

BELFAST FOOD COOP BOARD MEETING - May 22, 2008

PRESENT: Richard Brown, Allen Ginsberg, Kate Harris, Wayne Kraeger, Debbi Lasky, Susan Lauchlan, Mike Marino, Bindy Pendleton, Kip Penney, Jerry Savitz, Paul Sheridan, Zafra Whitcomb. Staff: Pepper Bush, Erica Buswell, Goldy Goldstein. Guest: Barry Way Absent: Karen Aveni, Scott Giroux, Peri Tobin.

FACILITATOR: Zafra. Scribe: Paul. Timekeeper: Goldy. Vibewatcher: Allen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: We are still looking for someone on the board to be co-scribe. The coop will make its first appearance at the Belfast Farmer's market tomorrow, selling prepared foods, from 9 AM-1 PM. Paul has photographs shown at Hutchinson Center and the Gothic Building this weekend.

MINUTES: of April 24, 2008 were approved (9-Yes, 0-No, 3-Abstain), with these changes: under Finance Committee, add this final sentence: "This has depressed our cash flow for the month of March as members are using their patronage dividends instead of paying with cash."

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE: 165 ballots have been cast so far, up 81 since last board meeting, however we need ca. 220 for a quorum. Discussion of problems: people don't know who to vote for (need photos) nor how many people they can vote for (correct the ballots). Also discussed were methods to get members to vote: signs around store, reminders at registers, e-mail reminders, possibly set up a table outside co-op to encourage participation. The three candidates, Allen, Bindy, and Jerry will each work to solicit members to vote.

GM TEAM REPORT: written report was received. Following from the above re: candidates, suggestion was made to post photos of Department and General Managers. The Pay-for-Performance concept was not enthusiastically received by staff, possibly because it was at an early morning or late day All-Staff meeting. It is also new, and its ramifications will need to become clearer to all concerned. Other co-ops do use this model, but it was unknown if any were our size. This would need an approximate 2 year phase-in, through the budgeting process. As it is a policy issue, the board would have to approve it. Finance and Management Oversight Committees will need to discuss with the GMs, looking at some hard numbers before a proposal could come to the board.

MEMBER COMMENTS: Bindy was contacted by a member with concerns over the placement of the bike rack, and problems with dogs being tied up to the rack. She also passed on member concerns over amount of non-recyclable plastic packaging used in deli dept, and single-serve packets of peanut butter, that also included palm oil. Discussion on possibility of co-op leading by example by accepting some plastics not already accepted by Belfast for recycling, to wit: "How can we recycle what we sell?" as the minimum goal. Reported: more members seem to be finding mistakes on register receipts. Disappointment was expressed over our members not voting. In HABA department, we are selling many items with endocrine disruptors. How can we get the word out? How can we get more fully educated on this?

FINANCE COMMITTEE: Re: unclaimed patronage dividends, we will need to check the "ages" of the dividends; it will have to turn into income for the co-op. This is best done over a period of time, to reduce our tax burden; meetings with Mike Nickerson will continue on this. Re: emergency repair to deli kitchen floor--we will always find the money for compliance issues. The next major project on the horizon is a complete re-do of the parking lot, including drainage problems, flow from Beaver Street, etc. We will seek a good price, and a honorable contractor. However, the money is not there at this time so we will probably do patching until next summer. April was a good month for the co-op, sales were up, and labor was reduced by .25% from March. Informing the DM's of increases in expenses in a timely fashion helped keep expenses down. Expenses incurred were low, lower than the previous six months.

DELI COMMITTEE: the café counter has been moved out, electrician is coming next Thursday to finish work. Committee has no big agenda right now, just to support the deli management. Discussions on possibility of a Juice bar (winter fruit prices would be high) or a Rotisserie (cooking odors would be objectionable); for both there are the problems of space and cost. For the last year ending in April, deli sales were up 30%. The deli/cafe area actually made a profit this April. Corrections will be made to accounting practices to deal with issues of wage allocation for labor between kitchen work vs. cashier work.

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: Richard Grey is coordinating with committee on work with new grocery displays. General Merchandise area move to the old produce office will be next. Scott and Wayne were thanked once again for their volunteer labor on all these projects. Zafra is working on a Public Address project to improve sound quality in the non-store areas.

ANNUAL MEETING REVIEW: We should start up work earlier, as early as September. Needing to be improved is overall turnout, but also the board/staff/member attendance ratios. Seems to be a lot of complacency in membership. One non-member recently said that she was not a member because she did not want to just pay to join the coop, but actively work for it too. We could talk up the Annual Meeting at the new member orientations. Other ideas for attendance boosting were: holding an auction, hand out the patronage dividends at the meeting, and perhaps involve members in a decision-making process at the meeting. As to needed publicity, perhaps ask Fran for assistance. Dismay expressed at the paying of staff to attend. Committee needs to be formed to plan the next AM.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE: poor attendance recently. Board members are asked to consider what they would like to see for a retreat or for a training session. Committee needs to meet as a whole to approve a questionnaire for the board. Also, discussion about a businessperson's advisory lunch to solicit help on new board candidates.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: The first two New Member Orientations will be held on Wed. 6/18, 6:30-8 PM and Sunday 10/19, 4-5:30 PM, run by Erica, with assistance from, and attendance by, all committee members. Meeting notices will be posted. Question as to whether orientation was best as voluntary or mandatory for co-op members.

BYLAWS COMMITTEE: had not met. Board as a whole discussed the section on "Powers of the Board" (Article V, Section 6). Who do the staff reps represent? Are staff reps guests of the board? Or can they vote until there is a conflict of interest? Staff reps are clearly not a go-between, as staffing issues should go to the GMT. In past, not all staff were co-op members. Now however, any staff can bring issues to the board themselves as members. Staff reps can be an important voice on long-term questions for the co-op. Main conflict is with GM issues. The board needs to recognize all "conflicts of interest:" vendors, GM evaluations, partners of GMs, etc., either through voluntary recognition by the "conflicted" party or by the board pointing out the conflict. We felt this discussion was wise to be held periodically, and it should be stressed during board orientations.

MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE: met as a committee, and with the GMT, on issues: deli, profitability, DM training progress, personnel manual, communications, finances, the All-Staff meetings, Pay-for-Performance, produce dept progress. On the matter of suggestions from board committees, generally these are to be taken as that, suggestions (absent affirmation by full board). However, this is an "elastic" definition: e.g. Finance Committee and the MOC need to get direct feedback both from, and to, the GMT.

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY: this item was a hold-over from December, to brainstorm ideas for the next one in August. This is the mirror to the Annual meeting. Board puts on the AM, staff put on this day. Plans are to have less music, more family orientation, continue with BBQ, demos. Great

PR opportunity for the co-op: as a community event, meeting vendors, info exchange. Try more to tie in the day to sales inside store. What does the day cost the co-op? Pepper will report next time. Board enthusiastic for book sale; perhaps that is our role? If more board members took a shift that day, we could save on labor; we may ask additional staff help with the Annual Meeting. Goldy asked to report on our Charitable Giving.

HOMEWORK: The three candidates will work to solicit members to vote. Finance and Management Oversight Committees to discuss Pay-for-Performance with the GMs. Board members asked to consider retreat ideas. Form committee to plan the next Annual Meeting. Add to agenda: form committee on plastics recycling. Pepper will report on costs to co-op of Customer Appreciation Day. Goldy to report on Charitable Giving.

NEXT MEETING: Thurs. June 26, 6:30 pm at Waterfall Arts, Richard facilitating, no co-scribe volunteered.