation included a question about the existence of Black, Hispanic, or Asian Master Gardener subgroups and appealing to college students and older adults. Other thoughts focused on helping those interested in volunteering but find the rigor of formal training a barrier. It was suggested that people in this category work under the guidance and direction of certified Master Gardeners. This way, residents accomplish their goal of volunteering while learning the craft over time through hands-on experiences.

- **Annual Impact Report, Michael Neil:** The impact report is a way that we communicate with key stakeholders and the public. It provides an overview of Extension's efforts at the state level. It also uses data and individual stories to highlight our programs' positive impact on Cook County residents' lives. This year's report is scheduled for a June release.

#### **Old Business**

- Council members identifying which local Extension team(s) they would like to work with

#### **New Business**

- **Team Assignment Updates:** *Dedra Ries* reported that she, Richard, and others met with the Community Health team. Council members learned about each educator's area of focus and would be on the lookout for related individuals, groups, or organizations they could refer.

#### **Announcements**

- *Director Buffett:* on May 13, fourteen College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) faculty members will visit our unit. All 14 faculty members have Extension appointments, which means that the research they conduct should include interfacing with local Extension Educators, and the results/findings of the research will be shared with that county.

Representatives from the council are encouraged to participate if available. The event format will be like Dean Bollero's visit last October. Additional information about the visit will be provided in future emails.

- Director Buffett suggested, and Chair Juarez Sr. agreed, that one of the new business topics for the June 20 meeting will be a recruitment strategy for new council members.

The next meeting date is June 20, 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 10:49 a.m.