

BELFAST COOP BOARD MEETING – November 20, 2008

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

FACILITATOR: Scott. Scribe: Paul. Timekeeper: Bindy. Vibewatcher: Peri.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: place orders for holiday turkeys now.

MINUTES: from October 23, 2008 meeting were accepted with correction in spelling of member Andrée Bella's name. (8 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abs). These were also approved for web posting, with all seven dollar amounts removed.

GM TEAM REPORT: written report was received. Comments and questions:

currently we have e-mail addresses for about 14% of our members. Suggestion was made that as many as 70% of the members may have e-mail, and that we make an effort to get most of the addresses, to facilitate quicker and cheaper communication with them.

How is front-end manager different than a floor manager? Front-end manager is more like a department manager, with responsibilities for training, scheduling, etc.

At a recent dept. managers' meeting, there arose problem with managers who do not want to participate in the labeling of products on shelves believed to be peanut-free. Our discussion involved points that the GMT is in charge; we are not a worker co-op, but a member co-op; some felt the board should set a policy here, in the form of a resolution; the Management Oversight Committee, has started some discussion; as we are waiting for the Peanut Committee to meet, implementation of the labeling has not begun, the issue is in process; if there is a problem, our personnel manual has policies that come into play; our employees appreciate having a voice in their work, but our managers do not like, nor want to "dictate;" this issue can lead to other members lobbying for removal of other products; research found only one store that flags their peanut products; also an allergy listserve suggests that use of gloves can be safer than marking tags on possible offending products; how this is decided could leave us open to lawsuits—it is too open-ended. It is no longer about peanuts, but about decisions; if the GMT is bullied into changing its decision, how will the team be able to make decisions in the future? We are a co-op of one member, one vote—but also that one vote deserves to be heard. We are about to enter a 90-day trial period of labeling shelves, to meet the needs of members; if it is not working, or it is causing financial issues, changes in the decision will be made. The Purchasing Policy Committee needs to be reactivated/reconstituted (currently: Rich, Mike, Goldy for the GMT and Caryn Knudsen for the staff).

BOARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE: reported on recent meeting, with follow-up on the board retreat. Rather than try for another board training in April, focus will be on doing a thorough job of orienting new board members, possibly helping them with a "board buddy," who can answer questions and advise; new members can choose someone or ask for one to be assigned. New board members to get the board handbook in advance of their first meeting; possibly have more board members at the orientation meeting, also explain how we use a variation of Robert's Rules—aka "Bob's Rules;" and possibly a tour of the store. The GMT passed out their "Thoughts on what is the role of the GMT in policy making;" which also serves to remind board members of their homework to submit our own notes on "the role of the board" to Debbi.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: noted were unusual numbers: the sales to wage ratio, and under expenses, there were some large one time/once-a-year expenses that occurred in October. There will be clarification of the figures by next meeting. Through bookkeeping procedures, we are trying to distribute the cost of yearly expenses over a 12-month period. Board members are seeking a “narrative” in the presentation of the monthly report. Financial committee meets only as needed, not monthly. Re: unclaimed/expired patronage dividends—we must take these as a profit item; if put onto books, we will pay more taxes. This can be done on a gradual basis, during any year with a loss, as an offset. We will ask Mike Nickerson about this at December board meeting.

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE: board voted (10 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abs) to set Sunday, March 8 as date for Annual Meeting, with the following Sunday, 3/15 as snow date. As to location, we are considering the UU church (but some members may have issue with being in a church), the Boathouse, or Troy Howard school cafeteria. To review again who is running: Wayne, Susan, Paul for re-election; Scott and Rich are not running. Reminder to be on lookout for potential board candidates, especially those with business minds, with experience in policy and management. We were verbally informed that Mike Marino will be submitting his resignation shortly. Therefore, along with existing vacancies, we have 9 open seats on the board, and additionally, one to be filled by staff. We will try to have ballots mailed with patronage dividend letter to arrive in members’ mailboxes March 9.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE: is looking at a possible re-do of the basement meeting room, to make it more pleasant to be there. Also researching possibility of a co-op root cellar in a basement area. Grocery shelf work is ongoing. No drawings available yet on the work for the rear parking stairs. Field-testing going on now for the fifth cash register position; more computer work is needed. An estimate for a walk-in basement freezer was received, with payback period about three years, just based on increased employee efficiency (3-4 hours week). No net energy savings, but organization and stock rotation will be improved. Recommendation will come back to board after Finance Committee reviews it, and we receive Mike Nickerson’s yearly report. Discussion needed on topic of surveillance cameras for employee safety, especially at night, and to deal with shoplifting. System can be fairly inexpensive, but there are labor costs to view/review the output from the camera(s). Our store has a reputation in town as an “easy mark.” This is a philosophical discussion, as much as a store management issue: it could be seen not as “Big Brother is watching, but Your brothers and sisters are watching.” Quantities of metal recycling went out from basement (thanks Wayne!), but note that recyclables are in much less demand, as the prices peaked in July.

RECYCLING COMMITTEE: Several meetings have been held, including with the City committee, as well as Phil, our maintenance manager, and Amy, our deli manager. Topics discussed included possibility of a mug board for staff cups. Most recent meeting was informational with the recycling coordinator from town of St. George and staff from the State Planning Office. Progress is being made.

DELI COMMITTEE: the manager has found new suppliers for non-organic, but nitrate-free meats, to be more responsive to our mission statement. Discussed was possibility of setting up cheese-cutting area, through reconfiguring a back room. Main issues in getting in a dishwashing machine are space, followed by price (or leasing). The anomaly of the board’s committee structure was noted, in that the deli is the only department which has a board-level oversight committee.

BOARD STATEMENT: after discussion and amendments, the following reaffirmation of our organizational structure was approved (10 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abs), for distribution to members and employees:

The Belfast Food Coop was created as a member-owned cooperative, which differs from a worker cooperative. The Board of Directors, as representatives of the membership, hire the General Management. General Management’s responsibility is to oversee the running of the store. Staff is hired to carry out the GM’s policies and decisions. Our values statement includes reference to

equitable treatment among members, employees and management, and ultimately decisions authorized by management need to be followed by staff as in any other business.

HOMEWORK: Retreat follow up—please get your reply on “the role of the board in policy making” to Debbi, ASAP. Environmental Committee will talk to Finance Committee re: a recommendation for freezer unit.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, December 18, 2008, 6:30 PM at Waterfall Arts, Allen facilitating.