

Plainfield Co-op Board
Meeting by Zoom
December 29, 2020

Board members present: Cat, Les, Rose, Liz, Shana
Absent: Roseanne
Others present: Gail (minute taker), Peter

Check-ins and Technical. Everyone was able to connect by Zoom. No members of the public were present.

Agenda review and Timekeeper. Les volunteered to be timekeeper for this meeting.

Minutes. The minutes of the November 24 meeting, as amended by Les and placed in the Google Board folder, were approved.

Personnel Policy. Prior to the Board meeting Peter had provided the Board with a copy of the revised Personnel Policy for approval. He explained that the policy was not greatly changed from the previous policy. Edits were made to reflect the current management structure of the Co-op. Language about floating holidays was clarified. Reference to children at the Co-op was removed. References to family and parental leave were removed because no staff meet the state mandated requirements for receiving family or parental leave. (See General Manager's report at the end of these minutes for clarification). Peter said he had circulated the policy to staff and gotten some feedback. He got feedback from Chloe regarding the wording on annual pay raises and changed the language so that it does not take anything away from staff. Peter noted that pay raises are always subject to budgetary considerations and that it is always the prerogative of the Board and General Manager to freeze raises because financial straits.

There was a discussion about the advisability of having an additional step in the grievance procedure before the General Manager, at least in case the grievance is with the GM. Shana said she would look into grievance policies at other stores. Peter said he would redraft the grievance section.

There were additional questions and clarifications. It was agreed to check with Sarah Phillips to find out what the intention of including Family Leave policies if no staff re mandated to receive it. Meanwhile the amendments to the policy regarding Family leave will remain as drafted unless peter learns from Sarah that there is a reason for the language. (note: after the meeting Peter checked with Sarah and found there is no reason to include the language.)

On motion by Cat, 2nd by Shana, the Personnel Policy was approved subject to later clarification of the Grievance Procedure.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team. Cat said she had received no community feedback or volunteers to join in response to the newsletter article.

Board Training. Les reported he participated in the Columinate Deep Dive Policy Governance training, and has put the training materials in the Board Google folder under “Board Development.”

General Manager’s Report. Peter’s monthly report is attached at the end of these minutes. Peter added the following updates:

- The new federal Covid relief bill seems to contain language says that the first \$10,000 of the loan we received under the first Covid relief bill Payroll Protection Plan does not need to be repaid.
- The Selectboard will write a letter of support but will not sponsor the USDA application.
- The Coop has received \$600 from the CFNE as described in the monthly report.
- On Christmas Day Chris Thompson painted the floor in the staff break area.
- The Co-op is now ahead of last year in Gross Sales, but expenses are also higher because of pandemic-related expenses.
- One of Columinate’s suggests was to get new countertops. Peter has a bid for \$2,400 to install a granite countertop on the long front counter.. More on this later. It would be a capital expense.

Year End Reflections. Cat expressed appreciation to Peter the to staff for all their hard work this year. Peter said staff morale is generally good except for holiday-related schedule disruptions. Still hard to keep weekends staffed.

Les said the Board should start to think about then and where to have the Annual meeting. Peter noted that Erben Crowell says NFCA has the capacity to host a Zoom annual meeting on their account. No decisions.

Board Committees.

- **Building and Capital Improvement.** Shana reported that the USDA has invited the Co-op to submit an application for feasibility study funding. Regional Council will be submitting the application for us. Great to have them as a partner. To be competitive, we should consider providing match, which could be in-kind or in funds. The application should emphasize other businesses that benefit from traffic to the Co-op, such as Positive Pie, and get a letter of support from them. Cat said she would reach out to Positive Pie for a letter of support. Rose will ask Ben Koenig for a letter of support. River House was also mentioned. Local businesses that benefit from selling their goods at the Co-op should also be asked for letters of support. Whizzo, Blackbird/Littlewood, and Local Donuts were mentioned. Rose expressed appreciation to Shana for her work on this and for getting the Regional Council to participate. Deadline for the application is the end of February.

Shana said is waiting to January to prepared the budget for equipment and building upgrades because she wants to get Building Committee input into which vendors to approach for estimates.

- Location Committee. Liz said that it makes sense to await action on the USDA grant proposal before moving forward on this because of the great amount of time that will be entailed.
- Membership Committee. See General Manager's report.

General Manager evaluation. Les said he sent the Board a compilation of the monitoring responses since Peter became General Manager. He said, in his opinion, this is the entire evaluation. There was a discussion about what the evaluation should contain and whether it should be done before Peter has been in the job for a full year. On motion of Shana it was agreed to complete the evaluation in February.

Next meeting. Les is working on the 2021 Board calendar. Rose will do a Doodle poll to decide a date for the next meeting, aiming for the 3rd or 4th weeks of the month.

The meeting adjourned ON TIME at 7:30.

Peter's Corner: General Manager's Update for December 29, 2020 Board Meeting

Year End Store-wide Inventory: Unlike previous years, when a whole bunch of people came in on New Year's Day and did the entire store all at once, COVID has forced an alternative approach. Buyers are already doing inventories both during the day and evenings. This enables us to spread out the work and the number of people in the building. Buyers are tracking new deliveries and updating as necessary. This will enable us to complete the work by the end of the year and have the reports to Naomi completed on New Year's Day, as usual.

Vermont's New "Local" Food Definition: We are in the process of re-identifying all products in our inventory system (CoPOS) to comply with the new law that goes into effect January 1. We had previously defined "local" and "regional" by distance; now the law says "local" is synonymous with "Vermont." Much more detailed than that, but you get the gist. This will take some time as we go through the entire inventory.

Staff: We have just added several new regular and substitute staff, and actually have settled into a new shift pattern with all the new people. Internally, Chloe Budnick has added Floor Manager duties to her buyer status. As part of our Columinate Peer Audit follow up, we're focusing the Floor Staff on being more consistent and efficient to improve profitability, decrease loss/spoilage, and offer a better presentation to the public. With the influx of new people, it was a good time to re-set. Chloe is updating all the daily worksheets of tasks the floor staff – old and new – will be following. Unfortunately, even with the new staff, and six current substitutes, we were short-staffed four days over the past two weeks. We had a stomach illness, a strep throat (not COVID), and one staffer whose mother had multiple abdominal surgeries and the staffer needed to be home to receive and care for her. Then we had subs out sick, too. We ended up having to close early three of those four days; the fourth we stayed open, only because I worked a late shift on the floor that day. Other staff also covered some hours of those other days, but we couldn't do it all.

Payroll Protection Plan Loan Forgiveness: As you know, the PPP loan was forgiven in the amount of about \$31,000, as expected. We will now pay off the balance of \$10,000 and change over the next year and a half. This reduced our liabilities on the Balance Sheet and improves our P&L for 2020 by an equal amount.

Columinate Peer Review Audit Follow Up: I know the Board has been taking various on line workshops recommended by Columinate. We have continued to follow up on the various recommendations. Most immediately, the Buyers will be meeting virtually with James Morrell on the 30th for a group session on inventory management and margin achievement. This will be followed by individual sessions between James and each of the buyers in January. Additionally, James will continue to work with me on financial management. The work in January is an extension of and covered by our current contract.

LISC grant application: Did not hear back on the December application, so am assuming we are not a December finalist. We knew it was a long shot, but worth a try.

USDA Planning Grant: Shana, Cat, Liz, and I participated in the virtual Plainfield Select Board Meeting on December 11. The upshot was that Plainfield will go in on the Letter of Intent with the Co-op, using the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission as the lead applicant.

Cooperative Fund of New England: Lane Fury alerted Cat and I about the possible availability of end of year funds from CFNE. These are 50/50 match, up to \$2500. I worked with James Morrell at Columinate for some language that would add some additional consulting time for me with him (3 months) to follow up on fiscal management and overseeing of buyers on inventory and margin achievement. We didn't have much potential match in our 2021 budget (staff development, etc.) so I only requested \$600 from CFNE. Lane just said we've been approved and should have the money deposited in our account by the end of the year.

Marketing Committee: Tried to meet virtually on December 17 to plan for advertising and outreach in 2021, now that the budget has been approved. However, that was the day I had to work the floor, and the rest of the committee couldn't log on (except for Bob, who was hosting). We believe it was storm-related. It will be re-scheduled after the Holidays.

Building Committee: Has only traded emails, but is considering what projects to take on in the new year. Still does not have a Chair. Maybe Mike Brosky will come back on as Chair once his house is completed.

Membership Committee: Met on December 16. It's the first real meeting in quite a while. They discussed a wide range of topics including, Leah's job, membership database and member questions, new membership orientation and recruitment - such as an Ambassador Program, working member ideas, issues about member equity payments at the register, possible membership alternatives to equity payments, Community Center uses during and post pandemic, and an article for the newsletter (Leah will write). Leah and Paula will meet on Dec. 30 to review and draft revisions to new member materials.

Personnel Policy: Please see attached proposed amendments. I would appreciate Board approval, so it can be implemented January 1 – particularly key for the change to how the 5 days of floating holidays are handled, which is screwy. The vast majority of the changes are related to the General Manager vs. prior management team models. I would also draw your attention to the leave policies, in particular the Family and Parental Leave sections. Current section 12.1 says "Parental and Family Leave is limited to covered employees per Appendix II." We have no covered employees, as per Vermont law, as we don't employ at least ten people who work 30 or more hours a week. We maybe have three on a good week. That argues for deleting the entirety of Appendix II, and the connected sub sections 12.5 and 12.6. Unless, it is the Board's intent to offer Parental and Family Leave under the definitions and model in the Vermont law, despite not legally being required to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Youngbaer, General Manager