

Plainfield Co-op Board  
Meeting by Zoom  
October 5, 2020

Board members present: Cat, Les, Rose, Roseanne, Liz Bicknell, Shana Siegel  
Others present: Peter (GM), Gail (minute taker), Sarah Phillips, Andy Robinson

**Member/owner input** Cat said that member Alice Sky wrote asking for the Community Center to be open as a place for families who live in small places to spend time. Peter said he has responded to Alice in writing – don't have staff capacity at this time to open Community Center. There is a virtual art exhibit just now going up in the Community Center.

**General manager Update** (written report attached to these minutes). Peter had the following addenda to his written report: Peter added that The freezer is now working well.; repairs cost \$800. He is recruiting additional subs and expects to be juggling scheduling during the holidays. The Market Basket is complete and is on a poster in the store and is being distributed.

**Member Engagement-** Based on the results of a Doodle Poll, Rose suggested October 28 as the best date for this. There ensued a lengthy discussion of what "this" would be. Andy said that the design for the meeting depends upon the desired outcome, and two sessions might be desirable.

Les said he wants to learn the values of the members and wants to use the session(s) to engage members by making them feel heard and also to get input to help the Board review the Ends.

Cat said the Co-op wants to be more than just a store. What kind of more?

Andy and Sarah said that addressing the survival question is a priority.

Rose said she had prepared a summary of the headlines from the survey and Annual Meeting and would share it. She said she hopes to focus on steps to the end of making a stronger more financially viable coop.

Roseanne said the elephant in the room is whether to move to Route 2 as our small size and our lack of accessibility limit our ability to be affordable and to welcome community events. She would like to focus on identifying what the Co-op can do *really well*.

Peter said the Columinate report will be coming soon and will be helpful to this discussion. It includes recommendations, such as the array of products, and identification of deficits, such as the fact that the building is hidden, and the entryway doesn't look like a grocery store.

Board members listed a wide variety of outcomes they would like to see for the Zoom meeting with members:

- Vision of how the Co-op will make a difference in the community
- How to achieve long range financial stability
- Explanation of the finances so all discussions of vision can be based upon this knowledge
- Specific things to strengthen member participation in the Co-op
- What will make people feel invigorated and that the Co-op is open to them
- Clarification of overall vision: is it more of the same but better, or a different vision
- Finances are a priority

Given the wide variety of ideas plus the vagueness, Gail suggested that the Board should do work to come up with some specific choices or plans to present to the membership rather than having a wide-open Zoom meeting. Sarah suggested a retreat to come up with a plan. Rose agreed with the idea of having a retreat to solidify Board thinking before a member engagement retreat; it's important to learn as a board before rushing into conversation with the members. Peter agreed, saying the Columinate report will promote this conversation. Les reminded the Board that updating the Strategic Plan is central to this process, and he agreed to get copies to Liz and Shana, as well as the member survey results.

Andy said it appears that the Board should do its own internal work before deciding what to bring forward to the Co-op community. He is willing to facilitate a Board retreat on October 28. Peter said the Board could meet at the Community Center. It was agreed to hold that date but no other decision was made.

**Policy Governance** F5 (Staff Treatment and Compensation) and F7 (Member notification of rights)

Les said that, in future reports, he would like more metrics and less narrative. Cat said she appreciates the narrative discussion. After discussion it was decided that F5 is completely in compliance. After further discussion it was decided that F7 is also in compliance.

There was a discussion of the Board's Role with respect to the Personnel Policies.

**Minutes of September 8 Meeting.** Approved with the proviso that the net loss is \$52,755 because it includes the line of credit principal.

**Board Officers** Rose Paul was selected Vice President. We still need a treasurer to replace Roseanne, but she will continue in this role on an interim basis until someone is identified.

**Next meeting:** October 19 at 6 pm by Zoom. Les reminded the group that the Board needs to develop a budget for 2021 in an upcoming meeting.

### **Peter's Corner: General Manager's Update for October 5, 2020 Board Meeting**

**Annual Meeting:** I think we all felt it was a generally successful Annual Meeting. I counted 40 registered attendees, so a quorum was obtained and essential business conducted. Weather was excellent, and I think those in attendance were happy to get out, get together, and show support for the Coop. Feedback I've heard afterward was very positive and upbeat. As follow up, however, I have two concerns. First, I'm not sure we were totally successful in conveying the seriousness of our financial condition heading into the typically slow months of winter. Hopefully, the material/reports that appear in the upcoming newsletter will help focus attention on that. Second, I don't think we were successful in setting up and bridging to the third phase of our strategy, a strategic virtual meeting facilitated by Andy Robinson. We should discuss whether we continue with that or some other approach for re-starting a strategic planning process.

**Staff:** Staff situation remains stable. We could use another sub or two. All permanent staff have now completed their annual performance evaluations and updated their personal contact information sheets. All job descriptions were reviewed and will now be edited to reflect current tasks and responsibilities.

**NFCA Membership Engagement Webinar:** Leah and I participated in a 2 ½ hour webinar on how to better engage the Co-op membership in all phases of the enterprise. I believe Les and maybe one other board member also participated, although they weren't in our breakout group. A premise of the presentation was that co-ops are more than just good food. The relationship with members is what creates the co-op difference. Making the relationship more than transactional – having an ongoing relationship in exchange for meaningful value was stressed. A Membership Pyramid was a key visual (think of the food pyramid graphic), with board members and GM at the top, and prospects, such as non-member customers at the bottom. They said most co-ops are good about the very top and the very bottom but needed strengthening in the middle levels. Four file folders were sent afterward, which we've save for future reference, and are happy to share with the Board, if you wish.

**Columinate Peer Review Audit:** We had our 2 ½ hour virtual debriefing on Tuesday. I had a half hour alone with them, and then Rose and Les joined for the remainder. It was an informative and supportive report, offering both praise and critique from a group of co-op professionals. Lot of specific suggestions on every aspect of our operations – physical plant, merchandising, management, and more. We are now awaiting the written report, which we will share with the Board and staff. There are "low hanging fruit" items and long term considerations. We also have access to consultation (already paid for) through the end of the year. Our local contact is James Morrell, who lives in Burlington.

**Buy Local Vermont Initiative:** We had 21 people sign up for the Co-op and have had several of them shop and activate their \$30 vouchers. Once they picked the Co-op, their funds were supposed to be transferred into our People's United Account. When they show up at the store, staff checks their voucher against a list, and then sets up a gift card account in the amount of \$30, or adds to their existing account, if they have one. Net to us is \$630, if everyone activates.

**Marketing Committee:** Leah and I did our Market Basket photo shoot Wednesday and have put a chosen photo together with some copy for the October sales flier. The plan is to simultaneously post on social media and with a colorful poster in the store. Theme is "Real Good Affordable Food for Your Family." Alexis Smith got the Co-op posters and palm cards produced and available at the Annual Meeting, and others have been distributed. There are still some left for posting around the central Vermont Community.

**Building Committee:** Repainted the retail space floor and repaired and replaced the broken and missing tiles in the back office. We are going ahead with taking the dead tree down by the delivery door and with purchasing the protective hut for the backup generator. No other projects planned, as we are out of money for the year.

**Membership Committee:** Leah and I met with Membership Committee Chair Paula Emery for about an hour and a half, discussing in broad terms Leah's position and plans for membership engagement, database updating, working member opportunities and the Community Center.

**Personnel Policy, F5 Staff Treatment and Compensation, F7 Membership Notification of Rights and Responsibilities:** I will address F5 and F7 separately in their own documents. However, the Personnel Policy is a key component of F5, and needs addressing by the Board, as I mentioned at the last meeting. F5 1. e. requires that the GM will not operate without written personnel policies that: ...e. Have been approved by the Board and approved annually. The current policies were last approved by the Board last October, so we have been operating with approved policies for this year, but it's up for renewal. The current document contains out of date references to former management set ups, missing language in at least one section (relating to children), and I have identified other areas (holiday pay and annual pay increases) that should be addressed. As policy setting is a Board purview, with implementation the responsibility of management, I have asked what the process is for the Board to amend/approve the Personnel Policy. That was not resolved at our last meeting. Board subcommittees are often used for this sort of task, with the full Board then acting on the final product. Please advise.

**October and November Monitoring Reports:** October's is F1, the Quarterly Financials. A reminder that we will not have the September financial figures from our accountant until Friday, October 9, so not available for a Board meeting on the first Monday; third Monday should be fine. November is F2, the Business Planning and Budgeting. Looking at the requirements for that, I have a couple of questions and look for guidance. First, budgets are required not to "fail to be derived from a multiyear plan." I'm not aware of any multiyear plan to be derived from at this time. Please advise. Regarding # 5, under F2, the GM will not "Provide less for Board prerogatives during the year than is set forth in the Governance Investment Policy (C8). C8 is basically the Board's budget (not the Co-op budget), which, on the Policy Governance Calendar, is scheduled to be approved by the Board in November. It would be good to have those numbers prior to my submitting the Co-op budget, also in November (first Nov. meeting for Board; second Nov. meeting for GM and Co-op budget?). Again, I am just looking ahead and noting benchmarks and bringing them to your attention, as the Board's work integrates with the GM's on these things.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Youngbaer, General Manager