

Plainfield Co-op Board Minutes

Monday, November 18, 2019

Board members present: Sarah, Cat, Les, Charlotte

Absent: Giordano

Others present: Jean Hamilton, Gail Falk

Consent Agenda. Not able to approve minutes of last meeting because Board members haven't had a chance to review them. Charlotte will make sure they go out before the next meeting.

Board Recruitment. Sarah said no one has volunteered to join the Board. She is including a big push for members to join the Board in the Email news that is about to go out. Several potential board members were discussed, and plans were made to contact them. There was a brief discussion about how to proceed should the Board drop below 5 members; Les said the Board needs a plan.

Board Budget. Giordano prepared a Board Budget for 2020. It was reviewed. It is included in the overall store budget, which is to be discussed later in the meeting. Les said it would be good to have actual plans to go with the budget items. Cat said that, as a new Board member, she is learning about Policy Governance through YouTube videos, which are good. Sarah asked whether there is duplication of the insurance item (later in the meeting it was determined that there is a duplication: Coverage for directors is part of the Co-op's overall insurance policy). Sarah said the Board will revisit group training for the Board at a later meeting.

Holiday Gifts for Neighbors. Sarah said in the past that the Co-op has given small holiday gifts to immediate neighbors. The Board approved doing this again. There was a brief discussion about gifts to needy Plainfield residents, and it was decided that there is not the money or energy for this right now. Would like to see the Food Shelf collection box active. Charlotte said she would follow up.

Holiday Party December 14. This will be a party for staff and community. Store will stay open until 10. DJ reserved. Charlotte will work on this with Jean.

E-mail updates. Paula Emery and Emily are working to update the member lists. They will send a post card (at their expense) requesting email contact information to everyone for whom the Co-op lacks an email address.

Newsletter. Les will write the Board's report for the newsletter. Giordano will do a Treasurer's report. Sarah will do an update of the Email news (see above) and will include search for General Manager.

Building Committee. They had a work day earlier in November and they will reconvene in January.

Marketing Committee. Bob Fancher will reach out to the people who signed up to volunteer at the September 14 member meeting.

Other committees. No one is currently working on Expansion of the current building. Cat said she will work with Giordano to convene the Route 2 relocation committee.

Membership Policies (D4, E5, D6, D7, D8)

- D5. Decided to change the word “Annually” in D(5)(3) to “Periodically.” People requesting redemption don’t necessarily have to wait a year for the request for redemption to be reviewed by the Board. (Charlotte or Sarah will to provide Bob Fancher with a copy of the new policy so he can update the Policies on the website.)
- D6. Reviewed. No change
- D7. Reviewed. No change.
- D8. Les thinks that this section should go back into the Executive Limitations section where it used to be, because is this is what the Columinate (formerly CDS) template suggests. He also thinks that some of the policies from D4 regarding equity rights of members should go in this section. Les was authorized to draft a revision to D8 to incorporate parts of D4 and move the entire section to the Executive Limitations section of the Policies.

The Board took no action on the suggestion brought forward at the previous meeting revise D1 to allow for a family member to use a member’s gift card or membership number. Jean said there is no way within COPAS for a Gift Card to be used by more than one member. Les will include a reminder in his Board report for the newsletter about each adult member of a household needing an individual membership number, and Gail will write a separate box about this for the newsletter.

Monitoring. (F4 and F5). Deferred.

Manager’s Update.

Jean reported that there are 29 working members with a 7% discount and 1 with a 3% discount.

November was an unexpectedly difficult month because of the storm-related power outage that led to loss of all food in the freezer. The store had to be closed for a day to clean up the mess caused by the cooler leaking. Kevin filed an insurance claim and has received word that the store will receive a check for \$8,000 to reimburse for the food lost. There is no reimbursement for lost sales or extra staff time. Management is now developing a proposal to purchase a generator to prevent future losses from power interruptions. Despite the power outage crisis, Kevin thinks the store can break even for November. There was a \$1,000 net profit in October.

Three new subs have been hired; one is a former employee. Jezebel will replace Angie (who resigned) as product manager. Stephanie is now doing admin support and account work and is doing well. Leah is now the lead receiver.

Kevin is cutting way back on his hours because he provides child care for his daughter during the weekdays, and he has taken a weekend job in Waterbury. He does a lot of his work at night and recognizes that the store needs a manager to be present during work hours. For 2020, the budget calls for a fulltime General Manager and for Kevin to provide transition, coaching and back-up for the new manager 10 hours per week.

Jean reported that a dissatisfied customer demanded a refund of his equity payments. To defuse the situation, Kevin refunded his payments directly although realizing that this is a Board function. The Board ratified Kevin’s decision. The staff who was involved with the customer (there were two different interactions) will received additional training. Sarah would like to further de-escalate the situation by

reaching out to the former member in a letter that says we are sorry to see you go and you will be welcome back any time. Charlotte said it is not necessary to send such a letter. Sarah said she recognizes it is not a requirement, but that it is important to try to promote healing in the community.

Jean reported that on the day that the store was closed on account of the cooler malfunction a staff member was treated rudely and hostilely by a member. There was a discussion about the staff feeling disrespected and unappreciated, and a suggestion that perhaps the member rights and responsibility policy could address the importance of members treating staff with respect. Jean and Kevin will review the store policy on excluding customers who are dangerous. They will also develop staff training on basic de-escalation skills. Jean emphasized that staff are worn out and emotionally threadbare because of being so under-resourced.

Jean reported that there is a mediation underway to address a conflict between two staff members; Judy Cyprian is mediating.

There was a discussion about doing something to show appreciation for staff in December. Sarah will make hot fudge. Cat will make some a card or poster for the Board to sign and will try to solicit staff gifts from community businesses.

Management Transition Planning. The staff was told about Kevin's plan to reduce his hours and the plan to hire a GM at their November 13 staff meeting. There was a proposal from staff to hire two half time positions instead of one fulltime position, but, after discussion, the Board decided to proceed with the plan to recruit a fulltime GM. There was a discussion of the need for middle management at the store; Jean said staff have been encouraged to step into floor supervisor or shift supervisor roles, but no one has yet stepped up.

Jean made it clear that hiring a General Manager is not instead of staff raises. The 2020 budget provides for Cost of Living raises for staff to begin 1/1/2020. The GM position is budgeted at \$18 per hour. The budget also provides for a 15 hour per week Membership Coordinator. The position could be hired later in the year if funds are tight in the early months of the year.

The Board agreed to proceed with the hiring of a General manager. Sarah Phillips will circulate a job description. Les said that Columinate has a manual for hiring a General Manager (it's 79 pages long). Sarah asked Les to share the relevant recommendations of the manual. She will take the lead on preparing the job description, doing the posting, and having the resumes come back to her. There will be a Hiring Committee, which should include staff as well as Board members. Kevin thinks he should not be on the committee, but he could review resumes. Sarah will circulate the draft job description. There will be a special meeting December 2 to finalize the job description and the hiring process. This will be brief – not a full length meeting.

2020 Budget. Jean distributed the draft 2020 budget, and there was a discussion of certain items. The budget will be corrected to remove the duplication of Board insurance costs. The draft budget projects a 3% revenue increase in 2020, and 34% margin. The net profit for the year is \$2206, which is below the Policy Governance benchmark. Jean asks the Board to decide whether they are comfortable with a break-even year in 2020. There could be a saving of \$12,000 if a member coordinator is not hired, but this seems like a needed item. Les asked whether the proposed budget allows for the Co-op to be in compliance with F1 benchmarks. Jean answered that it will (except for the year-end profit) by the end of

the year, although the low months of January to April are likely to be below. Jean asked the Board to send her questions and comments after they have had an opportunity to study the budget. It will be on the agenda for the December meeting.

Meeting adjourned on time (!) at 8:29 pm