



# Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

**Sangamon, Menard, and Logan Counties  
Extension Council Meeting Minutes  
June 17, 2021 - 7:00 p.m.  
Sangamon County Extension Office & Online Via Zoom**

**Agenda Items:**

- **Call to Order** Chairman Bill Bree called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.
- **Present:** Bill Bree, Craig Hall, Elsie Ransdell, Nancy Dixon, Zach Dixon, Rachel Fishburn, and Terri Miller
- **Previous Meeting Minutes**  
MOTION: A motion to accept the previous meeting minutes was made by Craig Hall and seconded by Zach Dixon. The motion passed.
- **Introduction of Guest** – No guest joined the meeting, however all those present introduced themselves.

The Logan County Board has assigned a new member to serve on our Extension Council and Extension Board, Keenan Leesman, from Hartsburg, IL.

MOTION: A motion was made to appoint Keenan Leesman to the Extension Council and Extension Board to serve a two year term. Motion was made by Craig Hall and seconded by Zach Dixon. Motion passed.

Miller mentioning that Jennifer Taylor Brown (Sangamon) and Gary Letterly (Logan) will be going off the board in October, as they will be completing their second terms. Miller said she would entertain suggestions for possible new members to serve on Council from their respective counties. Those members who will be completing their first term and up to serve their second two year term in October are Nancy Dixon (Menard), David Opperman (Logan), Brian Satorius (Menard), and Phil Sidles (Sangamon). There will be two youth representatives going off the board in October, Rachel Fishburn (Sangamon), and Zach Dixon (Menard).

Miller noted that Nancy Dixon was recently spotlighted in a video on Facebook by her employer, Springfield Clinic. It highlighted her volunteer work as a 4-H Club Leader in Menard County. It is an amazing video and we are so proud and grateful for Nancy's service to 4-H and Springfield Clinic for creating such a wonderful video.

- **Financial Report**

Miller reported the FY22 Budget was completed and sent to campus for approval. It is again a balanced budget, barring any significant changes to expenses or expected income for the upcoming fiscal year. Because of the financial stress our local and county governments have seen

due to the pandemic, it was decided to keep Extension's levy request with all three counties the same as previous years. It should be noted that the levees have remained constant since 2015 and remain below 2011 funding levels. While this shows great fiscal restraint and responsibility, the organization will have to begin asking for annual increases to at least match the P-Tell increase each year, as inflation is taking its toll. Miller praised her staff for helping to keep cost down and being very thrifty. She also thanked them for taking on additional work loads caused by recent retirements, and for their willingness to restructure job assignments, since some positions vacated by retirements may either not be replaced or replaced at reduced hours.

With the retirement of staff, it is necessary to update the Extension check signing privileges. Miller asked the council to approve the updated check signature authority for the current year. Those signors being - Logan County In/Out Account: Carissa Davis, Sarah Swaar, and Terri Miller, and removing Patty Huffer and David Irwin.

MOTION: A motion was made to authorize signature authority for checking accounts. Motion was made by Craig Hall and seconded by Nancy Dixon. The motion passed.

- **Program Updates**

Miller stated that the Governor moved the state to Phase 5 mitigations last week and campus is working on adjustments to programming safety mitigations. One important consideration we must take into account is that youth 12 and under cannot yet be vaccinated and so everyone has to remain vigilant with safety precautions when working with youth audiences in order to keep them safe.

Miller discussed the Unit Annual Impact Report for 2020. For those not present to receive a copy in person, a link was sent to council members where it can be viewed as a PDF online. She shared again how proud she was that Extension staff and volunteers were able to preserve through and meet the challenges present by the pandemic and still get the job done. It really made the team come together.

Miller invited board members to look through the second quarter program reports submitted and emailed to them in advance of the meeting. There is a lot of great programming going on and in-person programming is in gear again. She noted that a list of Master Gardener educational gardens located in the area was included in the reports and encouraged folks to stop by and visit them. The Master Gardeners are working hard to get the gardens in shape since they were only recently able to get back to volunteering at most of the partner locations.

Miller was very excited to report that the 4-H shows will be in-person again this year, and the staff and volunteers are doing an excellent job of planning them in a way that keeps volunteers, staff, kids, and their families safe.

Miller added that it is wonderful to see the offices alive with activity and staff were looking forward to what will be a busy summer, and even busier upcoming school year.

- **Staffing Update**

Miller gave a followed up report on the University's Staff Voluntary Retirement Program. In order to proactively cut cost, the University offered a retirement package to workers with at least 20 years of service and who also met certain age and other requirements. As a result of this plan, our Unit saw three retirements, Sandy Duncheon, office support for Menard and Sangamon, Patty Huffer, 80% Program Coordinator for 4-H and 20% communications. Both Duncheon and Huffer retired on April 30. Sharon Lounsberry, Program Coordinator for 4-H, retired May 31.

Miller thanked all three for their many years of dedicated support to Extension and their willingness to continue offering assistance with the transitions if needed in the future. While these retirements have created many short term challenges, they do present a good opportunity to look at Unit staff and current program need to find efficiencies and ways to utilize staff to best support programs in the Unit. One opportunity is to tear down artificial geographic boundaries that sometime create a mindset of staff only assisting with or performing tasks inside a certain geographic or county zone. Rather, now there is an excellent opportunity to look at each staff person's individual gifts, experience, and talents and pulling them through to benefit the entire Unit. Keeping local assistance and connections is always important, but taking a fresh look at how work flows and is assigned could bring about greater efficiencies and spark improved processes. Allowing for entrepreneurial and outside-the-box thinking. Miller shared that how this will all work out remains to be seen as they look at the talent they currently have and assess the talents of new staff that come on board.

Miller also shared that the Unit was currently in the middle of the process to hire an 80% time office support person who would work in the Menard Office on the days it is open (Monday and Wednesday), and assist in other offices the other two days they work each week. She is currently waiting for all the applications and civil service tests to be scored by campus at which time she will receive a list of applicants to interview.

The Unit has received campus approval to post two currently vacant positions and they should be appearing on the job board any day now. Those positions include a 100% 4-H Program Coordinator and a 100% time Community Worker. (This position's salary is covered by the federal SNAP-Ed grant.) Miller requested that if the councilmembers knew of someone who might be interested in the positions or be a good possible candidate, please have them reach out to her office and they will be sure to send them the link to apply, once the jobs are posted.

Miller also gave an update on the AITC program coordinator position. After talking with Jim Burge, Sangamon County Farm Bureau manager, it was proposed to the Ag Education Partnership to have the Farm Bureau(s) hire a new AITC program coordinator, rather than hiring them through Extension, which is how it was done in the past. The Farm Bureau will be hiring a full time coordinator, whereas Extension would have hired a 60% time person, as had been done in the past. Miller also mentioned that the position has always been housed in the Sangamon County Farm Bureau office and so them being the hiring agent makes sense. Also, the Farm Bureau can be more flexible in its hiring process. They have a more simplified hiring process and quicker turnaround and can begin the process immediately. They can also be more flexible when it comes to modifying hours or job responsibilities, which can be helpful for a position whose salary support is heavily dependent on grants and donations.

Since the Farm Bureau will be hiring the position, Extension will no longer receive an annual agreement from them to help us cover some of the cost of the program. (It had been around \$25,000 annually.) However, Extension will continue to supporting the program with an Extension paid Program Coordinator, Amy Hyde, continuing to offer in-class programs to schools in Logan County, and Extension paid Extra Help in Menard County to continue to provide in-school programming there. There may also be an opportunity for 4-H in metro Springfield to partner with AITC for some programming in Springfield city schools. And of course, we will also continue the embryology (egg hatching) programs as well. Miller wanted to make it clear that Extension continues to support AITC and its mission and she feels Extension definitely has a place in it. She looks forward to working together in a way that best fits both organizations resources and aptitudes.

- **Reaching New Audiences/Meeting Community Need**

Miller shared that from suggestions made by Sophia Schneider and Zach Dixon at the last council meeting, regarding the need for programming at schools about Ag careers, she has begun reaching out to individuals around the Unit to develop possible Ag Career exploration programming for middle school or early high school teens. Miller hopes to work with the Unit Farm Bureaus, commodity groups, Universities, and current Ag professionals to build a program that would offer more than just guest speakers, but hands-on and/or mentorship/shadowing opportunities. Miller asked that anyone interested in being a part of this work group let her know right away, as she hopes to start having discussions very soon. Craig Hall mentioned the “Explorer” program his children went through when in school and felt it might be a good model to investigate when developing the program.

Miller also thanked Brian Satorius for putting together a list of organizations that Extension could reach out to in the Menard County area. This type of information is very helpful when it comes to outreach efforts.

The Unit recently participated in a three year civil rights review with campus leadership. The process went very well and was a positive experience. The review also helped identified opportunities where the Unit could further engage with diverse audiences. A written summation of the review is expected from campus soon, and once received, staff will create a plan for continued success and progress.

- **Upcoming Meetings:**

Thursday, October 21, 2021 – 7 PM (Sangamon County Extension Office)

- **Public Input**

There was no public input.

- **Adjournment**

MOTION made by Craig Hall seconded by Zach Dixon to adjourn. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 7:48 pm