

BELFAST FOOD COOP BOARD MEETING – October 23, 2008

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

FACILITATOR: Kip. Scribe: Paul. Timekeeper: Goldy. Vibewatcher: Susan.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Zafra will miss the next board meeting, as he is getting married; Congratulations! There will be a workshop on solar heating in Machias on Saturday. Cooperative Maine has adopted a hub & spoke system for its e-mails as to not burden everyone with every e-mail; board members will receive only the weekly news/announcements, with option to sign up for more on their own, or to unsubscribe. Susan offered to help combine orders for FEDCO trees to receive discount.

MINUTES: from Sept. 23, 2008 meeting were accepted without correction (9 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abs). These were also approved for web posting, with five dollar amounts removed.

GM TEAM REPORT: written report was received.

- a suggestion made that Farmer's Market vendors could do demos at the Co-op.
- congratulations to GMT on recent community outreach: Market, Eat Local, etc.
- peanut-free checkout...many comments received on the sign as posted: "glad to see we are willing to make an effort." We should seek legal opinion before posting anything that might imply "everything else is safe." Can we possibly label all items that are peanut free? People with allergies need to be responsible for their own actions. Need a big sign: "This is not a peanut free store." Do we know enough about this subject? Is our bulk area peanut free, for example? Most probably not. Co-op lawyer has reviewed this for us and suggests: 1. we post a sign: "We have peanut products;" 2. offer gloves to shoppers who need them; 3. offer staff to assist those with allergies. The goal is affirmation of our caring about them, not a peanut free area. This is all an on-going lesson in "how to work co-operatively with controversy."
- noted was the reduction in staff turnover, with no new hires needed in past three weeks.

MEMBER COMMENTS: as received from members—Deli food has gotten better, especially the vegetarian offerings. Kate Harris has submitted her formal resignation from the board. Erica Bertram may be interested in becoming a staff rep. Member Andrée Bella is interested in being on the board. Board is reminded to invite interested potential candidate members to attend meetings, and it was noted that meetings will be on the third Thursdays of November and December this year, because of holidays.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: not much to report due to end-of-fiscal year on Sept. 30 and recent store-wide inventory taking, thus no written report. Roughly ("back-of-the-envelope) figures show about 60% of sales were to members, which is up 11.5% from previous year. Grocery prices are up 4.5 to 5%. We may have a possible patronage dividend to payout, with a net income after dividend, deductibles, earned time paid, and interest payments. Income may be up 50% from last year.

On-hand inventory gives an unbloated inventory of about 2.5 weeks on-hand. Inflation has driven some increase in the price of goods. We are not yet ready to set a patronage dividend figure, nor to set a schedule yet for a report from our accountant, Mike Nickerson. As per long-term liabilities, we reduced member loan notes by one third, and member equity is up by 17%. Electricity and fuel costs are down, cooler and freezer maintenance costs are down, but grounds maintenance costs are up. A request was made to have financial reports e-mailed several days in advance, as well as in board boxes by 5 PM Monday, prior to board meetings. This was expanded to request that any written reports, from committees, managers, etc. be sent by e-mail. Tabled was the subject of unclaimed patronage dividends.

POLICY GOVERNANCE and ENDS POLICIES: discussion following recent managers' memo, and prior to the board retreat. Ends Policies are part of Policy Governance. It should not really be attempted without Policy Governance in place. Could we make our Mission Statement more Ends-oriented? The memo and handout articles should be seen by board as a plea for help from management. How do we get beyond crisis management? Three questions posed to board: Are we succeeding with our community outreach? Are we happy with the management relationship with the board? Is the Co-op thriving? Arguably, the answer could be to each: no, we can be doing better; should we not be aiming higher? We need to put into place better procedures, future planning, be proactive, not reactive. Policy Governance may very well not be for us. Let's not shoe-horn ourselves into someone else's clothes. Management has a difficult job – a balancing act.

This is OK if there are safety nets installed, but one bad manager or bad management action should not be threaten the Co-op. They say they are able to run it on a daily basis, but they do not know about the future—long range. They have a responsibility to 50+ employees, but how can the GMT answer when asked about which direction to pursue— Build a new deli? Or focus on energy efficiency? Or what? What is our definition of the Co-op thriving? Can we ensure that 5, 10, 15 years down the line the Co-op will be here? The railroad, the sardine and chicken factories were considered an important part of Belfast, seemingly here for the long haul too. From the staff perspective, the Co-op is an amazing place to work, but can be incredibly stressful to work in at times. The staff sacrifices themselves, especially financially, for the Co-op. Perhaps what is needed is "Policy Guidance." Board was asked to review the Co-op Grocer website to see the pros and cons of Policy Governance. Debbi is willing to lead a committee to research long-range goals.

Finally, what are the problems that 'Policies' could address?

BOARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE: finalized were the plans for the board retreat, Sat. Nov 1st at Troy Howard School. Board approved schedule; topics and talking points were distributed. A reminder to all was to please be sure dates are on all handouts.

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE: will meet on Monday Nov. 10th. All board members encouraged to consider members that would be good candidates. Of the incumbents, Wayne and Paul, will run again; Richard and Susan are unsure; and Scott has decided to not run for re-election. For any and all departing board members, they are asked to help "find their replacement."

MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE: has met recently, and are working on "how to help the GMT manage the staff." Not only to fix one immediate problem, but to prevent recurrence of that problem.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE: no figures are available yet on the proposed "wall reduction" at front end of store, to be more energy efficient.
Retiling of the kitchen floor is being done this Sunday. Goldy met with the City Planner and architect John Spindola (sp?), who then did a walk-around of the building concerning both repair of the stairs to the rear parking lot and possible expansion to the side of building.
We were informed that we must buy that piece of property from the owner, and grant an easement back for parking by that previous owner. It is "very doable," if done properly. Preparations are underway in our parking lot for snow season. The work for the "5th register/education area/customer service" area is ongoing. The exterior lights over the front of the store are being redone, after a mandatory review, and now approval, by the City Design Committee. A quantity of unneeded old equipment will become metal recycling, to soon be removed from the basement. The propane gas tanks on the side of the building prove to be too dangerous to refill in winter, and these will be moved to the front corner of the building. We will need to get new sets of numbers on possible expansions: either to the side, to the front, or to both areas, due to new City review problems.

DELI COMMITTEE: Amy has found a manufacturer for compostable deli food containers, which are a starch product. MOFGA vendors at Common Ground Fair must use similar products, so she will research distributors. Kitchen floor is to be retiled, as above. The café/deli area was possibly more profitable; numbers forthcoming.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE; The second attempt at an orientation was successful, with four attendees. Erica offered to send board members the packet, as distributed at the orientation. Do we want to make the orientation mandatory? (They are planned to be quarterly.) Could we have members give the orientations?

RECYCLING COMMITTEE: met briefly; divided up assignments. Attempting to coordinate our in-house efforts with towns in area. The City committee is not available for contact, due to ongoing elections. Susan is preparing a resource list for disposing of many materials. There is possibility here for a marketing co-op to assist communities in their recycling.

HOMEWORK: Read packet of articles from the GMT on Policy Governance issues. Read bullet points and charts for retreat topics. Unclaimed patronage dividends—and expired dividends. Lorna Crichton, Waterfall Arts, will be contacted re: OK with new date for Nov/Dec board meetings?

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, November 20, 2008, 6:30 PM at Waterfall Arts, Kip facilitating.