

Plainfield Co-op Board  
Meeting by Zoom  
August 3, 2020

Board members present: Cat, Les, Rose, Sarah, Roseanne (joined part way through meeting)

Others present: Peter (GM), Gail (minute taker), Lucy Blue (member)

Cat, as vice president, prepared the agenda and chaired the meeting.

Participants were able to connect and to stay connected, except that Gail lost connection toward the end of the meeting due to Wifi signal interruptions. Les served as timekeeper.

**Minutes.** The draft July 6 and July 20 Board minutes were approved

**Member-Owner Input.** Lucy Blue joined the meeting and offered input as a member-owner. She described a favorable interaction with a new staff member Ahmah, who was very nice and considerate. She noted that the sign on the Drop Box looks “worse for wear” and offered to make a new one. Her offer was gratefully accepted. She described having put a check in the Drop Box for her gift card; when she made a purchase a few days later, the amount was not on her gift card, and the check was still in the Drop Box. The staff who assisted her was able to get the check out of the Drop Box and add it to the gift card right away so there was not a problem.

**General Manager’s Updates.** The General Manager’s report is attached to the end of these minutes. As noted in the report, sending a USPS letter to members is cumbersome, and Peter would like to include the Notice of Annual meeting in the mailing with the recent letter from the Board to prevent duplicate mailings. Sarah said she would help stuffing envelopes. Peter said the hard part is printing labels. Sarah suggested holding off on a decision about the notice of Annual Meeting until she reports on her conversation with Andy Robinson.

The Board decided to defer review of the F-4 and F-6 monitoring reports until the August 17 meeting because they had just received the reports and hadn’t time to review them thoroughly. Roseanne and other new(ish) Board members asked for guidance about reviewing Monitoring reports. Les said he would share a monitoring decision tree prepared by Columinate and he reviewed highlights of decision tree. Gail noted that it is important for the Board to take action on each monitoring report and to note the action in the minutes, as this becomes the basis for the Board’s annual evaluation of the General Manager.

Peter described the upcoming meeting on August 4 of the Select Board to consider whether to close the bridge from Route 2 onto Main Street for two weeks while a pedestrian bridge is under construction. This unexpected aspect of the pedestrian bridge project is a result of very high costs for flaggers needed to keep a lane open. Peter reviewed highlights of Giordano Checchi’s March 2020 report on the impact of bridge closure on Co-op finances. He said that, in addition to the financial impacts Giordano noted, the bridge closure would interfere with deliveries – 40 to 45 trucks a week; this would make it impossible to stock the store. The Board asked Peter to attend the meeting and quantify the impact of closing the bridge on the Co-op. The Board sees

positive impacts of having a pedestrian bridge, but this is outweighed by the detriment of closing the bridge to all traffic for two weeks. It was suggested that the Town's Revolving fund to support businesses could be used to pay the unexpected costs of flaggers. Peter will attend the meeting, which is on Zoom. Others are welcome to attend as well. The Select Board has allocated only 15 minutes for community input.

September 11 Member Engagement workshop. Les, Rose and Cat have signed up or will sign up.

**Policy Governance.** Sarah said she is still working on financial projections for the rest of the year, and will share what she comes up with. She noted the positive sales figures for July that are reflected in the General Manager's report. Peter said that inventory adjustments in June resulted in a margin of 39% for the month. He is in hopes that the Co-op may have had a profit for July.

Roseanne wanted to know when the Board will discuss planning for the inevitable winter downturn. Peter said that November is the month set forth in the Policy Governance calendar for business planning and budgeting for the upcoming year. Les noted that reviving the Strategic Plan is a good way to deal with long-term planning. There was a discussion about the Strategic Plan that the Board adopted in October 2016. Other than Sarah and Les, the Board members and Peter were unfamiliar with that document's content and the process for creating it. Gail said she would send it out (Sarah sent it to Peter and the Board immediately after the meeting). Sarah noted that the Plan suffered from a lack of member engagement, and Gail noted that it suffered from lack of support by the Management Collective at the time, although some staff were in support. Peter asked whether the Strategic Plan had been replaced by the decisions at the September 19 Annual Meeting. Sarah said that the Strategic Plan was put aside in the wake of dissolution of the management collective and the extreme financial crisis in 2019. Sarah noted that at the September 2019 Annual Meeting members were presented with options for long-term directions; although the majority favored continuing in the present configuration, the long-term options of strategic alliance with Hunger Mountain and moving to a location on Route 2 are not off the table. The 2016 Strategic Plan is consistent with the member decisions at the 2019 meeting. Sarah suggested the option of a pulling Andy Robinson in for a special meeting on strategic planning, where the Board could review the Strategic Plan and consider how and whether to update it.

**Annual Meeting.** Sarah reported on her meeting with Andy Robinson, who has agreed to facilitate the Annual Meeting. He wants to know the goal(s) for the Annual Meeting. Andy doesn't want a free-for-all: the purpose should either be informational or decision-making. If it is primarily informational, Zoom might be a better forum. If decision-making, the Board has to address what decisions the members will make. Peter said he thinks member engagement is pressing. The September 11 workshop coming up is a step. He noted that the Board has put the hiring of a membership coordinator into the budget as a priority for later in 2020. The members could be asked at the Annual meeting how they want to engage – how the membership coordinator should be used; it would be good, he said to lay the groundwork for the position and

set some benchmarks so that a year from now we can assess the value of the position. Sarah affirmed that thought and talked about reshaping the membership's role in relationship to the new board and new GM. Les suggested doing a survey or some kind of activity to get members involved in thinking about member engagement – to collect input that can frame the discussion at annual meeting. Roseanne agreed; she said that people don't know what the possibilities for engagement are; they need to be offered suggestions about needs and channels for activity. Sarah also agreed: we want to frame the discussion and not just get back a laundry list of "you should's." Sarah said she would follow up with Andy and any other Board members who want to participate to come up with a framework for discussion. She will contact Andy Robinson and set a date in the next week for a logistics meeting.

Les reminded the Board that in April they approved by-laws changes to be presented for approval by the members at Annual Meeting. These are housekeeping matters and should be quick. Sarah said they should be sent to the members for review before the meeting. Peter said he can include them in the upcoming mailing if Les forwards them. These should also be included in the newsletter .The meeting notice and the newsletter should also list the people who will be running for Board seats. Sarah will review the roster and let Peter know which current board members need to stand for election. Cat said that the notice about the election should include encouragement for others to run for the board.

Rose said she will send a list of questions about logistics for the Annual Meeting to the Board. She said that she has reserved a PortaPotty, necessary because the Select Board removed the PP from the Rec Field earlier in the year. It will cost \$355 for a model with a sink. Rose will go to the Select Board and ask for permission to have a PortaPotty for the meeting and also ask them to pay for it with the funds not spent this year on the PP. If the Select Board doesn't agree to pay for a Porta Potty, the Board approved the expenditure of \$255 to have one on the day of the Annual meeting.

**Next Meeting.** August 17, 6 pm by Zoom.

## **Peter's Corner: General Manager's Update for July 20th Board Meeting**

**Store:** July gross sales were good, topping \$119K, just 3% less than last year's \$123k. We'll know the full picture for the month once we get Naomi's reports at the end of next week. We have no plans to change operations or hours at the moment.

**Staff:** We continue to have difficulties keeping all shifts covered, due to staff illness, staff injury, family member illness, and returning staff not covering all previous shifts. In addition, the summer business makes things very heavy at times, meaning we have added mid-shift coverage in order to allow the regular staff to have their breaks. This is mostly on Saturdays and Sundays, but we've also added a mid-shift person Thursday mornings to help with receiving, and may add another day or two. All of this is being covered by substitutes at the moment, as our current permanent staff hasn't stepped up to take on more shifts (with one exception, covering one shift). Brought another new sub on this past week, Amatul (Ah-mah) Peyman, who has now had two days of on floor training, in addition to the 3.5 hours I spend with any new hire doing new hire paperwork, Dept. of Liquor Control Training, SNAP training, COVID Training, and Personnel Policy review, as per our New Hire checklist.

**Economic Injury Disaster Loan:** The EIDL remains unsigned at this time. I keep checking the on line forms, and they have yet to change the signature page. I did spend some time with Kevin after the last Board meeting discussing the request to re-cast the budget for the rest of the year. That will take a lot more time.

**Payroll Protection Plan:** I have just begun to review the multiple documents and guidance communications we've received, and that also will take more time, but no deadline, unlike the EIDL.

**Back up Generator:** A week ago last Sunday, we had a training session with John Draper, attended by Kevin, Jezebel, Chris, and myself. Works great. Simple hookup and the inside breakers flip to take the generated power and off the grid. All the inside coolers and freezers are covered, with the exception of the walk-in. Also, lights in the store are covered. Kevin is working on hooking up the battery packs for CoPOS.

**Board Mailing:** Les sent the letter out via MailChimp, which goes to 711 people. Mail Chimp says that 253 have opened it, or 35.58%. We have hard copies that we're handing out to customers. Kevin and I spent an hour and a half trying to produce a mailing label file from CoPOS for the 386 members in the data base for whom we don't have emails. It's not a straight shot. We have to compile a complete list on CoPOS, and then subtract the Mail Chimp list. We stopped work on the CoPOS list the other night, but I was able to print the Mail Chimp list today. We'll keep working on that this week. However, I strongly suggest that we include a notice (separate sheet of paper) warning the Annual Meeting for Sept. 20 at the Rec. Field. That will save us hundreds of dollars on postage by not having to do a second mailing, plus staff time stuffing envelopes again. If we can agree on that language in the next couple of days, that would be extremely helpful.

**Other Activities:** Roseanne and I met to go over financial stuff – bank accounts, balance sheet, Naomi reports, etc. I signed the revised contract for Columinate Peer Review Audit, and they are now scheduled to have their on-site photographic visit on Monday, August 17. Spent some time reviewing the Rte. 2 bridge interruption report Giordano did for us back in March. I've had emails and a phone call from folks on this – both pro and con the project. I was out sick a day and a half last week, so am behind on several fronts. I continue to do Payroll bi-weekly (about three hours) and the Naomi financials every week (about four hours), plus the twice-weekly credit union and post office runs (about an hour and a quarter each time). I also write a Weekly Update for staff, which goes out with the weekly work

schedule. That schedule takes hours of Kevin and my time, given all the staff churning that takes place. The Department of Liquor Control has re-done its retail training program. Currently, they have a “train the trainer” model, where certain store employees (currently myself, Kevin, and Laura) are certified to train new hires and re-train staff periodically. The three of us have to take a new training course prior to October 1, and then re-train all staff – no matter how recently trained (normally good for two years) – between October 1, 2020 and October 1, 2021.

**Policy Governance Look Ahead:** September has Staff Treatment and Compensation on the calendar. Reviewing with Kevin, staff hasn’t had evaluations in “years.” I’ve looked through the personnel folders, and they are a varied mish mosh of papers: different forms, some evals; some not, etc. Job descriptions are also partially out of date. In this week’s Weekly Update, I’ve put staff on notice that I’d like to complete a review of all permanent staff in time for reporting to the Board in September. This will include a review their current job description for accuracy, and will have a self-evaluation form, then a meeting with me. In terms of compensation, our Personnel Policy says that increases should occur on employee’s anniversary date, but this past year, all staff got a \$.25/hour raise on the first of the year. Transitioning back to anniversary date will take some planning and examination of the budget. I mention this now, as this is a major undertaking that has been neglected for some time, and I can’t guarantee it will be completed in time for September, depending on when the Board meets in September.

**Marketing Committee:** Met on July 22. Bob Fancher will mount the new bracket and Pointing Hand “Open” sign out front on the big sign, replacing the flag, as per our conditional use permit. Julia Rapczynski will do an in-store shop as part of developing the “market basket” for affording shopping at the Co-op. This was an idea that had been worked on last year, but dropped during the closure. The committee is also talking about a poster and a hand flier. There was some brief discussion about re-opening the Community Center, but protocols will be needed for COVID 19, and interface with the downstairs functions.

**Building Committee:** Chris Thompson is organizing a building committee meeting for Thursday to discuss a list of pent up projects. The committee did do floor painting Memorial Day weekend, but has not actually met for several months. Through June, we’ve spent \$1995 of the \$3100 budget, and we’ve had cooler repairs in July, so we’re crunched on repairs for the rest of the year.