

Belfast Co-op Board of Directors Meeting

May 28, 2020, 6:15 pm; Virtual Meeting via Web Conference

Directors Present: David Balicki (treasurer), Annie Bussiere (secretary), Evans Goff, Kate Hanson, Crystal Howard-Doliber (vice-president), John Krueger, Matt McConnell, Liz Moore, Buck Sawyer, Heather Selin, Edward Sheridan (president).

GM: Doug Johnson

Staff: Emily Berry

Facilitator / Timekeeper: Heather Selin & Edward Sheridan

Agenda

The BOD approved the agenda by consensus.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The BOD agreed to strike irrelevant comments from the *Conflict of Interest* discussion. With this amendment, the BOD approved by consensus the minutes of the April 23, 2020 meeting.

Announcements

The BOD published a recognition piece for Doug in various local newsletters and publications as a way for the community to get a sense of just how much the BOD appreciates him and “his extraordinary leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic”.

The directors thanked Annie for the work she did putting together the staff appreciation piece.

Election of Officers

The BOD accepted by consensus the appointment of Edward Sheridan to the office of president; Crystal Howard-Doliber to the office of vice-president; David Balicki to the office of treasurer; and Annie Bussiere to the office of secretary, for the 2020 term, effective immediately.

GM Reporting

Alignment

Doug is working with Mark Papendieck, NCG Easter Corridor Prepared Foods Specialist, and Dave Blackburn, of the NCG Development Co-op, to get the deli up and running again in a new form. The plan for the deli should be solidified by the end of next week.

Shop for Me is now open on Sundays. An email to owners will be going out on June 5 and will mention the new Shop for Me hours on Sunday. Before it is promoted more widely, Doug would like the process to be running with greater efficiency. Doug is looking into opening the store to walk-in shoppers on Sundays for limited hours in the near future.

GM Update Report

May sales were down 11% from last year. This is the first month the Co-op has experienced negative sales growth in this year. With the restrictions in place, the Co-op has seen the customer count drop, however, basket size has increased from an average of roughly \$20 to approximately \$120.

It doesn't seem like the restrictions on the number of shoppers allowed in the store will be lifted during Stage II (beginning in June) of the state's reopening.

Doug received a pro forma for expansion from the NCG Development Co-op in early March, just days before Covid restrictions went into effect, and he has not yet had a chance to dig into it. Doug's work with the NCG Development Co-op is picking up where he left off with Bill Gessner.

Doug talked about how the staff were holding up, mentioning that they are all a bit fried. He also touched on the solidarity among the workers, that successes and failures are felt by all and there is a sentiment that they are all in this together, supporting each other.

Since implementing the Shop for Me program, Doug has begun to see it as a permanent fixture at the Co-op. Feedback from a recent survey of shoppers who have participated in Shop for Me was overwhelmingly positive and indicated that they would like to continue to use this service after the pandemic.

B3 - Asset Protection

Doug reported partial compliance with policy B3 - Asset Protection. Due to the Payroll Protection Program loan that the Co-op received, there are more funds in one bank account than is recommended by the operational definition of the global B3 statement. Once the terms of the loan have been fulfilled, the funds can be relocated, bringing that subpolicy into compliance. One of the operational definitions for subpolicy B3.8 states "Our total number of customer transactions for the year will be at least as high as it was at the same time last year". Due to Covid-19 and the resulting restrictions, customer transactions have been significantly lower than this time last year. As restrictions are lifted and shopping patterns gradually return to "normal", customer transactions should increase, bringing this subpolicy into compliance.

The BOD accepted by consensus the B3 - Asset Protection monitoring report as in partial compliance.

Strategic Discussion

Post-Pandemic Outlook

The overarching message was that the Co-op will pull through and remain in business.

Doug briefly addressed concerns about summer traffic. The Co-op will see summer traffic in some form but it will be different than past years. The Co-op will have to continue to adapt in order to meet whatever the demands will be.

The departments that have changed dramatically will continue to change dramatically. For instance, it is unlikely that people will congregate in the cafe anytime soon, now is the time to look at the best use for that space. The bulk department will also be rethought. Doug would like to reintroduce gravity bins for items that would not be consumed raw (rice, beans, etc.) in the near future and stock the bottom shelves with large quantity (25lbs, 50lbs) bags that customers can buy 10% off retail. These changes should cut back on the amount of items which require repacking into individual plastic bags, which is currently all bulk items and very labor intensive. Implementing these changes will depend on the comfort level of shoppers.

Although there has been some feedback that the Co-op has been overreacting about safety procedures, most of the comments coming in reiterate that the Co-op is the one place in town that people who are immunocompromised, in a high risk group, or are generally concerned feel safe. Doug and staff would like the community to continue to feel that the Co-op is a safe place to shop.

The Co-op is starting to hire again in order to fill in gaps. Doug would like there to be enough staff so that the Co-op can be open 7 days a week and those who are temporarily covering multiple roles can be relieved.

This pandemic has brought about several opportunities to build out new systems, such as Shop for Me and online owner sign-up, and rethink how things are done. This has been an opportunity to disaster-proof the business more; if / when something like this happens again, operations will already have their strategies down and plans that can be put into action. This has been a time for creating more opportunities for folks who want to get in and out of the store speedily. It also has Doug rethinking expansion. With an inevitable recession coming, it seems to make more sense to reinvest in the current building than to take on a \$7 million expansion project.

A director encouraged Doug to keep his eyes open for opportunities to expand into at this time when an initial investment might be lower than it would have been a few months ago.

Another director brought up how the Belfast Soup Kitchen is struggling to meet demand with no volunteers allowed to participate at this time. Although the Co-op can't address the soup kitchen's staffing needs, Doug has been thinking a lot about the needs of the community at large and is looking into bringing in WIC eligible products.

The BOD and Doug talked about the legacy from this pandemic experience. There will be a story to tell about resiliency and the local food economy and the Co-op will be in a good position to tell it because of its relationships with local farmers, producers, and vendors. Strengthening these relationships going forward will benefit everybody.

Something to consider and plan for accordingly when the time comes is the onset of winter. What is this going to look like when cold weather hits? Will people still be willing to stand outside the store in 14°F temperatures?

A director mentioned fish and shellfish coming back to the Co-op which led to a discussion of service counters. The meat & cheese service counter has not been staffed since restrictions were put into place but will come back in some form, probably close to what it was previously. Whereas, the deli service counter will probably not be coming back in any form.

Board Administrative Matters

Retreat Follow-up: Calendar and Efficiency Review

The BOD discussed ways to open and modify their calendar to allow room for discussions on topics that they would like to explore in depth. It was suggested that self-monitoring of policies be consolidated to happen every other month, allowing time for a focused discussion during the months between. The Executive Committee will create a proposal for modifying the calendar and present that at the June meeting.

Expansion Readiness Workgroup

During its May meeting, the Expansion Readiness Workgroup reviewed the B policies.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee will continue the review of its charter and present any recommended changes at the next meeting.

Board Development Committee

BoDev reviewed the D2 - Accountability of the GM policy and noted to the board that directors should remember to put requests to operations through an ORF and refrain from asking Doug or another staff member directly.

The BOD contract with Columinate includes their choice of two intensive training sessions. BoDev would like to sign up for a financial training session in November and requested input from the rest of the board on the other training.

Self Monitoring Policy: D2 - Accountability of the GM

The BOD accepted by consensus D2 - Accountability of the GM as in compliance.

Owner Engagement Committee

The OEC asked the BOD whether their communication to the owners should be sent out. The BOD asked for more time to review the correspondence and they will revisit this at the June meeting.

The OEC has decided to push the bylaws forum back one month. It is now scheduled to take place in July.

Conflict of Interest

Evans, who was absent at the April meeting, stated that as a staff member his finances are tied to the Co-op.

Homework

Full BOD

1. Take D3 & D4 polls
2. Review & add to [Board Guidelines](#)
3. Send owner comments to Emily for compilation
4. Think about *Rootstock* article topics
5. Review [Owner Comments](#)
6. Send feedback from Retreat to BoDev
7. Send email to Doug if interested in [CCMA](#)

Doug

1. Look into CORE re-enrollment numbers
2. Send public policies to OEC
3. Forward the NCG Dev Co-op plans to the BOD

Doug/Emily

1. Address google calendar re: committee events

Heather/Doug

1. Post re: suspension of bylaws rollout

Heather

1. Send BOD courses from Columinate catalog

Executive Committee

1. Create proposal re: calendar

Finance Committee

1. Review charter re: membership

Board Development Committee

1. Review strategies for board recruitment
2. Review language of policy C1.3 re: clarity
3. Discuss requiring comments on policy polls
 - a. Notify Emily of decision
4. Review different polling systems for policies (ex. numerical scale)
5. Discuss agenda setting
6. Discuss upcoming training opportunities

Debrief

Heather noted, with merriment, that it was more fun to be in the meeting as a participant than the facilitator.

Edward thanked the other directors for their support as he takes on the office of president. He commented that they all have a lot of responsibility, including Doug, and it's good that they can get along and retain a sense of humor at the same time.

Crystal acknowledged that the executive committee got together to talk about this agenda prior to the meeting. She noted that it was a good step forward and she really appreciated that process, so thanks to Heather and Edward for leading that.

It was suggested that perhaps the executive committee members serve on one other committee instead of the recommended two.

The executive committee was asked to submit a monthly report to the BOD on its activities.

Next meeting: June 25, 2020

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End of minutes. Submitted by Emily Berry, scribe.