MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Mark E. Biberdorf, Town Manager MEB
Josh Queen, Parks & Recreation Director

COPY TO: Heather Taylor, Assistant Town Manager

DATE: May 28, 2025

SUBJECT: Update on Farmers Market Activity & Discussion of Potential Change of Location

The Town's first farmers market has been underway for a month now. Parks & Recreation staff has heard mostly positive feedback from the public and vendors about it. However, one issue that has been continually brought up is that the current location is not ideal. It has been suggested that the Town consider moving the location to Bill Moore Community Park.

In comparing and contrasting the current location of the market near Town Hall and moving it to the park, Parks and Recreation staff put the following information together based on observations from vendors and patrons:

Current Location – Town Hall Parking Lot:

- **Traffic and Parking Challenges**: Even with staff at the gate and cones blocking access from Howard Gap, drivers still attempt to come through. Managing traffic flow requires additional staff support.
- **Lack of Handicap Parking**: Many of our guests are older and use walking aids. The walk from the Town Hall lot is long, and the broken pavement creates safety hazards.
- **Bathroom Access**: Restrooms are difficult to locate and access, which affects both guests and vendors. Vendors often need to leave their booths unattended to find restrooms.
- **Pavement Condition**: The parking lot is full of cracks, loose pavement, and holes, creating a hazard for pedestrians and complicating vendor setup.
- **Vendor Load-In/Out**: The size and layout of the lot make loading and unloading difficult, especially for larger setups.
- **Environmental Factors**: The full-sun, asphalt surface creates high temperatures that can negatively impact produce and the overall experience.
- **Limited Foot Traffic**: There's no organic foot traffic in this area, which limits casual attendance and community visibility.

Proposed Location – Bill Moore Community Park:

- **Increased Visibility and Access**: The park offers higher visibility and more inclusive access for all visitors.
- **Organic Foot Traffic**: Being in the park encourages more spontaneous visits and integrates with other park activities.
- **Post-Hurricane Engagement**: Moving the market here helps bring people back to the park and supports our community recovery efforts.
- **Vendor-Friendly Space**: The open grass fields provide more space for vendor setup and easier load-in/out.
- **Reduced Staffing Needs**: The park's layout would require less staff support for traffic and setup.

Also attached is direct feedback that we received vendors when asked the question about a different location. Based on this feedback and analysis from staff, it is recommended that we consider moving the location of the farmers market to Bill Moore Community Park.

If Council should have questions on this report prior to the Agenda Review meeting, please let me know.

MEB/meb

Attachment

Mark Biberdorf

From: Josh Queen
Sent: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 10:18 AM
To: Mark Biberdorf
Subject: Farmers Market

Good Morning Mark,

I reached out to vendors who attended one or more of our markets to gather their insights on the potential benefits and drawbacks of moving the market from Town Hall to Bill Moore Community Park. I asked them to share their thoughts from a vendor's perspective. I would like to move the market over to the park starting in June.

Please see their response below:

Farmer:
"I see a lot of potential in the Fletcher Farmers Market. For a beginning market, there has been enough positivity and promotion that high quality vendors and a large percentage of farmers have showed up for the market. I think in the future it could be a tremendous service to the Fletcher community. That being said, the current location is not workable. I already know that some top farm/vendors have not come because they knew they would not be able to sell enough at that location to make it worth their time.

Farming is a notoriously time-consuming job and farmers in our area have to choose carefully what markets they attend because while they are at the market, they know there is farm work not getting done. Therefore, there needs to be a critical mass of customers for a farmer to be able to spend an afternoon at a market. If they don't get enough sales or if they pick fresh produce that does not sell and is therefore wasted, it's not that they don't want to come back...they can't come back and hope to stay in business. Margins are narrow for small farms.

The current location of the Fletcher Market is problematic because it is not visible from the road (or really anywhere). It is also small, hot, short on parking, and lacks any character to draw customers. The park is opposite. Even better, I am hopeful the park will draw families which will enable parents to feed their children healthier food and teach them about agriculture and small business. As a mom (and farmer), I would love to take my kids to a park and farmers market at the same time. It's a win for kids and parents alike and will enhance Fletcher's offerings as a community. I strongly support the move from the maintenance shed to the park."

Animal Products:
"I believe a move to the park is the only way the market will flourish. We will have visibility from the road for patrons passing by. Also, I have talked to many other farmers in the community that would be interested in vending at our market, but only if it is relocated to the park."

Consumables:
"there's a lot more traffic with the school across the street and better parking!"

Farmer:
I think this would be a great move! I think that it would create more traffic for the market, and it would increase accessibility for all parties involved (customers and vendors)!

Grower:
More exposure to the public's view would be a great idea

Baked Goods:
"I think it would also be a great idea given that there are summer games/people visiting the park! My main concern would still be weather, especially in grassy areas"

Farmer:
"We would love the move to the park, I think there's already a good traffic flow that way, great parking, bathrooms and playground for families, lots of people go there for walks with dogs already, I think it would be great for the community. "

Consumables:
"I think moving over to the park would provide visibility as long as the market is close to howard gap road. Drive by visibility is key.

Example. The Mills River Farm Market is in the back parking lot behind evergreens which has been problematic for drive-by visibility."

Grower:
"The parking lot is going to be extremely hot soon and the parking lot is not great."

Maker:
"The market overall is a great addition to the community, however for the long-term success of the market it needs to be in a well-established location with attractive scenery, accessible parking, and space to grow. The current location does not have any of those qualities. "

Josh Queen
Director
Fletcher Parks & Recreation
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