The Chelsea Farmers Market (CFM) POP-UP Café

WHY we did it

Chelsea Farmers Market has a long history as farmers markets go. It was started in 1975 and has continued on the North Common to the present day, with some years inevitably being better than others. In the spring of 2018, the Chelsea community was reeling from multiple institutional losses, beginning in 2014 with the closure of the Chelsea Country Store, which had been serving the Chelsea community for over 100 years.

During 2017 our diner (Dixie's II) closed, we lost our pizza shop/ gas station (the Quik Stop), and Flanders Market, which was also the local liquor store and a second gas station. We had nowhere to buy gas, nowhere to eat in the daytime, and only Will's Store on Rte 110 and the local bar on Maple Street (which serves pub food in the evening) left to provide for Chelsea’s needs.

This was the scenario when we began to plan for the 2018 Farmers Market. Our market has a 40-year + history but has never had a regular hot food provider, so we started to think about how great it would be if we could have a real sit-down café at the market; a place where families could come to eat on a Friday afternoon and enjoy regular entertainment, events for kids, and a wide range of local vendors. They could eat on the North Common, in the middle of the market or get take out to eat at home – or both! [See Appendix A]

HOW we did it

First thing, of course, was to figure out how we could fund this enterprise, and our local bank was clearly the first port of call. For Chelsea this was Mascoma, the bank that has sat on the corner of the North Common, where Rte 113 meets Rte 110, and has been the center of our town (as several different banks) for many decades.

We are proud that our local bank is a ‘B’ corporation and the funding of a local eatery that supported the Farmers Market was clearly in the range of projects they would be willing to support. So, we figured out what we’d need to get started and how much that would all cost. [Appendix B]

We determined that entertainment EVERY week would be an integral part of our community offerings, so we included a tent for musicians in our Mascoma request. We promised to name our musician tent the Mascoma Music Tent to give Mascoma the promo they deserved and sent our request to the Mascoma Donation Committee with a clearly outlined list of requirements. [Appendix C]

Mascoma generously agreed to fund our plan and we began purchasing the items we needed. At the same time, we put out notices letting folks in town know that the opportunity was available to be ‘chef for a day’ along with the rules and regulations they would need to know. [Appendix D]

Fortunately, a good neighbor, Mary's Side Street Shoppe on the North Common, offered us space in the backroom of her store to keep our market tables and all the necessary items for the café and a regular vendor agreed to put up, take down, and store the 3 tents in exchange for free vending for the season. We bought nice banner signs for the Café and the ‘Mascoma Music Tent.’

We decided on compostable plates, bowls, utensils etc. and that we would charge the café vendors just $10 to cover this rather than have them bringing their own non-compostable items. We found that $10 didn’t quite cover it so we’re increasing that fee to $15 this year and plan to buy even more compostable items, such as trash bags. [Appendix E]

The next step was to send out application forms to everyone who had expressed an interest in vending at the café. [Appendix F] and by mid-season we had figured out a full description of what to do and what to expect as a CFM Café vendor. [Appendix F]

The CFM report to the Chelsea Town Report for the 2019 Town Meeting describes the success of the market during the 2018 season. [Appendix G]

Please don’t hesitate to contact Jennie at manager@chelseafarmersmarket.org for more information.