

## **Belfast Community Co-op Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

**January 22, 2025**, Public meeting commenced at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom.

**Directors Present:** Corinne Burr, Ernie Cooper (Vice President), Rio Greeley, John Krueger (treasurer), Jim Miller, Charles Sterbach, Valerie Tate (secretary), Collin Thompson, Susan Cutting (president)

**Absent:** Todd Bluhm

**Staff:** Doug Johnson (GM), Jamie Cermak, Heather Hay

**Owners:** Ashleigh Russell, Michael Walter, Jamila Levasseur, Ridgely Fuller, Joe Pearl

### **Preliminaries**

#### **Agenda Review**

Consent Agenda approved

Review of NCG Statement on BCC website added

#### **Announcements**

Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) Conference, May 29 - 31, Duluth, MN – Budget supports attendance of two Board members. Costs would be reduced if the Board applies and is approved to make a presentation.

The 2025 Principle Six Conference, Cooperatives Build a Better Maine, Saturday, May 3, 2025, Auburn, Maine. The conference will celebrate the 2025 International Year of Cooperatives.

Belfast Community Co-op Worker Party, Sunday, January 26, 5:00pm - 9:00pm, Belfast Curling Club.

#### **Owner Comments**

Three owners made impassioned presentations calling for a boycott of Israeli products, displaying large photos of people who have been killed and scenes of destruction. Concern was expressed that country of origin is not clear for bulk items and some grocery items such as Field Day Tahini. One owner spoke to the number of Israeli products displayed during Hanukkah, including Manischewitz products. [Note: Manischewitz is a U.S. company, not an Israeli company.] Comments were made about collecting signatures to call for a special meeting; frustration that tabling on Co-op property was not permitted; finding other means of communicating with customers; and predicting that "... a sufficient portion of members may decide to rescind their membership over the next few months." There were questions about the work of the ad hoc committee.

Another owner and former worker said that he had heard from "... many, many people who disagreed with the three people who spoke." He encouraged the Board to continue to let the GM make operational decisions.

### **GM Reporting**

#### **Alignment**

Doug reported that CFNE approved the Co-op's application for an extension of its line of credit; and the NCG loan came through. Cash flow is fine right now. Sales have been great. Jamie and Doug have been planning the Annual Meeting and working on the Annual Report.

#### **GM Update Report**

There are 5,458 Co-op owners in good standing. Our percentage of sales to owners has increased. It's up to 70% from about 62% last year. Prepared foods have provided a huge boost in sales. The 1st fiscal quarter was 20+% over last year. In answer to a question about what was generating these increases, Doug said the new store is beautiful; we're able to offer more of what people are looking for from their Co-op – more variety and more affordable options for folks; and the Farm Fresh Program, WIC, EBT, SNAP, and CORE are also driving sales.

## **Board Action Items**

### **Consent Agenda**

The BOD accepted by consensus:

1. December Minutes
2. Minutes of 12/11 Special Board Meeting
3. Minutes of 12/27 Special Board Meeting

### **2025 Board Election Ballot**

Ernie provided an update. There are 4 candidates running for more than 4 seats, so it's an uncontested election. Two of the candidates are Board members running for reelection – Ernie and Jim. The two new candidates are Kevin Cope and Kim Relick. The policy requires that for the election to be official, at least 10% of member owners in good standing need to cast votes. So, we need to have a minimum of about 550 owners voting. That number will be brought up to date on March 2 when the voting starts. The Board approved the official ballot.

### **Review of NCG Statement on the BCC website**

The Board agreed that it would add a note to the introduction of the NCG Statement on the Israeli-Palestine conflict that the Co-op will do what it can to identify the country of origin on products as it does in the produce aisle.

There was more discussion in response to owner comments at the beginning of the meeting, including opposition to what's going on in Israel and Gaza; the role of the Board v. the role of Operations; what a boycott would mean in terms of setting a precedent; all of the time that the Board has taken on the matter; the decision it made to align with the NCG Statement; identifying country of origin so shoppers can make their own choices; the role of the Co-op in the community to help people stay healthy, to provide a welcoming place for LGBTQ+ people; our policy on tabling only by Common Cents recipients; that we don't survey owners on other matters; how to educate owners on the complexities of our food system and businesses that have holdings with companies that are in Israel.

The Board agreed that the Board Development Committee would look further into policy approaches and report back at the next meeting of the full Board.

### **Generative Discussion Topics**

Susan requested that Board members respond with their priorities for generative topics to discuss in future B meetings.

### **Public Meeting Adjourned**

Due to time constraints, since a Board Training Webinar was about to start, the meeting was adjourned without further owner comments or a debrief.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30pm. Minutes respectfully submitted by Valerie Tate, scribe.

### **Homework Items**

Full Board

1. Introduce ourselves to workers while we are in the store and say how much we appreciate them.
2. Email ideas for Common Cents celebration/meet and greet to OEC.
3. Sign up for activities on the BOD Google Drive
4. Respond to all policy polls
5. Email priorities for 'B' meeting generative topics to Susan

Committee Chairs

1. Compile list of committee tasks and email those to Corinne.

Owner Engagement Committee

1. Offer a possible framework for a Common Cents celebration that BOD members can consider and respond with ideas.

2. Learn about intersection of Marketing and OEC roles and responsibilities
3. Implement process for Board member calls to new Owners who express interest in serving on the Board and/or committees.
4. Evaluate how Owners and broader community view the current Ends Statement and share with Strategic Work Committee
5. Discuss using the Ends Report as the basis for an Owner Forum (possibly in conjunction with Strategic Work Committee)
6. Send email to BOD re: individual's commitment to Tea & Talk events in 2025

#### Board Development Committee

1. Look into policy approaches regarding the call for a boycott and report back at the next meeting of the full Board.
2. Develop a plan in discussion with Thane to better utilize Columinate.
3. Re: Columinate Trainings
  - a. Flesh out the BOD Guidelines for training expectations
  - b. Develop a system of compliance for utilizing Columinate services
  - c. Conceptualize ways trainings could be done as a group
  - d. Develop a Columinate services evaluation plan

#### Strategic Work Committee

1. Stay on track with environmental sustainability and climate change as our 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. Meet with Doug for conversation about goals and process; and his thoughts about incorporating environmental sustainability into our Ends and/or policy governance.
3. Find a grocery store leader in environmental sustainability and/or local food systems we could invite as a speaker for future owner forums. Check with Thane and Doug.
4. Discuss whether or not Board needs multi year plan
5. Discuss using the Ends Report as the basis for an Owner Forum (possibly in conjunction with OEC)

#### Valerie

1. Request header for Capital Campaign Debrief now in the Board Google Drive

#### Valerie & Emily

1. Organize Board Google Drive folders and files

#### Doug

1. Update the Board introduction to the NCG Statement on Israel-Palestine Conflict, noting that the Co-op would provide country of origin information as possible.
2. Make sure we recast the budget in 6 months. Add the row for depreciation.
3. Provide basic training in Beekeeper functions at the next BOD meeting and set up access for Charles and Todd.
4. Follow up on concerns about safety and related proximity of parking spaces to Café window and possible need for barrier
5. Compile a list of the Co-op's occupancy costs

#### Susan

1. Show Corinne where to find contact info for new owners.
2. Talk to Thane about organizing local training

#### Susan & Valerie

1. Make sense of the next steps for the Strategic Work Committee

#### Susan & Jim

1. Work on timing planning for future meetings

#### Emily

1. Update policy B2
2. Update BOD monitoring calendar to include A/B meeting schedule