

The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Summer 2021



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Open Seven Days a Week

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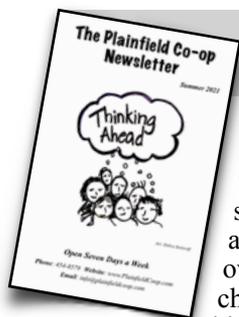
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Deadline for the Fall issue is September 15, to be published early October. The newsletter is published quarterly in a black & white paper version and in color online. To place an ad, contact Elizabeth Mathai, ad coordinator, elizabethmathai@yahoo.com.

Electronic graphics files are preferred, but we are able to work with any clear copy. For questions about ad copy contact Elizabeth Mathai, elizabethmathai@yahoo.com.

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About This Newsletter



While our Co-op has successfully survived the pandemic, it faces several challenges ahead. As member-owners, these are OUR challenges and WE have big decisions to make

about how we move forward. It's important that you read this newsletter to be informed about what's involved in those decisions, that you think about them and talk about them with other members, that you come to the Annual Meeting on August 29 to share your thoughts and hear what others have to say, and then vote. That's what being a Co-op member means. Democracy still prevails here.

Deadline for submissions for the fall newsletter is September 15. ❖

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membership.

On Board!

President's Report by Cat Klarich

It's no small feat that The Plainfield Co-op, our small village grocery, has made it through almost 50 years. The Plainfield Co-op is arguably the grittiest co-op in the nation. In a recent conversation with Erbin Crowell, Executive Director of the Neighboring Food Co-op Association, I was humbled at how proud they are at the near impossibility of what the Plainfield Co-op has overcome. It is because of the essential staff and loyal membership that we have remained open to the awe of our neighboring Co-ops who understand that the struggle is real for rural cooperative grocery stores.

Thank you for taking the time to read this! The newsletter is an incredibly important tool for the Board, as it gives us the opportunity to fill you, the membership, in on what we have been up to.

(Thank you to the Newsletter Committee for publishing the newsletter, quarter after quarter, year after year!) We are using this print edition to invite you to join us for the—

Annual Meeting
on Sunday, August 29, 4 pm,
at The Plainfield Opera House

We will be reporting on finances and the Capital Improvement Plan (huge shout out to the building committee and Board member, Shana, for their work on this!) and holding Board elections. We will present the information we have gleaned over the past year which will help us determine the best path forward. We lean on you for ideas and invite you to volunteer your skills.

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First, I want to thank the folks on the Staff and on the Board who are moving on from their current roles at the Co-op to new, exciting things. Our General Manager, Peter Youngbaer, stepped out of retirement to Captain this ship, after a long career at the People's Health and Wellness Clinic. Peter will be retiring for real this time, stepping down from his role as General Manager. We are sad to see him go yet overjoyed that he will be able to spend time doing what he was born to do—cave. That's right, Peter was recently featured in a Boston Globe article, *Notes from the Underground*, that outlines his efforts in cave conservation. In the article, he name drops the Plainfield Co-op! Even a hundred feet below ground, we are on his mind!

Chloe Budnick will be moving to Michigan to be closer to family. It is going to take at least three incredibly talented people to do her job and the Plainfield Co-op will not be the same without her.

Gail Falk, who has been an integral part of our Board work by taking minutes at the meetings, is moving onto a myriad of other commitments, doing the good work she is so natural at.

Our awesome Secretary, Les Snow, is not seeking re-election this term. Les is so committed to the Co-op that he served a full term, took some years off, and stepped up to join the Board a second time. This guy! Be sure to say hi and a huge thank you when you bump into Les or Gail or Chloe or Peter at the Co-op!

I love looking back to see how far we have come since the last time I sat down to write to you. For the very first time, the Plainfield Co-op staff are earning a livable wage! This is truly a milestone! How about the lovely new granite countertop, sky blue floor, and streamlined entryway with a mural by the Co-op's own Deb Barnwell?! Staff member

Fiona Winter designed the brand new wreath logo featured on the new Co-op sweatshirts, tees, and shopping bags. (I have one of each!) Please pre-order at the store so we don't end up with a bunch of odd sizes! Pre-payment is not required. The Plainfield Co-op sure looks good on you!

At the Annual Meeting, we will present the membership with what we have learned, ask for your input, and move forward together for the next 50 years. Let me cut to the chase... There is one question we have to ask—are you all in? Do you want the store to stay open? For me, there is only one right answer—Yes! So, what next? Do we stay in our current space or expand to a more visible location? This question comes up year after year as we balance the pros and cons of each direction. We will provide the most transparent and comprehensive information possible. There will be passion on both sides, but this is not the Board's decision to make, it's yours—the member-owners. It is, however, our responsibility as a Board to work for the Co-op's best interests, exploring all opportunities and not allowing the Co-op to become stagnant. So long as the outcome means a Co-op in Plainfield, I am on board!

Should we stay... The current location in the village is historic and provides an economic engine for the town. It employs and nourishes people. It is a hidden gem, but how can we make it accessible to more people? Unfortunately, our current location needs hundreds of thousands of dollars in deferred maintenance and upgrades. If we stay in the village it is imperative that we invest in the building. Access to the Community Center and Staff offices are not ADA accessible. This is a huge concern as is the deteriorating lead paint on the exterior, not to mention thousands in broken equipment

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and other limitations outlined in this issue. The building, while old and hungry, has Winooski River access and many of us feel very connected to the current location. Check out the improved patio area in the side yard next time you are shopping with us!

Should we go... Expanding to Route 2 offers more visibility, accessibility, increased sales, and could employ more people. We are worried about the impact the proposed intersection project will have on our downtown business. An expanded store front would provide the opportunity to offer the community more of what we are hearing you want—a deli and café. We have been listening! Strategically thinking about a move now could put us in a prime position later. Both options require a commitment and investment from the membership and financial support from other sources.

You can become a working member and earn a store discount by being elected to the Board, serving on a committee, or volunteering in other ways. The marketing committee has been doing some great work engaging the broader community. How about that fun mailer providing the opportunity to win \$20! There are a lot of ways to become engaged and we welcome you. Reach out to Member Coordinator Leah Tedesco for more info on how to get involved as a working member or board@plainfieldcoop.com for information on what it means to serve on the board. Visit the website for current job postings, including the G/M position and lead buyer.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting. We'll have some music, noshes, a door prize, and raffle. Please mark your calendar. See you at the store! ❖



Our Farmers Thank You

Since 1919, the farm families of Cabot Co-op have been passionate about making the world's best cheese. We use only the purest ingredients to craft our creamy, delicious classics. Just maybe, that's why we've won every major award for taste. Learn more at cabotcheese.coop



Treasurer's Report

by Rose Paul

For the first quarter of fiscal year 2021 (January through March of 2021), we squeaked by with a tiny net **profit** of \$812. This is good news, and here's why—traditionally the Co-op operates at a slight loss in the winter months because sales are usually down. We budgeted, based on past years' performance, to have a net **loss** of \$6,065 in the first quarter of 2021. In the same quarter last year, when the pandemic struck, we had an actual net **loss** of \$17,450. So things are really looking up since we basically broke even in a traditionally down quarter.

We did have a net loss in January and a smaller net loss in February, as expected; then March came in well ahead of projections with a net profit that made up for the prior months' losses. There are several factors that can cause fluctuations from month to month, such as the need to restock inventory after holiday sales, and whether there are two or three payrolls in one month. Perhaps we should think of January as a marketing challenge for our creative Marketing Committee, and a shopping challenge for member-owners, so that we do all we can to boost sales in the doldrums of January.

Here's another piece of good news: looking back at the Treasurer's Report from the first quarter of 2020, the Co-op was "almost current on all payments due." I'm pleased to say that for the past year, all payments to vendors have been on time, with no late payments (unless the vendor billed us late, which occasionally happens.) Our other financial obligations, such as loan repayment, property taxes, etc. have been paid on time as well. This is an indication that we have good cash flow, and it is a healthy situation for the Co-op and for

our vendors, many of whom are local community members.

The Co-op's liquidity is in good shape. Liquidity (the ability to meet cash needs in a timely and efficient manner) is measured by the Current Ratio, calculated as Current Assets (unrestricted) divided by Current Liabilities. Our goal for the Current Ratio is 1.3 or higher. In the first quarter of 2021, our Current Ratio was 3.2 (\$186,733 Current Assets / \$58,041 Current Liabilities.) This compares favorably to a Current Ratio of 1.9 in Q1 of last year. We benefited from the forgiveness of the Payroll Protection Loan in this quarter, which increased our assets and decreased our liabilities.

We are also exceeding our target for **solvency**, as measured by total equity divided by total liability. Our desired target is to be above 1.1, and in Q1 our solvency ratio was 2.16 and has been trending upward over the past 3 quarters. This trend toward greater unrestricted assets and reduced debts will help us meet the repeated financial challenges of breakdowns in older equipment and needed maintenance on our building.

Please see the related article on page 15, by Co-op Board member Shana Siegel for anticipated costs in the Co-op's near future. ❖



General Manager's Report: Hot and Cold

by Peter Youngbaer

As I sit writing this GM report “**Hot and Cold**” is the theme that keeps running through my mind. **Hot**, because it’s currently 90 degrees outside; **Cold**, because our 30+-year old freezer is once again giving us problems.

Hot, because the Co-op is running smoothly and accomplishing several short-term goals; **Cold**, because we are still very challenged by fundamental long-term issues.

Hot, because I believe the Co-op is positioned to be a growing economic engine for the broader Plainfield/Marshfield community; **Cold**, because I have concluded I am not the person to lead that growth and will be retiring in the Fall.

Highlights of the Quarter (Hot).

1. As the COVID pandemic eases, a vast majority of Vermonters have gotten vaccinated, and the state of Vermont nears loosening most, if not all, of its restrictions, we have come through with zero cases of staff or volunteers coming down with the virus. Thanks to all of them, and to our members and the public for understanding our space, social distancing, cleaning, and mask-wearing needs as we’ve gotten through this. With very few exceptions, it’s been truly a cooperative venture. We hope soon to ease the remaining restrictions (target date July 4).
2. Entryway and Counter Improvements. The bulletin board moved outside; the entryway cleaned and painted; the new granite countertop installed; the front corner by the door cleared out; and a soon-to-be-mounted fabulous new mural by our own Deb Barnwell. All these initiatives were inspired by the Columinate Peer Review Audit we have written about in prior GM re-

ports. It encouraged us to make the store more inviting, especially that first impression, and to make that front space ours, reinforcing our messaging.

3. Merchandising and Operational Improvements. The Peer Review also gave constructive feedback on merchandising. We have made the rear end cap by the beer cooler a place to highlight our monthly sales items and hung a chalk board for customers to tune in. Our Buyers have had personal and group consultations about managing their departments, reducing “shrink,” or loss, and hitting their profit margins. We set a higher margin this year and are achieving that goal to date.
4. New Membership Brochures. Thanks to Paula Emery and Leah Tedesco for designing and editing the new brochures. The old ones were very out of date. Now, when a new member signs up, they get a “welcome package,” that includes a Membership Card, a round window sticker of the Co-op logo, and a Membership Brochure that outlines the benefits and responsibilities of being a Plainfield Co-op Member.
5. Improved Marketing. Our Marketing Committee has accomplished several goals so far this year: Underwriting a WGDR program, running a special coupon advertising campaign in the Times Argus, and just recently doing a “Nearly 50” contest theme direct postcard mailing to every household and post office box in Plainfield and Marshfield, some 1810 pieces.
6. New T-shirts, Hoodies, and Re-usable Grocery Bags. Our own Fiona Winter did the artwork for these three items –

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we affectionately call it the “Produce Wreath.” The bags are on sale in the store for just \$5 each. T-shirts and Hoodies are being ordered in batches of 36, so as not to have unsold items in back stock. Place your orders on the signup sheet where the samples are hanging. No need to pay in advance, but it helps us only order what sizes we actually need, so we don’t carry unsold surplus.

7. Paying Staff a Livable Wage. Yes, we finally do! I am perhaps most excited to be able to announce this one. All Regular Staff now earn a minimum of \$13.40/hr. (Jan. 15, 2021: Vermont Basic Needs Budget and Livable Wage says \$13.39). We had added a step increase to everyone in January of \$.35/hr and had planned to do so again next January, in addition to the normal annual cost of living increases. However, the job market is overheated right now, and our recruiting showed that we were simply not competitive. Staff turnover costs the Co-op money: additional unemployment insurance premiums, additional training costs, and loss of productivity. So, we advanced the schedule and increased it to \$.75/hr across the board. We were able to finance this by having a \$10,000 COVID loan advance fully forgiven, freeing up that money in this year’s and next year’s budget.

Challenges Facing Us (Cold).

This is an old song, but after singing it for many years, it’s time to make some big decisions. Others will provide detail in their articles elsewhere in this Newsletter, but we are looking at a quarter of a million dollars in repairs and replacement (\$250,000). Even if we had that money on hand, we have to ask the question: should we put it into this building? I have concluded, no.

Some immediate large costs are unavoidable. Our furnace died a few weeks ago. Our annual inspection late May red-tagged our furnace with a cracked heat exchanger. That means carbon monoxide would leak into the air ducts and air we breathe. Luckily, this occurred at the end of the heating season. We are awaiting quotes, but this must be addressed before Fall.

Our large in-store four-door freezer unit is quickly dying and causing us virtually daily problems, causing us to have to spoil hundreds of dollars of food. We have tried everything the repair service folks have suggested, but it is on its last legs.

Unfortunately, when the unit was installed, it was brought in through a hole in the wall that has since been sealed. Estimates are \$6,000 to reconstruct (and leave a door than can open in the future), plus a freezer unit (\$10,000-\$20,000 used/new), plus a week we’d need to be closed (losing roughly \$25,000 in sales in the summer). I cannot justify \$41,000-\$51,000 just to get to where we are now – in a limited space. We are rigorously investigating options, such as dismantling the current unit on site and bringing in two smaller units. If successful, that will help some, but still be a major cost.

Our building itself is old and in need of serious attention. It is not handicapped accessible, particularly the upper floor. ADA compliance means not just a lift or elevator, but a bathroom and other considerations, neither of which exist. Our property footprint doesn’t allow for much expansion, and being in the Historic District places restrictions on the kinds of modifications and even materials we can use.

The exterior of the building needs new siding, requiring two of the sides to be completely removed to address rot, plus lead abatement protocols need to be followed.

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We have just 900 square feet of retail space. The pandemic closure showed us that we could operate 50% more space with the same staff. We're simply not efficient in this tight space.

Our major equipment is very old. It is also of poor design. Best groceries have rear-loading coolers and freezers. These enable staff to cut in half the time handling inventory – the newest arrivals can be loaded from the rear, and the older inventory automatically moves to the front. It's a well-known rule of thumb that every time you handle inventory, it costs you money. We do not have the space or layout for this kind of equipment or operation.

The Co-op does not have a Capital Budget. I've been working with the Board

and the Building Committee to develop one, getting current cost estimates and prioritizing those needs. This is an essential part of annual budgeting, and one the Co-op has not done in the past. Our goal is to include that for 2022 as we build that budget this Fall.

Further, the upcoming Route 2 Intersection Project, scheduled for 2024 at this point, will close the only bridge into the village, cutting off access to the Co-op (and Fire Station), and other businesses – not only for customers but to delivery vehicles. We've been looking at this time as an opportunity to make a move to a new location – still to be determined – as the disruption would be nearly fatal. Why not make lemonade out of that lemon?

In order to do so, however, the Co-op

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THE PLAINFIELD CO-OP IS HERE FOR YOU

not because there is profit to be made from the store
but because of a devoted staff and many volunteers.

Board members guide the Co-op and are essential to its existence. There are two empty seats on the Board waiting to be filled by members like YOU. You could really help our Co-op at this critical time by running for a 3-year term on the Board. More info at board@plainfieldcoop.com



Elections will be held at the Annual Meeting, August 29.

**IF YOU WANT THE CO-OP TO STILL BE HERE FOR YOU
BE HERE FOR THE CO-OP.**

RUN FOR THE BOARD!

membership will need to make the hard decision to re-locate. Traffic studies show ten times the drive-by traffic on U.S. Route 2 as opposed to in the village. If even a tenth of that turned into shoppers/members, we could double sales, include a deli and coffee bar (the most profitable department of any Co-op), growing jobs for staff and area growers and producers. If timed well, a new Co-op could be built/renovated in time to physically make the move during the construction project when we'll be heavily impacted anyway.

Vision for the Future.

As the pandemic has exposed, our underlying financial sustainability is in question given the limitations of our current space. The current staff turnover and personnel shortages shows us to be non-competitive in the job market. To continue to accomplish our cooperative ends, we need to grow. I am convinced that we cannot do that at our current location.

We have come through the pandemic in OK financial shape. However, I would not invest any more of our precious resources into this building beyond sufficient maintenance to keep it running until a new location is ready. If we're going to need to spend a quarter of a million dollars, we should make sure it provides adequate space for growth. It makes no sense to me to raise and spend that much and end up with what we have today.

It is an unfortunate fact that most of our members don't read the electronic newsletter or the electronic sales flier, which is why this newsletter is being mailed. As our marketing study a few years ago demonstrated, most of our shoppers use us as a convenience store and have little or no interest in serving on committees or being working members.

That was different 50 years ago, as the excitement of a new entity, a new space, and visions of impacting change on the world coursed through our veins. Our active members tend to be of an aging group (myself included). We need to find a way to re-ignite the passion. We do not need "more of the same, but better," which was the direction I was given when hired as GM.

That will take new leadership and a new vision. I believe Plainfield (and Marshfield) need the Co-op as an economic engine for our small communities. I believe we can generate excitement with the promise of a new Co-op. We have laid the groundwork with the Town Select Board and Regional Planners. We have increased our visibility in the community through participation in town planning (think road projects), as well as through enhanced social media. We not only provide food, but we provide an outlet for local producers and jobs for local residents. We can grow both of those and help make the community more economically vibrant. I believe our larger communities and our younger residents can understand those dynamics and get behind a new Co-op. That will take work, but I do think the timing is good to rally around "Our Next 50 Years."

I know we have strong emotional attachments to an historic building that has served us well, but we must intellectually understand that its time has passed.

It has been said that Co-ops take a long time to make decisions. We have struggled with management, financial, and now pandemic crises, and we have considered options, met on them, voted with dots on them, talked for years, but never moved forward. Now, we must, and it will be a big undertaking. Candidly, that is beyond me.

To that end, I have urged the Board to

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begin the search for a new GM as soon as possible. Ideally, they can begin this summer. It would be great if we found a good candidate who could begin on-boarding mid to late August. I would hope the Board would seek someone with project expansion experience, as well as grocery store management experience. Having been through a transition or a move would be an important asset. I plan to continue to work into the Fall, gradually phasing out my hours. On the operational level, I would plan to work with that person in developing the budget for 2022, which is due to the Board in November.

Conclusion.

It has been both a pleasure and a challenge to serve as your General Manager the past year and a third. However, the Co-op needs to grow and address the community needs of tomorrow. I do not believe it is possible, or even desirable, to do it in our current location. While I do see a logical path to our next 50 years, I am not the person to take that challenge on. Someone with more energy and a different skill set will be required. The time is Hot for making a tough decision; I hope we don't get Cold feet. ❖

Membership and Marketing Update

by Leah Tedesco, Membership & Marketing Co-ordinator



A direct mail postcard went out the end of May to all addresses in Plainfield and Marshfield. One item featured in this mailing is our “Nearly 50” promotional game, during which customers can potentially win \$20 at the register.

The membership brochure has been updated and is available for distribution. ❖

T-shirts, hoodies, and reusable shopping bags featuring art by our own Fiona Winter are now available for sale. We have a limited selection of sizes of the shirts in store, but an order form is posted next to the first register.

The mural by our own Deb Barnwell is complete and will be hung in the entryway soon. Merchandise depicting the piece will eventually be available for sale.



The Elephant in Our Co-op's Room

by Les Snow, Board Secretary

There will be a major impact on Plainfield's lower village when the "blinking light" Route 2 intersection is reconfigured in a few years. The bridge will be closed for months. How will our Co-op survive this challenge? We need to plan now so that the Co-op will come through it strong.

Last year, Co-op board member Giordano Checchi did an analysis of member-owner addresses and their purchase totals. 40% of Co-op sales are to those who must cross the bridge for regular access to the Co-op. And many member-owners who live on the Co-op side of the bridge (the other 60% of member-owner sales) may shop elsewhere while the bridge is closed because their Co-op

shopping is normally part of a routine (like commuting to/from work) that involves the bridge and Route 2 travel. We can't let the intersection construction be a "dead end" for the Co-op.

The intersection itself will be greatly improved when construction is complete. Entering and exiting the lower village via Route 2 will be safer and more convenient for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic (bicyclists too!). The lower village will be more enticing to Route 2 travelers. This easier "on/off" access can only help traffic flow to and from the Co-op, but what sort of the shape will the Co-op be in at that point?

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- The intersection will be a “T” with a traffic light.
- The incline getting onto Route 2 from the lower village won’t be as steep.
- The pedestrian crosswalks will be “signalized.”

We will experience a hint of the 2024 Route 2 intersection construction’s impact on the Co-op this summer as a pedestrian walkway is added to the bridge. The bridge won’t be closed, but it and Route 2 will be down to one lane for months. During high-traffic periods of each day, Route 2 is likely to be backed up. For those traveling Route 2 at those times, the idea of dropping into the village to shop at the Co-op only to head back to the Route 2 gauntlet won’t be very inviting.

As we commit ourselves to shopping at the Co-op this summer, even with the inconvenience of one lane on the bridge and Route 2, be thinking about what you and the rest of the Co-op can do to prepare for the bigger challenge facing us in 2024. We will figure it out and thrive with your help! ❖

The Co-op Needs You!

by Liz Bicknell, Board Member

As we emerge from the pandemic year, it is a time to reassess our lives—and a time to reassess the viability of the Co-op.

If you are a regular reader of the Co-op newsletter, or the monthly board meeting minutes, you will know that times are tough for our favorite nearly fifty-year-old store. The issues of an elderly building and equipment in need of repair or replacement have existed for a while. This year’s *new* issues are: the fabulous General Manager, Peter Youngbear, is stepping down; we have a limited number of shoppers permitted at any one time;

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the impending road closure of Route 2 for pedestrian bridge (July-October 2021) and for intersection safety (2024). The road closures not only deter shoppers, they additionally create difficulties for delivery trucks.

All of these issues are on the minds of your volunteer Board, and we would love to hear your opinions—and engage your activism!—with the hope of keeping the Co-op open.

The options, as we see them, are four:

1. Invest a substantial amount of money in the current building for necessary repairs and ADA compliance;
2. Limp along until a catastrophic event forces immediate closure;
3. Invest in a big way and move the Co-op to Route 2, where a larger premises could foster a deli, food preparation onsite, possibly a play area for children, a café ... the possibilities and risks are both exciting and nervous-making; or
4. Admit defeat and close down.

Read Shana Siegel’s report (p.15) on the needs of the current building, estimated costs, and timeframe.

The members ARE the bosses, and your votes will decide the future of the Co-op, so please attend the monthly Board meetings to hear more; plan on voting at the annual meeting; consider becoming part of a fund-raising committee; volunteer!

The Co-op needs you! ❖

Seeking Ad Co-ordinator

The Newsletter is seeking an ad co-ordinator who will solicit new advertisers as well as track current advertisers and renewals. This job provides a working member discount. Contact the editor: Glenda Bissex, songboat@vmlink.net or 454-7895.

Farewell Sarah Albert

by Glenda Bissex, Editor

Nine years ago we welcomed Sarah Albert as our new Layout and Design editor. Sarah, volunteer extraordinaire, was also a key member of the Plainfield Planning Commission and a founding member of the Conservation Commission. It was my pleasure to work with her for those nine years. Now that she is moving to Montpelier, I welcome our new Layout and Design editor, Elizabeth Mathai. Elizabeth has already proved her skill by putting together our spring issue.

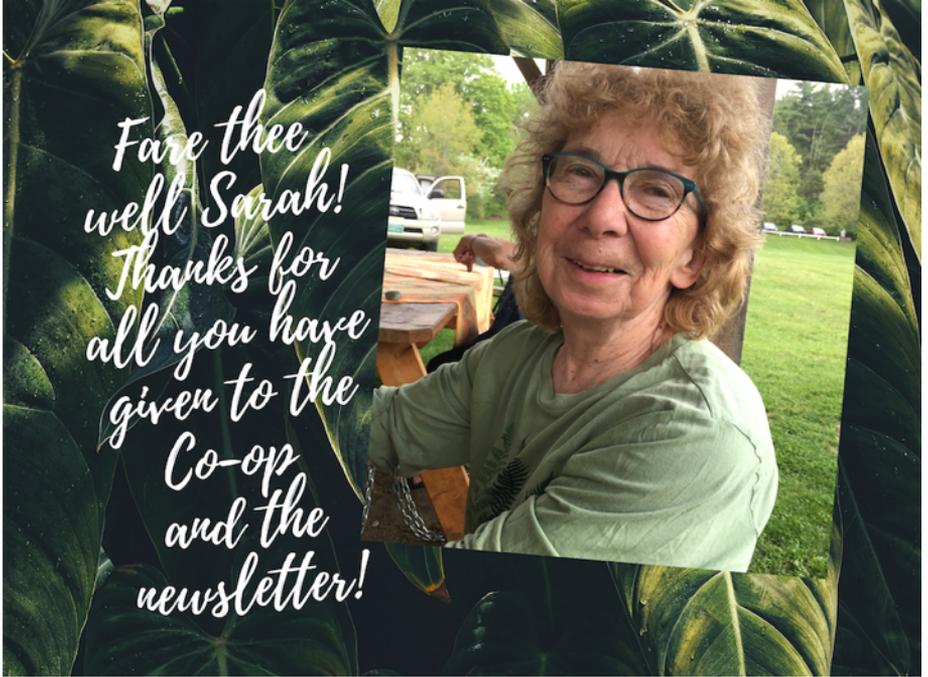


Photo card credit: Debra Stoloroff

Welcome Elizabeth, New Layout Editor

A resident of Central Vermont for nearly 20 years, Elizabeth now lives on a farm in Plainfield. Her interests include dance, music, and mathematics. Lately, while learning to cope with an autoimmune disorder, she has been focusing on low-stress activities, such as experimenting with recipes, volunteering for local organizations, and, most recently, teaching herself to use the software for the layout of our newsletter.



The 2021-2030 Capital Improvement Plan, Explained

by Shana Siegel, Board Member

Over the last year, the Plainfield Co-op's General Manager, Building Committee, and Board of Directors have been attempting to piece together a Capital Improvement Plan. This plan (which is presently still in a draft form and may change slightly before the annual meeting) includes most of the equipment upgrades and building repairs that we know will need to be done in the coming decade if the Co-op is going to stay in business and stay in the current building.

► Equipment Replacements and Upgrades

Some of the equipment that we know the Co-op will need to upgrade or replace in the coming years include the store freezer, which has broken down several times just in the last year, leading to considerable costs in lost product, lost sales, and repeated repairs. Replacement of this item is estimated at \$16,000 plus another \$6,000 to cut a hole in the wall large enough to move one freezer out and another freezer in. The capital improvement plan has estimated that the current freezer can hold out until next year, but the current rate of breakdowns may make it more cost effective to replace this in the coming months.

The dairy and beer cooler and the walk-in cooler in the back of the store come in next as the next most urgent pieces of equipment that need attention. Both of these coolers are old and limping along, and they may be able to make it until 2024 and 2025, respectively, before being replaced at an estimated \$10,000 (dairy and beer cooler) and \$6,000 (walk-in cooler).

Less costly, but also needed are upgrades to the store's Point of Sale system (which still runs on DOS) and modem.

Store shelving may also require upgrades, though this is the least urgent of all equipment needs.

► Building Repairs

Installation of a new, larger delivery door (estimated at \$6,000, and mentioned above) will be necessary to get the old freezers and coolers out and the new freezers and coolers in. Installing a door is the most cost effective way to replace these items when needed, as opposed to cutting (and then re-patching) a hole in the wall each time a major piece of equipment has to be replaced.

Also big on the list of needed building repairs is a new furnace, as the old furnace has recently been determined to be permanently out of order. We do not yet have an estimate on the furnace costs.

Action to remove rotting external siding, most of which is coated in lead paint, is also big on the list of building needs. Lead abatement can be prohibitively expensive, and much of the siding around the building would still need to be replaced. At this point, it appears that safely removing the lead-coated siding, and replacing it all with new siding, might be the most cost-effective way to deal with this lead paint problem. Unfortunately, this is still a costly project, estimated at about \$23,000 for removal, \$15,000 for properly prepping the walls for new siding, and then \$67,000 for installation of the contractor-recommended side paneling.

The Co-op building also has many old windows that leak cold air and have shifted to fit oddly in their frames over time. Replacing these windows and repairing the trim and window frames is

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Capital Improvement >>

estimated to cost around \$12,000 for the windows and \$15,000 for the trim work on the inside and outside of the building. Though this work could have a hugely positive impact on heating and cooling bills, we've estimated that it could (or will have to) wait until at least 2027.

The above-outlined work comes to a grand total of \$177,000 today, or \$223,239 over the next decade, when inflation and contingency costs are included.

Unfortunately, this Capital Improvement Plan does not include much-desired funding for making the present building accessible to everyone. Those costs would seem to be prohibitive, given the current building structure; and the type of accessibility work that would need to be done may also be problematic with relevant Historical Preservation Boards.

► Paying for the Capital Improvement Expenses

The Plainfield Cooperative holds a good deal of member equity. We've projected that — if needed — possibly \$80,000, or the bulk of all member equity, could be invested in building repairs and equipment upgrades. If this is true, the Co-op could afford to pay for the new store freezer and dairy and beer cooler, as well as the new cargo delivery door and some small upgrades to the point of sale system and store modem.

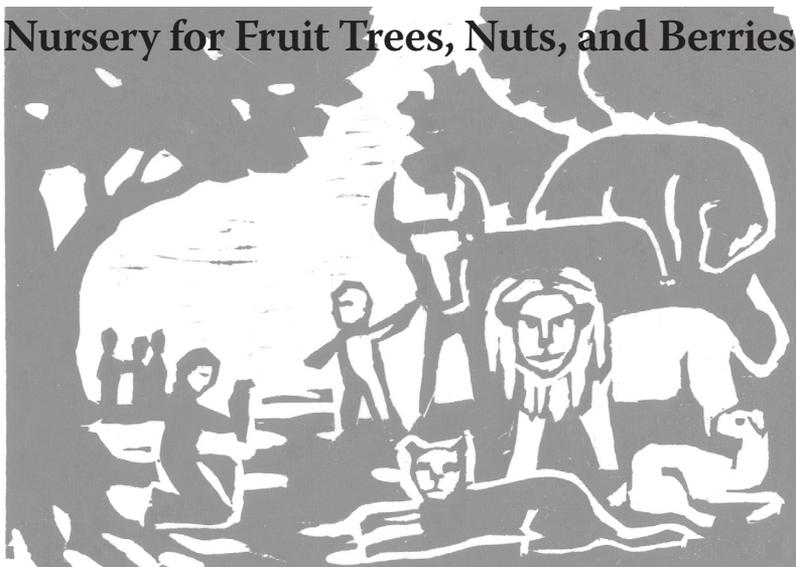
The Co-op also has access to a \$45,000 line of credit from its lender, the Cooperative Fund of New England. A little over half of that credit has already been borrowed due to financial crises, but the Co-op still has about \$20,000 left in this line of credit that could be borrowed.

Despite this \$100,000 in capital sources,

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by 2025, and before the walk in cooler and external paneling could be addressed, the Co-op would have to raise about \$100,000 — and then raise another \$30,000 or so by 2027 in order to complete all of the remaining (known) building and equipment needs. These funds could be raised through a mixture of fundraising and, potentially, grants, if there are members who are willing to do the hard work of researching grants and submitting grant applications. Just for the sake of balancing the Capital Improvement Plan, we've listed \$100,000 in member fundraising efforts into the capital improvement in 2025 and another \$30,000 in member fundraising efforts in 2027.

While costly and requiring a great deal of work to achieve, this Capital Improvement Plan could be funded and carried out over the next decade, addressing all of the current (known) equipment and building needs. However, as General Manager Peter Youngbaer has pointed out: “Even if we do all of

that, we end up with a nice looking building that is still too small to sustain the Co-op financially.”

Without increasing floor space and visibility, the Co-op seems unlikely to increase sales and revenue, which means the Co-op will not be able to compensate employees with a living wage, leaving the Co-op to continue to struggle to retain trained staff. Worse, the upcoming road closure(s) and construction projects seem likely to reduce revenues that the Co-op would otherwise gain over the next year(s), and may make it difficult for the Co-op to do enough business to cover operating expenses.

Co-op Members will have a lot of difficult decisions to make at the upcoming annual meeting. ❖

** **Special thanks** to Chris Miksic for his extensive and so appreciated work creating estimates for the work on the building exterior. We could not have put this plan together without amazing members like Chris!*

Plainfield Co-op Annual Meeting

Sunday August 29, 4 PM

Plainfield Opera House

Should we stay or should we move?

Updates from the Board
Capital Improvement Plan
Impact of road work on Route 2
Board elections
Music, Noshes, Door Prize, Raffle



Come to help decide the future of the Co-op!

	Estimated Total (All 10-years)	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Store Equipment											
New Store Freezer (most urgent)	\$16,000		\$16,000								
New Dairy & Beer Cooler (Hobart Brand)	\$10,000				\$10,000						
New Walk-in Cooler, back of store	\$6,000					\$6,000					
New Point of Sale System	\$1,500			\$1,500							
New Store Shelving?	\$5,000			\$5,000							
New Store Modem	\$100			\$100							
Building Repairs											
New Delivery Door (to get freezer out/in)	\$6,000		\$6,000								
Removal of siding with lead paint	\$23,000					\$23,000					
Prepping external walls for new siding	\$15,000					\$15,000					
New siding	\$67,000					\$67,000					
Window replacement	\$12,000							\$12,000			
Repair window trim and frames	\$15,000							\$15,000			
Replacing existing furnace (no estimate)	\$ -										
Repair foundation holes (no estimate)	\$ -										
Pre-contingency Subtotal	176,600	0	22,000	6,600	10,000	111,000	0	27,000	0	0	0
Contingency of 15%	17,660	0	3,300	990	1,500	16,650	0	4,050	0	0	0
TOTAL, pre-inflation	194,260	0	25,300	7,590	11,500	127,650	0	31,050	0	0	0
Inflation factor		1.00	1.025	1.051	1.077	1.104	1.131	1.160	1.890	1.218	1.249
Total cost (inflated)	\$223,239	\$ -	\$25,933	\$7,977	\$12,386	\$140,926	\$ -	\$36,018	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

	Estimated Total (All 10-years)	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Sources of Capital											
Savings/Bank Accounts											
Savings x 8840 - Member Equity	\$80,000		\$80,000								
Capital improvement account											
Other Sources?											
CFNE Line of credit	\$20,000		\$20,000								
Member Fundraising?	\$130,000					\$100,000		\$30,000			
Grants?											
Total Sources	\$230,000	\$ -	\$100,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$100,000	\$ -	\$30,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Surplus/Deficit		\$ -	\$74,068	\$(7,977)	\$(12,386)	\$(40,926)	\$ -	\$(6,018)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Cumulative Surplus/Deficit		\$ -	\$74,068	\$66,090	\$53,705	\$12,779	\$12,779	\$6,761	\$6,761	\$6,761	\$6,761

Plainfield Co-op Capital Improvement Plan 2021-2030

Building Committee Report

by Ehren Hill



The Building Committee has been quite busy over the last several months.

The two storage rooms off the community room upstairs were identified as being a heat loss for the building. In an effort to mitigate this, they were first cleaned out. There were enough items in those two small rooms to fill the community space! This was all organized and sorted through. The floors then had a vapor barrier and plywood installed to minimize further heat loss. Several holes were found, insulated, and sealed as well. Walls and windows in the storage space were also sealed and repaired as needed. Jason Mallery, Chris Thompson, Joe John, Kevin Levesque, Adam Krakowski, and I all worked on the project.

A grocery ordering and pickup window was designated and an overhang roof was installed to facilitate small orders being picked up without entering the building. Also, a new community posting board was installed next to the entrance. Please post and check here for local events, Co-op news, and flyers from your neighbors. The space outside the door that was being used for grocery pickup (there's some beautiful plants for gardening there now!) was also reinforced and made a little more customer friendly.

On Memorial Day the floors in the Co-op were painted, along with some minor carpentry repairs ranging from rail-

ings, to the floor space just inside the exterior door. Since we have a new granite countertop being installed at checkout on June 2nd, there were also updates to the shelving space beneath the checkout counter. Several doors got a new coat of paint in an effort to make things a little more contiguous across the space. Some mechanical components of the Co-op also received a spa day for preventative maintenance, being cleaned out and given some TLC.

There is a plan to convert a section of wall to a door, to facilitate the replacement of our freezer and coolers should they require it in the near future.

See you around the Co-op! ❖



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RECIPES collected by Debra Stoleroff

Saag Paneer

Wondering what to do with all your wonderful spinach before it bolts? Saag Paneer is a great option.

Ingredients

- 1 pound fresh baby spinach (about 8 packed cups)
- 2 tablespoons ghee (clarified butter)
- 8 ounces paneer (Indian cheese), cut into 1-by-½-inch pieces
- ½ cup finely chopped yellow onion
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated peeled ginger (from a 2-inch piece)
- 2 teaspoons grated garlic (about 3 cloves)
- 1 serrano chile, stemmed and minced
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ cup heavy cream
- Steamed rice or naan, for serving



Preparation

1. In a food processor, working in batches, pulse spinach until minced but not puréed. Do not pack the spinach too tightly or it won't get evenly chopped. You should have about 3 packed cups of minced spinach.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon ghee over medium in a large nonstick skillet. When it shimmers, add paneer and cook, turning occasionally, until golden all over, 5 to 7 minutes. Using tongs or a fish spatula, transfer cheese to a plate, leaving as much ghee as possible in the skillet.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low, add the remaining 1 tablespoon ghee and the onion, and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened but not browned, about 5 minutes.
4. Add ginger, garlic and chile, and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and well incorporated, 1 minute. Stir in coriander and cumin until well blended.
5. Add minced spinach and ½ cup water, and increase the heat to medium. Season with salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until spinach is completely soft and most of the liquid is absorbed, about 8 minutes.
6. Stir in heavy cream and paneer until well incorporated. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving bowl.
7. Serve over rice or scoop up with bits of naan. ☆

Caldo Verde

Caldo Verde is a traditional Portuguese soup. My brother (married to a Portuguese woman) has lived in Portugal for over 40 years. Whenever we visit we usually are served caldo verde (which means green broth) at some point during our stay. It has become my mother's favorite soup – she calls it kale soup as that is the green she uses but it can be made with collard greens as well. The soup is quite easy to make. Serve it hot with some cornbread or bread with olive oil.

Ingredients (*as with all recipes, you can adjust amounts to your taste*)

- 1 pound of kale or collard greens with the leaves cut into thin slices
- ½ pound of Portuguese or Spanish chorizo sausage cut into thin slices (*note, I use VT Salumi's spicy chorizo sausage*)
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 3-4 potatoes, 1-1½ pounds, peeled and thinly sliced
- 3-4 garlic cloves, minced
- 6-7 cups of water, vegetable or chicken broth
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for serving
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- Cornbread or other type of bread to eat with the soup



Preparation

1. Cut the greens. It is very important to cut them into thin slices. Suggestion: stack the leaves, three at a time and roll them like a cigar. Cut crosswise into very, very thin strips. Set aside.
2. Slice the chorizo into thin slices (1/8-1/4 inch). In a skillet, over medium heat, heat a bit of the oil and cook the chorizo until lightly browned on both sides. Use a slotted spoon to remove the sausage to a plate. Reserve sausage flavored oil that the sausage makes to flavor the soup.
3. In a large pot over medium heat, sauté onions in some of the olive oil until tender and translucent. Add garlic and cook for 2 more minutes.
4. Stir in potatoes and add water or combination of water and broth and bring to a boil.
5. Reduce the heat and let the soup simmer. Cook until the potatoes are tender, about 10-20 minutes. Remove from heat and let them cool slightly.
6. Mash some to most of the potatoes and then bring them back to the pot. OR Using a hand blender, blend the soup until smooth. Or you can use a regular blender and blend the soup in batches.
7. Add most of the sausage slices and fat to the soup.
8. Add the collard greens or kale, stir, cook and keep stirring for a few more minutes until the soup turns bright green. Don't overcook as the greens should be slightly crunchy.
9. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
10. Ladle the Caldo Verde soup into bowls topped with thin slices of chorizo in each one.
11. Serve hot accompanied by cornbread. ★





“To Celebrate Our Being Nearly 50!”

by Peter Youngbaer

That’s what our recent post card mailing to everyone in Plainfield and Marshfield excitedly announced. But wait, didn’t we just celebrate our 50th in 2019?

As the Marketing Committee and Board looked into this, we found a bit of a cloudy picture. Les Snow pointed out that the Summer 2019 issue of the Newsletter marked our 50th Anniversary. What? But our logo, sign on Main Street, website and other social media all state, “Deeply Rooted in the Community Since 1972.”

So, what gives? One of the 2019 articles talks about our early activities but mentions no specific event or dates. It cites a buyers’ club, but the cover photo on the Newsletter was actually from 1974. The author of one of the other articles said she agreed to write a piece for the Newsletter, but she said she had no specific reference point.

In my office at the Co-op is a framed poster celebrating the “Grand Opening” of the Winooski Valley Co-op Store. FYI, our legal name is the Winooski Valley Co-operative Market dba Plainfield Co-op. The event was notable as it celebrated our moving into our current space in the old Grange Hall — at 11:00 AM on the 11th Day of the 11th Month.

One of the founding members, Jim Higgins recalls that the first group buying order was probably done in November or December of 1971, “but who’s quibbling?” he quipped.

I could find no record of media coverage or announcements of our 50th from 2019. So, I don’t think anyone will “out” us, if we go ahead and celebrate again in 2022. Maybe another event on November 11?

But wait, there’s more! Checking our legal documents, we didn’t actually file Articles of Association with the Vermont Secretary of State’s Office until June 6, 1977. So, maybe we celebrate turning 50 a third time in 2077. At the Plainfield Co-op, all things are possible.

Strawberry Salsa

It’s strawberry season. I saw a recipe for fruit salsas somewhere and thought to try experimenting with strawberries. I had help with ingredients from somewhere but can’t remember the source. I’ve listed the ingredients in order of the most to the least amount.



Ingredients (*measurements are to taste*)

- Strawberries (*of all ingredients, strawberries would be the largest amount*)
- Red Onion (chopped)
- Jalapeño (chopped; *if you like hot salsa add more, if you like mild add less*)
- Cilantro (chopped)
- Lime juice (to your taste – add last) ☆