

Belfast Community Co-op Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

July 24, 2024. Public in-person and Zoom meeting commenced at 6:01pm

Directors Present: Babette Cohen-Solal, Charles Sterbach, Collin Thompson, Corinne Burr, Ernie Cooper (Vice President), Jim Miller, John Krueger (Treasurer), Rio Greeley, Susan Cutting (President), Todd Bluhm, Valerie Tate (Secretary)

Staff: Doug Johnson, Michael Walter, Gina Ferendo, and Jamie Cermak

Owners: Michael McCormack, Annie Bussiere, and Ashleigh Russell

Scribe: Valerie Tate

Preliminaries

Welcome

Susan welcomed everyone, declared a quorum, and referred attendees to the Agenda, Ends, and Ground Rules/Working Agreements in the chat.

Agenda Review

Change: Approval of last month's minutes taken out of the Consent Agenda and postponed until next month's meeting in order to give more time for members to review them

Consent Agenda

Approved: C6 - Officers' Roles

Announcements

Babette announced that, effective at the end of this meeting, she is officially resigning from the Board due to personal time constraints. Appreciation was expressed for her service, participation, thoughtful input, and time. Babette said that it's been a pleasure to serve, and a great learning experience.

Owner Comments

Michael McCormack had a question about a comment from a Board member at a previous meeting about being unenthusiastic.

Homework Updates

Reviewed homework and updated items.

GM Reporting

Alignment

GM work schedule will level out in the next couple of weeks.

GM Update Report

Posted for HR coordinator, a direct report to Doug, and a couple of promising candidates will be reviewed next week.

We're moving in a good direction with Columinate Financial Services. Their goal is to have sales margin and payroll expenses for June and the quarter by the end of this week; not the full balance sheet but an income statement to see where we are.

Recruiting a board administrator has not moved. It's part of the conversation we are having with our consultant this week. Reframing the job is under consideration. There has been a strong interest in finding an internal hire who already has an understanding of our co-op.

Construction continues.

Board Action Items

B6 - Staff Treatment & Compensation

BOD member noted, even after substantial increases and effort, that the living wage curve seems “insurmountable”, especially related to housing. Nearly a dozen people have accepted jobs in recent years and been unable to take them due to inability to find housing. Cooperative housing for workers would be a dream solution.

Doug noted evidence of workers needing a permanent HR leader who they can go to with concerns. A BOD member asked about a possible worker ombudsman or rep, which Doug noted other co-ops have adopted.

A BOD member noted satisfaction was substantially above benchmark, but lower than last year. Doug pointed out that construction has been a major stressor and is ongoing.

BOD members expressed appreciation for workers and reported the positive comments they’ve heard from others. There was a question about how the workers view support from the BOD; how we might show support; a possible event for workers; possibly surveying the workers about what they know about the BOD and how they feel about the BOD. Doug noted that a catered lunch would be nice... and, even more than that, introducing ourselves to workers while we are in the store and offering gratitude would be powerful.

There were a few questions about scoring which Doug answered.

Doug noted that this was the policy compliance worker satisfaction survey, which is reviewed every other year with a random sample of 50% of staff. Next year, will be the full survey, with many more questions surveyed, of all of the staff.

B6 was accepted as in partial compliance.

2024-2025 Board Budget

Same budget as last year. No increase. We’ll know more about what we spent by the end of September. We’re on target. A BOD member noted that, even though our \$45K budget is “a drop in the bucket,” it’s gut wrenching that our workers aren’t making a living wage; so there was a question about spending on Columinate education and consulting, speakers, and travel. Doug pointed out that these are good investments. Taking the long view, the value of professional Board governance, and networking, and staying up to date on cooperative issues benefits workers.

It was noted that the Columinate contract is up for review in October; that BOD members could be taking more Columinate trainings. We work with our Columinate consultant Thane Joyal through monthly executive committee meetings, agenda planning, policy governance support, retreat facilitation, turnover training, direct one on one meetings for BOD members with Thane, etc. A BOD member talked about the exceptional Columinate classes he’s taken with terrific speakers and well-organized presentations. Doug noted that the pandemic “took the wind out of the sails.” Prior to the pandemic, Columinate trainings and meetings were in person, where we got together with other co-ops.

A BOD member suggested accepting the budget with the assumption that the renewal of the Columinate contract is included. If for some reason we decide against renewing the contract, then we would just come in under budget and make an adjustment next year.

Budget was accepted.

2025 Board Calendar

Approved with a line added for the Strategic Work Committee with dates.

Monthly Tea and Talk

It was agreed that Tea and Talk will occur every second Tuesday from 5:30 – 6:30pm in the Co-op Café. At least one BOD member and one OEC member will meet with Owners. Each BOD member will sign up for at least 2 Tea & Talks in the coming year.

Board Discussion Items & Committee Updates

Finance Committee

The committee has been reviewing the project summary spreadsheet – a helpful tool. See the committee's report for statistics. There's 14% of the contingency left and 13% of the construction that's left. Data from invoices is available for the BOD to review online.

We are using SAGE for the most part as we transition to a new system in the next 2 – 3 months.

The Finance Committee requested good numbers from Columinate Financial Services before the next meeting, to include POS sales, labor margin, and days of cash on hand.

Doug notes that there's been a struggle to get stock on the shelves. It's not been due to staffing but rather due to location and refrigeration to receive and infrastructure problems; and it will improve.

Owner Engagement Committee

ORF was submitted for the Belfast Street Party table. BOD members encouraged to sign up for activities on the BOD Google Drive; send email if unable to "edit"; and email Common Cents celebration/meet and greet ideas to OEC.

Board Development Committee

Email ideas for BOD retreat to Board Development Committee in October. We'll discuss potential topics for the retreat at our August BOD meeting.

Beekeeper and Beekeeper training will remain available. Doug will provide basic training in Beekeeper functions at the next BOD meeting and set up access for Charles and Todd. However, at this time, there is not an expectation that the BOD will transition to communicating via Beekeeper.

Strategic Work Committee

Most recent meeting was yesterday, so a verbal report was provided and the following notes were distributed.

We are staying on track with environmental sustainability as our first strategic initiative.

NOTE: The following are ideas, not yet recommendations!! We are still brainstorming.

Vision

Belfast Community Co-op is a community anchor and model for positive environmental impact in all of its endeavors; with established objectives that are supported by our Owners, and are specific, measurable, achievable, affordable, and relevant.

Values

Mitigation – reduce carbon emissions, food waste, toxins, and energy usage; for example:

- Offer grocery delivery using one electric vehicle so that fewer people are driving their cars to the store
- Donate and/or compost unsold food
- Emphasize recyclable, reusable, compostable packaging
- Eliminate plastic clamshells, switching to cardboard-and-cellophane boxes
- Emphasize local products
- Emphasize plant based foods
- Emphasize organic options

Resilience – adapt to change, recover from disruptions, preserve the environment, and communicate effectively regarding environmental sustainability and in case of an environmental emergency; for example:

- BCC's response in 2020 to the pandemic
- Strengthen local food system
- Intentional, proactive planning for interruptions to the supply chain
- Identify and close gaps in communication with workers, owners, shoppers, community regarding environmental sustainability and in case of an environmental emergency

Education – how to live an environmentally sustainable life

- Tours, signage, discounts, and sampling to highlight sustainable choices
- Plant based cooking classes
- Speakers on local, national, and global environmental initiatives
- Highlight local environmental organizations and support through Common Cents
- Provide information on how the community is better off due to the positive environmental impact of the Co-op

Process

Research – reach out to other Co-ops; collect data

Discuss with the Board and Operations

Educate and engage with Owners and the broader community, including shoppers, neighbors, other businesses, electeds and other officials

Change our Ends and Policy Register

John referred the Committee to the state plan for resilience and will send the survey to Valerie.

Closings

Homework Items

Full Board

1. Introduce ourselves to workers while we are in the store and saying how much we appreciate them.
2. Email ideas for BOD retreat to Board Development Committee.
3. Email ideas for Common Cents celebration/meet and greet to OEC.
4. Sign up for activities on BOD Google Drive, including tabling; Belfast Street Party; and at least 2 Tea & Talk in the coming year.
5. Policy Polls: strive for responses from all directors

Owner Engagement Committee

1. Offer a possible framework for a Common Cents celebration that BOD members can consider and respond with ideas.
2. Look into optional event/meet and greet with the BOD.
3. Learn about intersection of Marketing and OEC roles and responsibilities
4. Ask Doug about surveying Owners for Owner Forum Topics
5. Develop process for Board member calls to new Owners who express interest in serving on the Board and/or committees.
6. Evaluate how Owners and broader community view the current Ends Statement and share with Strategic Work Committee

Board Development Committee

1. Plan September Board retreat

2. Continue evaluation and drafting of a revised D-3 policy, especially as it relates to monitoring GM's compliance with proposed revised policy
3. Continue evaluation and drafting of a revised B-5 policy, incorporating GM feedback, evaluating monitoring issues, and defining terms like "significant number of member/owners"

Strategic Work Committee

1. Stay on track with environmental sustainability and climate change as or first strategic initiative; review statements and policies from other Co-ops; consider recommending a clear commitment within our Ends and/or our policy register
2. Discuss Todd's points about promoting strategic thinking among the Board v. looking at a particular vision
3. Discuss whether or not Board needs multi year plan
4. Evaluate and implement greater use of Beekeeper in the Committee's work
5. Define potential Vision and Value terms for possible incorporation in Ends and/or our policy register

Valerie

1. Make sure BOD calendar includes a line for the Strategic Work Committee with dates.
2. Work with Doug on next month's Board Packet
3. Present Capital Campaign debrief to Board
4. Work with admin to organize Board Google Drive folders and files

Doug

1. Set a date for financial numbers from Columinate Financial Services before the next meeting, to include POS sales, labor margin, and days of cash on hand
2. Provide basic training in Beekeeper functions at next BOD meeting and set up access for Charles and Todd.
3. Reframe BOD admin role in an effort to recruit.
4. Follow up on concerns about safety and related proximity of parking spaces to Café window and possible need for barrier
5. Share NCG Statement on Israel-Gaza with owners via website, social media and email – platforms as recommended by Marketing
6. Ensure monitoring summaries are continually compiled into a spreadsheet
7. Work with Valerie on Board packet until a new admin is hired

Susan

1. Resend signup to BOD members to commit to various activities.
2. Show Corinne where to find contact info for new owners.
3. Invite Thane to next BOD meeting to talk about Columinate and what it provides.
4. Talk to Thane about organizing local training

Charles

1. Reach out to Heather Spaulding at MOFGA for its assessment and a summary of the NFCA position on farm bill

John

1. Send climate change resilience plans and surveys from the state and elsewhere to Valerie for the Strategic Work Committee.

Owner Comments

Michael McCormack suggested that the first step for the Strategic Work Committee should be to stay in business, and grow the business, and grow and stimulate the local food economy. Environmental sustainability is a wonderful goal that could be a byproduct of growing the business.

Debrief / Evaluate Meeting

Appreciation was expressed for everyone's attendance and participation in person and online.

Public Meeting Adjourned at 8:03pm.