Plant Growth Facilities Faculty Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes – February 10, 2021

The meeting started at 11:03am

Members Present: Jinliang Yang, Stacy Adams, Ed Cahoon, Sabrina Russo, Justin McMechan, Stephen Wegulo

Ex-Officio Members Present: Hector Santiago, Matt Anderson, Amy Hilske, Scott Sattler

Approval of Minutes of Nov 20 Meeting – Adams moved to approve the minutes of the Nov 20 meeting; McMechan seconded. The minutes were approved without changes.

Updates from Amy Hilske –

- There is not much going on right now – main concern is the cold temperatures
- Supplies are hard to come by right now due to shortages from the pandemic. They have been able to find the right pots, soil, etc. But the lead time on getting it is longer than normal
  - Adams suggests to order large amount of soil so that we have the supply when needed. Hilske replies that the soil has been varying in quality so she does not think that will work right now
  - We are doing this with the pots because they are a special order, so the manufacturer requires us to place a large order

Updates from Hector Santiago –

- Covid related updates:
  - We are probably all aware of the new testing requirements to be on campus. Overall, our rates of positivity have gone down. We are in meetings with other university leaders to compare practices – most are doing very similar mitigation processes
  - For the vaccine, in Nebraska, education (including higher ed) is in the 1B tier. We have not yet mapped out who in the university will get the vaccine first, but logically, it will go first to those that are in contact with students first.
  - We have plenty of PPE to supply.
  - If anyone has any additional questions or concerns about PPE or Covid, email Hector.
- APLU (Assoc of Public & Land Grant Universities) commissioned a study in 2015 on facilities used exclusively for agricultural study, looking at deferred maintenance and updating those buildings (UNL was not part of this study).
  - There may be a large infrastructure bill coming to boost the economy and UNL wants to be part of it, so Hector has sent in our information recently. This confirmed what we all know – that the buildings do need updates. The amount determined from the study for what colleges of ag need across the nation is $11.5 billion. We have a group lobbying to get UNL to be part of this bill.
  - If the bill goes through, the funding will be at NIFA and institutions will have to compete for the dollars. Right now, it will be a matching 1:1 funding, though they are trying to reduce or eliminate the matching requirement.
  - In order to be able to compete, we need to be very prepared with plans/a proposal – blueprints, costs, benefits
  - Adams brings up his experience with a similar ask in the 1980s where it was hard to get funding due to Nebraska’s short session times – 90 days. If we need to get matching funds, there will be a lot of work involved in getting Nebraska funding. Possibly we could work with groups like ABN (Ag Builders of Nebraska) for help in lobbying the state
  - Russo asks if the lobbying and resources would need to be split across NU. Santiago replies that since it is only for ag related programs, as it currently is projected, it would only be split with UNL and NCTA
o Russo asks for a summary or information on this to be added to the box folder so we can use it to build the proposal. Santiago will see what he can provide.

o Russo expresses concern on what this committee can provide for this (i.e. this is somewhat outside of their area of expertise – construction, land zoning, etc.). Santiago reassures that we are mostly looking for this committee to identify what is really needed in renovations and new builds, not necessarily to make the entire construction/building plan
  ▪ Russo and Adams suggest that we need UNL/IANR admin buy in. They could provide the exploratory funds needed to get a rough vision of what we are looking at and cost estimate. This will help in tightening up the plans

Agenda Items –

Continue rates discussion

- In calendar year 19 to 20, our expenses went down and revenue went up. Most of our revenue is coming from tier 1 greenhouses (Beadle and airconditioned houses).
- Proposed to increase rates by 2% to keep up with inflation. This translates to $0.02 more per square foot.
- Operating expenses broken down presented. Bulk of the money goes to “greenhouse supplies” - light bulbs, repairs, keypads, tractor repairs, shade cloth installation & removal
- Russo asks if the cost of supplies has gone up due to shortages. Hilske replies that yes it has, but only about 2-3% (this is not due to the shortages, but is the normal amount it increases every year)
- Hilske has made an additional sheet that explains the financial procedures for the committee
- Cahoon brings up that the 2% increase feels like a rubber stamp and not a good incentive for faculty working hard for their grant dollars, but also dealing with budget reductions and increasing costs. Cahoon would like to get more support from outside of IANR – like from ORED and Arts & Sciences. Hilske points out that Arts & Sciences pays for one salary.
- Russo suggests that we look at the proportional usership and funding for future years to make sure that the costs are being shared fairly by units
- Santiago reminds the committee that the administrative salaries (greenhouse directors) are not included in the budget. If we leave the rates as they are this year, in a few years, the increase needed to catch up would be too high (unspoken agreement is no more than 5% increase in a year)
- VOTE: Russo proposes to vote on the rate increase. Cahoon moves to increase the rates by 2%. Wegulo seconds. Committee votes and the motion passes unanimously.
- Adams in chat: I’d like to recognize the Horticulture Club RSO for paying $6,750 for the concrete walk that was installed in the teaching greenhouse and the effort provided for Jeff Witkowski of getting it installed during Christmas.

Next steps – Greenhouse Revitalization Proposal

- Committee members to read through the email Russo sent on the greenhouse revitalization proposal and contribute what they were asked, add more where they have knowledge. PLEASE edit in the cloud so that we can maintain version history.
- There is already a lot written about this, so we can use some of this language in our proposal.
- Next meeting to discuss the greenhouse revitalization proposal. Everyone, please start thinking about what we will need in the greenhouses.
- Adams suggests that we get creative and innovative, think towards what we will need in the next 30-40 years to make this investment really worthwhile and impactful. Santiago agrees that the old greenhouses are past renovations (as was determined by the external review as well)
• Russo suggests one way to deal with the matching would be to create priority tiers. So, if we got X amount, we could do this. If we get more, we can do more. Cahoon and Santiago direct the conversation back to what Adams said about thinking big and about innovation at this point, rather than getting into the costs and matching and lobbying right now.

• Hilske suggests creating a subcommittee to include more people not on this committee to help contribute to this proposal process. Hilske will put a list together for the next meeting.

Adjourn — Meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.