

Plainfield Co-op Board Meeting Minutes

10/14/2014

Present: Mike Peabody, Adrienne Allison, Joseph Gainza, Scott Harris, Art Chickering, Gail Falk, Sue Chickering, Bob Fancher (visitors from St. Johnsbury Food Co-op: Brian Romeo, Susan Parker, Chris Wenger) and Bob Rosenfeld (possible board candidate)

September Minutes were approved unanimously.

End Monitoring: “An outlet for local producers and growers”

Mike’s report was inclusive and informative with a number of examples that clarified some of the sales. The report concluded that the MC was in compliance in working towards the End. Discussion ensued about the definition of “local” and Gail felt strongly that this did not mean “Vermont”, but rather towns that were close by to our co-op geographically, as opposed to Bennington or Enosburg for example. Hunger Mountain considers 100 miles “local”. This doesn’t seem close enough where Gail is concerned. Mike pointed out that other factors such as reliability and quality need to be considered as well as proximity. Art wondered how many people would be excluded if we defined local as the surrounding towns that bordered Plainfield. It sounds like it would be a small number of people. Most members live in Plainfield, about 25%; the other 75% are generally made up of Marshfield, East Montpelier, Calais, Orange, Barre, and Groton. We will table coming up with a definition as a board of “local” at another meeting, the board accepted the report as in compliance.

Treasurer Report:

Financial review Leslie Keogh-Wisner can do this, but not until November or December. Naomi was fine with working around Leslie’s schedule. We had questioned the value of the building so Bob contacted Sandra Pearson who said that the figure was in fact correct, as it was the price that was paid for the building minus depreciation. That led to the question of what the insurance company estimated the building was worth. That figure was \$560,000, 402,000 would be what would be received if there was a fire, which is good to know. Sales were 5% over last year’s sales. All the numbers are very close to budget. Gross profit was 6%, so overall we are still growing, and things look to be in good shape.

Food For Change Movie:

Gail watched the “Food for Change” movie which was sponsored by the Granite City. It has some interesting facts and explains the history of Co-ops and the growing pains that happen over the years with many co-ops. It was a little bogged down with American history, but worth seeing

NFCA:

Mike and Gail attended the Neighboring Food Coop Association meeting in Hanover, NH. Gail went to a couple of sessions led by board members. Other boards do some more things for fun. Some boards celebrate birthdays with treats, cake, etc. Others eat dinner beforehand. We agreed to start taking a 15-minute break in the middle of the meeting for desert or other snack. There was a speaker, Tom

Webb, from Canada and he pushed “Co-op accounting”. You have to have numbers that illustrate your impact. He gave some ideas to think about as far as accountability to the members. Ways Co-ops adapt: in the Midwest there were two co-ops (120 miles apart in two different states – Wisconsin and Minnesota), one was doing well, the other was floundering, so they merged these two and it helped the downtrodden co-op succeed. The next NFCA meeting will be in March and three people from our board could go then. When we know the date, Gail will let folks know. (It’s March 21, 2015 *gf*)

Building Committee report:

Joseph had previously shared the September minutes of the Building Committee, which reported on much progress, including building the ramp. Gail raised the concern about the structural supports that had been identified as crucial. Sam Clark suggested that the Co-op hire someone to do this challenging work because it is so very difficult and hard to get into this space to rebuild these floor supports. Right now, it looks like these projects that are happening will be under budget (under \$10,000). Installing ADA-compliant rail on the ramp, would put this structure a few inches over onto the town’s property. Joseph suggests that the MC contact the town about this. Mike said he is already in touch with Selectboard Chair Alice Merrill.. Staining the wood posts will keep away wood-boring beetles that have been problematic. Allen Banbury was in the hospital. Joseph will send him a card on the board’s behalf.

Membership Committee:

The committee is exploring revitalizing the bulk ordering program. Scott will work on scheduling a follow-up meeting.

Newsletter Report:

Joseph forwarded our discussion regarding communication to the Newsletter Committee. The discussion led the committee to agree that the issue is broader than just the Newsletter. Three members of the Newsletter Committee (Glenda Bissex, Karen Starr and Joseph) have volunteered to be part of a communications committee to discuss these broader issues. Mike brought the topic up to the co-op staff and Mike and Karen would like to be on this. Art and Bob would also like to be on this committee as well. It would be great to have someone skilled in web design and internet/electronic communications, Mike and Adrienne will scout around for possible members. The committee will need a Chair person and a charter. Gail will try to draft a charter. Maybe Karen would like to chair this committee. Mike can ask Karen if she would be willing to chair.

Tax Preparation:

Sandra Pearson, our tax preparer has notified us she is no longer going to be our tax preparer. Mike has been in touch with some tax preparers named Wegner with experience in Co-operatives who are in Madison, Wisconsin. Hunger Mountain Co-op uses this firm and has been pleased with their work. They also will charge quite a bit less than Sandra. It seems to make sense to go with people who know what they are doing. They may be available as early as November, but Mike is not sure.

Annual Meeting Planning:

- Location: Grace Church

- Date: Sunday, November 16th, 3:00 – 5:00 PM Pot luck following*board members arrive @2:30
- The MC will need to give us a membership list
- Jamie has agreed to be the facilitator and Lee Blackwell is on stand-by
- Clean up volunteers – we can all pitch in
- Mike will check on the template for the postcard size notice that we used two years ago
- Sue and Gail volunteered to help with the mailing – shoot for the weekend of Oct. 24th. Art may be able to help.

AGENDA:

- President’s Report – new Ends and possibly asking Jamie to come up with activity
- Building Report – Sam and Kathleen
- Equity/Treasurer’s report – Bob Fancher is willing to do this. (THANK YOU, BOB!)
- MC Report – Mike Peabody
- Member questions, input and answers
- Communication discussion – asking what other ways we can communicate with the membership, with the greater community and educating the membership about the co-op movement in general
- Voting by ballot (other business) – Mike thinks it is important and the MC is in favor of this. He plans to bring this up for discussion; pros and cons about this idea, with facilitated discussion. We will think of this as a two year process, as By-Laws can only be changed at an annual meeting
- Election of Officers
- Board candidates – Karla Haas-Moskowitz is interested , Bob Rosenfeld is trying to decide whether he is interested or not (after attending this meeting)
- Carl Etnier – Speaker “Localizing the Economy and our Food Supplies” (20 minute presentation with discussion following)

Brainstorming regarding another End:

MC requests more guidance regarding the concept of “Healthy Food” and also “Sustaining the environment,” which we added at the last retreat to change one of our Ends. We brainstormed “Sustaining the Environment” and will return to the subject by prioritizing the outcomes for this End at an upcoming meeting.

Monitoring report: B6 – Staff Treatment and Compensation

Mike reported compliance in all areas. It is important that there are signed copies of the Personnel Policy so that all people understand their rights and responsibilities. Gail wanted to make sure that these signed copies would be taken care of within 60 days. Bob raised the question about whether people with higher level skill sets could be paid accordingly, since the MC has been discussing these ideas. The MC is uncomfortable with paying staff different wages for different jobs at this point. Wages are based solely on seniority for the time being. Mike may bring this suggestion back to the MC to possibly change the policy to enable the MC to more flexibly pay different wages based on skill sets. The board accepted this report with the understanding that Mike will follow up with the expectation that all staff will signed to document that they have been provided with a copy of the Personnel Policy.

Livable Wage:

The MC is going to work towards paying a livable wage as a goal into the strategic plan. This plan becoming a reality will be contingent on the viability of the co-op as we move into the future. The MC is

also discussing which benefits are considered with determining whether we pay a livable wage. They still need to determine a definition of “Livable wage” Joseph recommended the MC contact the Peace and Justice Center in Burlington. They have done a great deal of research on this issue. Mike will get back to us after gathering more information. These decisions will in turn affect the equity dividends that the board will be able to pay out in future years. The board requested that the MC have the actual figure by the end of the year, and the plan for being able to pay all staff a livable wage as soon as possible after that.

Board Monitoring: Global Board-Management Connection – D1 – Unity of Control

The board and the link agree that we seem to be following and respecting this directive.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, November 11th 6:30 PM

Tentatively discussing: Link annual evaluation and B1: Financial Condition, Board monitoring D2 and D3. Gail will be away, and Scott will chair the meeting.

Annual Meeting: Sunday, November 16th 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM