

Plainfield Co-op Board
Meeting by Zoom
May 18, 2020

Board members present: Cat, Les, Giordano, Sarah (for part of the meeting)

Absent: Rose

Others present: Peter (GM), Gail (minute taker)

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

Participants were able to connect and to stay connected (with brief exceptions). No at large members or members of the public joined the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting Les pointed out that there was not a quorum. He also pointed out that Sarah had missed a number of meetings (he wasn't sure how many) and under the terms of the By-laws (Section 4.14), her membership on the Board might have been ended, in which case, there would be a quorum because two-thirds of the board was present (however, the Board would be operating without the minimum number of members). There was a lengthy discussion about how to proceed, but before the issue was resolved Sarah joined the meeting, thereby providing a quorum.

General Manager's Update. Peter reported several glitches within the past week: the phone lines were down for a day, email forwarding of orders stopped working and had to be repaired, printer problems, furnace problems, cooler needed repairs, and the vacuum cleaner died. Replacing the vacuum cleaner will use up the remaining money in the equipment budget.

On the positive side, two additional doors now have lights and cameras and the new generator has arrived. John Draper will install it. The Express window has started serving customers.

The Co-op is working toward a phased reopening. All staff but one have taken the OSHA-required training. The Co-op has a thermometer and all staff are expected to take their temperature upon arrival. The state guidelines require a safety officer for each shift, but everyone on staff has been designated a safety officer with the responsibility to check on one another. Plexiglas guards are to be installed at the cash registers. Not sure how to handle the limitations on the number of customers who can be in the store at one time. Hours to be open going forward are under discussion. Looking at June 15 as a target date to be open but hope to continue curbside service on a limited basis. Many people say they want to continue this.

Peter is juggling staff. Some people are returning to pre-Covid jobs. Some staff who have been on leave are returning to work. There are two vacancies, which are posted internally.

Les asked whether customers will be required to wear masks. Peter said yes.

Sarah asked whether people can now use EBT cards for curbside purchases. Peter said the Co-op never stopped accepting EBT payments. Sarah said that Twinfield families will soon get a special one-time EBT benefit of \$367 and suggested a publicity blast oriented to these families.

Peter said he is in communication with Naomi and Kevin about hiring an in-house bookkeeper and how many hours that person needs to work. He hopes to post the new job description in about a week. A typical bookkeeper makes twice what the Co-op is offering for the position.

Peter is in the process of sending out the patronage dividend letters (discussed at May 4 meeting). All the dividend e-mails will be out by Wednesday, but there are still letters to be sent to people who have not provided their email addresses to the Co-op. This is particularly time-consuming because of the large number of people who have not provided their e-mail addresses and thus require a physical stamped letter.

April expenses and Gross Revenue. Giordano's figures and Naomi's matched!! For the first 4 months of the year sales did well, but Cost of Goods and Services went up. Margin is down. Peter said that it is hard to know the cause for sure. Staff overbought in late March as a result of supply chain interruptions and accumulated extra inventory which will ultimately balance out when the items are sold. Giordano said that COGS should not be affected by extra inventory because COGS is only calculated when the item is sold. There was a discussion about how items are entered on the balance sheets. Sarah asked whether, when the actual cost of goods went up, we failed to pass along the increase in higher prices, thus resulting in lower margin. Peter responded that buyers routinely do adjust prices when the price of goods goes up. Sarah suggested that perhaps we are selling less of the items with higher margins. Peter responded that sales of some high margin items have decreased, such as beer and wine. It was agreed that it is important to maintain the margins, and this requires attention.

There was further discussion of factors that may have caused expenses to go up, some virus related, such as hazard pay, and some unrelated, such as increased utilities. There was a discussion about an item for workers discount (distinct from staff discount) which appears to be a mistake, and much too high. Peter will look into it. Sarah said it would be helpful to get a budget with a year-to-year comparison. Peter said the quarterly budget Naomi prepares has this and he will pass it along to the Board.

Peter said it is looking doubtful that the federal Economic Impact Disaster Loan (EIDL) will come through, though he continues to check with Senator Leahy about it, and so the Co-op will have to have greatly increased sales to avoid a loss at the end of the year.

Les asked about the Columinate grant. Peter said Columinate is not scheduling consultations at present.

Peter asked how long the Board intended to continue hazard pay for staff. It is costing \$900 to \$1000 per week. There was discussion, including whether to reduce it slowly or all at once, but no decision. This will be decided at a June Board meeting.

Minutes. The May 4 minutes were approved.

Board recruitment. Sarah needs to resign from the Board because of other responsibilities so it is essential to recruit one or two more members. Potential candidates were discussed and Cat volunteered to reach out to them.

Policy Governance Review. Part E (Board-Management Relationship) is on the calendar to be reviewed in May. Les said he had edited the policies to remove reference to the Administrative Manager and put revised and updated policies on the website.

Les led a review of Part E by reading E-1, E-2, and E-3. Board members indicated they feel they are in compliance with those sections. Sarah asked Peter for his perspective. He said he thinks the policies are being observed and that things are “fine;” he thinks there is a good balance between the Board and General Manager, and he feels supported. Les said that the words “and the By-laws” should be removed from E3 (3) because the General Manager is not authorized to interpret the by-laws; only the Board has that authority. There was discussion about whether this was the case and why that language was there, and it was agreed to postpone a final decision on Les’s suggestion to the next meeting. It will be on the Board agenda in June.

Committees. Marketing committee. Peter said the committee is still meeting by Zoom. The committee is close to having a zoning permit application ready for a sign on the east side of the building and working on a Direct Mail flyer to residents.

Membership committee. Peter said the amount of time that volunteers are needed to answer phones is decreasing as more and more people are e-mailing their orders; thus shifts for call-answering by volunteers are phasing down. There are preliminary discussions about how else to use member volunteers. Any volunteers working in the building would have to comply with VOSHA training and precautions. However, as long as there is a limit to the number of people who can be in the store, adding volunteer workers would limit the number of customers who can be in the store.

Annual Meeting. The possibility of an outdoor meeting was discussed. As long as there is a limit on the number of people who can be in one place, it’s a problem. To be further discussed in June.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.