

BELFAST COOP BOARD MEETING – January 22, 2009 FINAL

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

FACILITATOR: Wayne. Scribe: Paul. Timekeeper: Debbi. Vibewatcher: Scott.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: a panel discussion sponsored by the Co-op and the Belfast Free Library to take place on February 19th, 4-6 PM titled "Healthy Hearts" will be presenting an array of modalities for prevention and healing of cardiovascular diseases. The three panelists, including Bindy, are local health care providers.

MINUTES: from Dec. 18, 2008 meeting were accepted (8 Y, 0 No, 2 Abs) with correction in 'Homework' entry: Debbi had received board replies from only two people, not three. These were also approved for web posting, with a single dollar amount removed in the Environmental Committee entry.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: the labor percentage is back in line; small profit shown; more stable, month of December sales helped. Some expenses still need to be adjusted including some that should have been paid in previous fiscal year. No adjustments were made in statements for electronic inventory. Beginning to feel the economic downturn in margins, except in bulk, but especially in "luxuries"/frozen. A major supplier, United, finally reduced their surcharge for fuel. We have overall growth of 5%, about equal to the retail price index. Since patronage dividend must be available as cash, possible problem if many members asked for cash at same time. We would ask them to please wait for a better sales season, such as summer, and not February. Members will be allowed to again donate some, or all, of their dividend to the Equity Assistance Fund and the Capital Improvements Fund. Our new phone system is coming from members' annual fees, to be paid all at once. We paused to acknowledge management's accomplishments, as per Mike Nickerson's report in December, and this will be added to the President's letter. Re: 80/20 rule—most co-ops return 20% of patronage dividend and retain 80% for large purchases. Finance Committee is researching possibility of refinancing loans as the rates come down.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT TEAM (GMT) REPORT: written report was received.

Comments, questions:

- a short member survey is going out with the patronage dividend letter; if board has any suggestions please give to Erica.
- the "Follow a Co-op Dollar" article in latest newsletter was brilliant!
- Question: was anyone present inconvenienced by the change since the co-op no longer supplies plastic bags? No! Paper bags cost us ca. 9¢ each, with big usage. Change motivated by environmental unsustainability of plastic, and sanitary rules if used bags. Members are able/encouraged to bring own bags, of any type. What if we had a working member to monitor a system of donated bags? Recycling Committee will take this up. Newsletter could highlight the new reusable bags available for sale.

MEMBER COMMENTS: Jeanne Gail was present, is considering running for the board. Bindy reported compliant that the new rack with power bars is broader, but difficult to use, requiring customers to bend down to see product. However it is a good thing that it is lower, allowing cashiers to see down aisles, monitor HABA area for theft. Also new and positive were coupons, from the coupon books available up front, and now posted on shelves w/products to alert customers.

DISCUSSION ON POLICY MAKING: this was homework from retreat—“what is the board’s role in policy making?” Replies received only from the GMT and two others; Debbi is still willing to collate all replies received by Feb.1. More board engagement in the co-op is seen to be needed, for example—Farmer’s Market, should we participate again? We could help the Market by arranging to take EBT cards, but this could cost us fees. How to decide? Is the risk of fraud an issue? Is it a problem that the costs can be open-ended? In past, the board has done more ‘micromanaging,’ because of crisis, but that is less so nowadays. Board wants input on budget, business plan, food buying policy, and “highly controversial” issues (does employee dress code qualify in this category?). Some of our committees are inactive; not enough board members to staff them. We need to look at how we use our “committee energies.” In the deli/café, we had three managers in one year and the board stepped in with a committee; when is it appropriate to step back? Erica could spend a full forty hours a week on community outreach—how much is enough?

SETTING POLICY FOR ADDRESSING MEMBER CONCERNS: the committee members, Allen and Kip, receives complaints/concerns and send a note—“thank you for your letter, we will forward as appropriate.” The Purchasing Policy committee needs to be active, meet at least quarterly, training new members with past examples. Weakness with our committee structure: should we allowing board members to choose freely which committee to be on or not on? What about qualifications? What if some committees have too many members, others not enough? The GMT should/could choose to ask a board committee to help whenever an issue concerns these areas: member interactions, purchasing policy, and the Management Oversight Committee’s work.

MONITORING FOR THEFT: theft is up! Possibilities are a scanner at the door, tagging expensive items, or several cameras, simple recorder. In the wine department the manager has moved some expensive bottles around to keep a better eye on them, similarly in the HABA dept. Recent efforts have yielded some arrests. We agreed that a modest amount for equipment should cover; additional labor costs when needed to review recording in event of incidents. Possibly we could enlist member assistance to be on lookout for suspicious activity. Also, articles in local newspapers to the effect that “we monitor and we prosecute.” This is not “Big Brother” watching, but “Brother and Sister watching our store.”

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE: Nominations open on Feb.1, with voting ending on March 29. If Annual Meeting moves to March 15 as a snow date, voting period to start then and voting will be extended one week. Board was asked opinion on whether we should have a speaker or a set of discussions with the board and members—we will try for both. Food to be supplied by co-op, light meal, with dessert as a potluck.

BYLAWS & MISSION STATEMENT: these get an annual review, now past due; no glaring needs to revise are seen. Anyone having ideas, please contact Kip and Debbi. The issue of clarifying the role of the staff reps to the board will need more discussion and started earlier, to make any possible bylaw change(s).

MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (MOC): evaluation forms for the GMT were passed out, to be returned by 1/29, in a sealed envelope to Debbi’s mailbox. Next board meeting will end with an Executive Session to discuss the evaluation returns and possible reconfiguration of the GMT, and changing some job descriptions.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE: Goldy reported that City Council passed on the easement to allow work on the rear stair to parking lot. City will remove snow, we will build and maintain it. Work needs to go to bid for spring construction. The new cashier station/bread rack/floor manager office/customer service/children’s area work is moving forward, slowly. Committee is scaling back, not spending as much

money. Area will be more accessible when done. No discussion yet on a “mug board” for cups. There have been some complaints about the lack of the children’s area; parents are being patient.

CHARITABLE GIVING COMMITTEE: last fiscal year we donated \$2392.55. This year to date we have donated \$789.46.

HOMEWORK: get GMT evaluations to Debby by 1/29. Replies on role of board in policy-making to her by 2/1.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, Feb. 23, 2009, 6:30 PM at Waterfall Arts, Kip facilitating.