

Belfast Community Co-op Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2025, Public meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m. Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library and via Zoom

Directors Present: Todd Bluhm, Ernie Cooper, Susan Cutting (president), Rio Greeley, John Krueger (treasurer), Jim Miller (vice president), Kim Relick (secretary), Valerie Tate

Staff: Doug Johnson (GM), Emily Berry (scribe)

Owners: Mary Bigelow, Annie Bussiere, Jamie Cermak, Richard Dines, Gina Ferendo, Steve Gold, Heather Q Hay, Becca Lane, Jay O'Hara, James Shimko, Ashleigh Russell

Guests: Joe Doura, Hether Jonna

Preliminaries

Agenda

The BOD accepted the agenda by consensus.

Announcements

Directors are still welcome to sign up for Thanksgiving bagging on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

There will be a holiday tasting at the Co-op from 4-6pm on Dec 4th. There will be active and passive demos throughout the store with a wine tasting in the cafe. Operations would love to have a director available to welcome shoppers at the door.

This November marked the 10 year anniversary of Doug Johnson as the BCC's General Manager. The board presented Doug with a framed photograph in recognition and appreciation.

Owner Comments

Owners currently planning to run for BOD seats in the 2026 election were asked to say a few words.

Mary Bigelow - has been a resident of Belfast for 25 years and before Belfast she lived in northern Vermont. Since the early 80s she has benefited from the amazing cooperatives she has lived near. She now feels it is time to contribute in a serious way and is very inspired by the work of the BOD and GM.

Steve Gold - is a recent resident of Belfast and is looking forward to getting involved in the community. He is interested in making sure that the Co-op stays healthy and continues to grow and best serve people in the community.

Richard Dines - is in the process of moving to Belfast full time. His whole career has been in cooperatives, including credit unions. He is currently on the boards of the Food Co-op Initiative and the Shared Capital Cooperative. He loves this community, co-ops, and food and he is really looking forward to serving.

James Shimko - has been an owner of BCC for 5 years and has found it a pleasure to visit and be part of the co-op. He teaches at Husson University and has always worked to promote and support nonprofit organizations, and is currently on the board of Still I am One. He is very happy to see the success of the Co-op and is looking forward to working with the BOD.

GM Reporting

Alignment

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, this meeting is being conducted before the October financials have been finalized. As soon as the financials are finalized, Doug will send those to the Finance Committee for review. Preliminary numbers show that sales were up 9% from budget and up 14% over last year.

GM Update Report

Directors questioned how operations planned to assess the SNAP issue. Operations plans to keep the assistance protocols in place for now and reassess at the beginning of December. Operations has added a number of people to the CORE program which has resulted in twice as many discounts from the program. The supplementary coupons to offset Farm Fresh Rewards (FFR) disappearing are about the same. There has been success with people allocating their owner rewards to the CORE program and/or the Belfast Soup Kitchen. Operations has also seen the at-register donations to the Soup Kitchen almost double since SNAP funding was withheld. There has also been \$1300 in at-register donations to the CORE program. This situation highlights the need that has always been there as well as the number of organizations doing great work in this community. Overall it is encouraging to see how the community came together over this issue with direct action to feed people.

Board Action Items

Consent Agenda

The BOD accepted by consensus the October 22, 2025 BOD meeting minutes.

C4 - Board Meetings

The BOD accepted by consensus policy C4 - Board Meetings as in compliance.

CLBD Contract Renewal

Susan spoke with Columinate about alternatives to the CBLD contract. Based on her conversation it makes more sense for the BOD to utilize Columinate services through the CBLD contract instead of ala carte services.

The BOD agreed to enroll in Columinate's Regular CBLD program for 2026.

A - Global Ends

The environmental impact of the renovated building and systems has not been included in this Ends Report, being the first Ends Report since completion of the renovation, but going forward there will be cumulative data to report. It will be good to keep in mind that while many environmental systems were added to the updated building, energy usage increased. Directors questioned whether the rooftop solar panels will save on energy cost. BCC is housing the panels, and because of that will get a little credit at the end of year. However, the panels are not feeding into the building, all the energy generated is being fed into the grid. In six years there will be an opportunity to buy the panels back. Initially, the opportunity to buy back the panels was a good deal, but the current administration has taken incentives away. Directors expressed that the solar panels are no harm to the business and they like the idea of using and promoting clean energy.

Directors asked Doug what his process is for researching grants available for capital improvements. Unfortunately, the BCC is not eligible for many grants since it is a long-standing for-profit retail business. Most grants available for food co-ops are limited to start-ups.

One director noted the nebulous nature of the Ends, making him question the Ends rather than the report. How do we prove that we have complied with a policy that is squishy? Hether Jonna, BCC's Columinate Consultant, pointed out that Ends policies in general are squishy and it is the interpretations within the report that are meant to clarify, with data that supports the interpretation and shows progress toward meeting the End. This discussion also highlighted the fact that the Ends Report is a retrospective document while the business plan is a prospective document. Hether added that the BOD's job is to set the direction and make sure the Co-op is moving in that direction. The Ends Report is the way the BOD is finding out if the GM is doing what has been asked of him. The Ends Report should be (and is) lengthy, comprehensive, and full of all the amazing things the BCC has done over the past year.

The BOD accepted by consensus the 2025 Ends Report as in compliance.

Discussion Items

Topics for Board Retreat

The BOD discussed the agenda for their upcoming retreat. The key topics that will be covered include: the Policy Governance framework, the Ends, forming a nonprofit to further the Ends work and strategic thinking.

A director added that they would like to spend some time on fiduciary responsibility and come out of the retreat with a better sense of the value a director can bring to the Co-op.

Hether offered the BOD a bonus session on Friday Dec 5th to do an activity about the balance sheet. Directors who are available will attend.

Board Appointment

The BOD agreed to discuss appointing Mary Bigelow to the board ahead of the retreat.

The BOD accepted by consensus the appointment of Mary Bigelow.

The BOD agreed by consensus to invite all the board candidates to the December retreat.

Annual Meeting Planning

The Annual Meeting will be held at the Shrine Club in Belfast. There will not be a band but there will be good food. Right now directors involved in planning are looking for discussion topics to be on signs at each of the tables. They are also in contact with someone at the History Museum, looking for objects or photographs from the Co-op's past for display.

Finance Committee

Due to the early scheduling of this meeting, there is nothing to discuss at this time.

Owner Engagement / 50th Committee

The OEC was unable to have a full meeting this month but remained in conversation with Jamie about the big 50th Anniversary party scheduled for August 26, 2026, down by the waterfront. Right now they are gathering ideas and determining how much involvement the board will have. They have discussed using files from the museum, displaying one product from each of the last 50 years, collaborating with Belfast Summer Nights, and looking for original members and board members to speak. They are hoping to engage Phoenix Knights Gaming to run the kids section.

Jim will help John with the cooking class event idea.

Board Development Committee

Nothing additional to discuss.

Strategic Work Committee

The next meeting of the Strategic Work Committee is scheduled for January. The board retreat may inform what the committee does next.

Executive Committee

Nothing to report.

Closings

Homework

Full Board

1. Respond to all policy polls
2. Let Susan know if you are interested in submitting an article for the Co-op's newsletter
3. Document shopper feedback for inclusion in the BOD packet
4. Send ideas/input for the 50th Anniversary party to OEC or Jamie

Committee Chairs

1. Submit annual reports by the beginning of December

Owner Engagement Committee

1. Learn about intersection of Marketing and OEC roles and responsibilities
2. Implement a process for Board members to contact Owners or staff who express interest in serving on the Board and/or committees.
3. Evaluate how Owners and broader community view the current Ends Statement and share with SWC
4. Discuss using the Ends Report as the basis for an Owner Forum (possibly in conjunction with SWC)

Strategic Work Committee

1. Include Doug in strategic topics discussions as needed.
2. Discuss whether or not Board needs multi year plan
3. Discuss using the Ends Report as the basis for an Owner Forum (possibly in conjunction with OEC)

Finance Committee

1. Go over the 2024 financial review

Executive & 50th Committees

1. Look into bylaws and brainstorm ways to comply with AM parameters while shortening the business portion of the AM

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 when possible.
2. In future B1 reports:
 - a. define net income
 - b. Interpret financial trends
3. Delve into mapping a path to meeting a livable wage

Susan

1. Talk to BCC's Columinate Consultant about organizing a local training
2. Resend annual reports request with examples to John
3. Connect with Hether re: candidate orientation

Owner Comments

None.

Debrief

Directors found the meeting productive and are looking forward to the coming year. Susan expressed the BOD's appreciation that all the candidates were able to attend.

Meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm. Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Berry, scribe.