



Board of Directors May 15, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Present: Jim Hutcheon, Ruth Brownstein, Anch Bergeson, Bob Marsalli, Jennifern Falknor, Jeni O'Connor, Ike Nwankwo, Andie Giron (by zoom)

Other members present: Trudy Springer, Tora Saeger, Miles Batchelder, Mo Tobin

Facilitator: Ruth

Notes: Miles

Announcements

There are some very important meetings coming up and board participation is strongly encouraged.

There will be a screening of the film "Food Co-op" about the Park Slope Food co-op in Brooklyn, New York, next Thursday from 6 – 8 pm at the Downtown Office. It is important to have as much of the board present as possible to show the staff we have their backs.

On June 11, from 11 to 4:30 will be an All Staff Meeting at ASSHO with John Steinman who does lots of work around communication. Different perspectives of board and staff can inhibit communication, and this is a great opportunity to facilitate building relationships.

On Thursday June 12 from 3 to 6 PM is the first meeting of the Board of Directors with Dr. Bre Haizlip

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the cooperative is to contribute to the health and well-being of people by providing wholesome foods and other goods and services, accessible to all, through a locally oriented, collectively managed, not-for-profit cooperative organization that relies on **consensus** decision making. We strive to make human effects on the earth and its inhabitants positive and renewing, and to encourage economic and social justice. Our goals are to:

- Provide information about food
- Make good food accessible to more people
- Support efforts to increase democratic process
- Support efforts to foster a socially and economically egalitarian society
- Provide information about collective process and consensus decision making
- Support local production
- See to the long term health of the business
- Assist in the development of local community resources

Land Acknowledgement

We start the meeting today by taking a moment to honor the land and the people whose ancestors have been stewards of this unceded land since time immemorial. We acknowledge the contemporary communities of Squaxin Island, Nisqually and all the people of the Medicine Creek Treaty.

Member Comment

Tora Saeger, the owner of the commercial (café) building next to the West Side Garden Center, spoke about efforts to work with the Co-op to address the bamboo encroaching the garden area of her restaurant. She has sought help with removal of the bamboo from the Co-op for a couple years. She is now asking the Co-op to provide soil to fill planting containers to cover the affected area.

As the issues raised are property and property-line related, the Board agreed to consider the request in Executive Session at the end of the meeting. Tora is on a short time line for opening and hopes for a resolution this week.

Jeni will follow up with Tora after the meeting.

Trudy Springer wanted to know if there are plans to expand the west side store.

There are none.

Trudy Springer expressed concern over the Co-op's legal ownership. Because we are not a true co-op, legally, the members are not owners of the Co-op. Trudy asks who actually owns the co-op?

Mo Tobin explained that because we were incorporated before the legal co-op structure existed, our tax status makes the question hazy. If we wanted to be sure, we'd have to decide it in court. If it went before a judge, they would look at the bylaws and most likely decide the members are the owners. The Bylaws are very clear and we have and will continue to operate under the assumption that the members are the owners.

The Board engaged in a brief discussion around potentially changing legal status. This question arises regularly and what it would take to change our status under the RCW.

Dave offered that non-profit corporations, which is what we legally are, do not have owners but dissolution clauses which provide for distribution of assets if the corporation ceases to function.

Previous Commitments

- Jim will email the Board requesting feedback related to the Low-Income Proposal to bring to the Advocacy Committee.
- Jim will connect with Dr. Bree about masking at the June 12 session.

New Commitments

- Jeni follow up with Tora on her Soil request following the Board's Executive Session
- Mo will provide a follow-up on the ongoing results of the CX Survey in August or September
- Mo will send the monthly CX survey report to the board
- Mo will check in with Audrey at the Olympia Film Society to follow up on concerns raised by collective staff
- Miles will facilitate the next meeting

CX Membership Survey

Mo came to present the most recent monthly report on the CX survey. The idea is to get as much data in the moment the customer is shopping. With this survey, we can collect and compare our data to other grocery stores and other co-ops and co-ops of our size.

Reports are generated every month. The data will be more instructive, because there will be more of it, the longer the survey is active.

The data is most useful for operations and will likely make more sense in a few months.

We have some data from a previous survey, and we'd like to use that data also. Collective member Danielle is looking through current and previous data, which is very comment heavy, and sorting based on key words

We all noticed when we look through the comments that they are often very contradictory. There is no apparent consensus about what our problems are. Still there is a lot to learn.

In the storewide summary, it is helpful to look at NCG data that summarizes all coops. That is very useful for us to compare ourselves to other NCG coops.

The store specific summaries are a little more interesting, where you can dig into store specifics. The west side comments were a lot of love, satisfaction, and loyalty. Likely to recommend was 83% which is much higher than NCG average.

The data is specific to the time of day and days of the week. This can be very useful, for instance, in terms of looking at how many cashiers are scheduled. Staff are looking at this in terms of what we can respond to and improve, and what we can do to positively affect margin.

West side tends to get more comments than the east side. There is more loyalty. As a neighborhood store it seems more a part of their lifestyle than the east side. Westside shoppers have tended to be more long winded in the survey comments.

The Eastside pretty good percentages compared to NCG numbers, though ease of moving through the store is at 36% while NCG is 67%. Eastside also has a 2-5 PM problem.

There is some valuable information here in terms of expansion. Ease of moving

through the eastside is marked low, so we know that when we head into raising capital for expansion that will be part of our messaging.

Remodeled bathrooms will help raise the numbers around cleanliness.

Mo will return in August or September to update the board further.

Cash Register Roundup

Staff did not consent to the Olympia Film Society as the next cash register round up because the donations were designated to their general fund. The Olympia Film Society switched from Collective Management to a hierarchical model with an Executive Director. The staff Collective doesn't want funding to go to support the Executive Director's salary, but rather to some specific project.

Thus far, the Olympia Film Society has not responded to Mo's communicated request from the staff collective.

The Arbutus Folk School has asked to be round up recipient to offer financial help to students. The fund may do 3 months for Olympia Film Society and 3 months for Arbutus.

There was discussion around the role and functions of the Community Sustaining Fund (CSF), and concerns expressed about their ability to administer these funds effectively. Is this current arrangement sustainable?

As the Board's Liaison to CSF, Anch agreed this is ongoing work and welcomes input and guidance from the Board to bring to her role as liaison. They are working on specific infrastructural and procedural improvements which Anch will discuss more in committee reports.

The Co-op wrote and adopted an internal policy, but there is no written agreement with CSF. The Co-op's seat on the board is designated.

Proposal to Seek \$100,000 Eastside Expansion Planning Grant

The federal program is the Healthy Foods Financing Initiative (HFFI) from the Food Access and Retail Expansion (FARE) Fund. The grant limit for this program is \$100,000. The proposed step is a pre application. If accepted, we would be invited to submit a full proposal. That planning grant proposal, which may include

funding for staff, will take some time to prepare.

This proposal is also to consider a loan program that might be a good opportunity. The loan is also an application process separate from the grant process. There may be a pre-application process, a way we can get a pre-approval before committing to a loan. The interest rate is probably 3% and member loans will likely be higher. Loans in this program can be 1 to 3 million dollars. It will take a while working with staff to determine if the loan would be appropriate for the project and the Co-op's ability to pay it off.

It was noted that the grant program states an emphasis on underserved communities and question about how this relates specifically to the coop. Dave explained underserved communities are defined by location of the store. The east side is in a low income neighborhood and meets the criteria.

Dave can complete the grant pre-application on his own but will need the assistance of finance staff for the loan pre-application.

PROPOSAL: Seeking consent to approve pursuing submission of a pre-application planning grant to HFFI for the east side store as well as a loan pre-approval application

Blocks: 0

Stand Aside: 0

Consent: 9

CONSENT

Staff and Committee Reports

Local Committee

- Look at 2014 Charter to see if we want to updates
- Outline our goals
- Identify local businesses with whom we would like to establish and nurture relationships – will be seeking support and approval of departments so as not to step on toes/ will attend

Exploring ways of connecting vendors to members.

Connecting local vendors with tabling opportunities.

Local committee was heavily involved in tabling prior to COVID. Big emphasis on tabling local produce.

Capital Campaign Committee

The main thing we talked about is communication and who makes decisions. We're getting data so we can target some people to help with financing.

There are lots of questions for which we need to get advice, so we are looking developing a set of questions and identifying a pool of attorneys with experience in capital campaigns, coops, and perhaps just non-profits.

We're looking at how we're going to market the expansion. Successful capital campaigns need targeted outreach. We want to reach all 20k members to give them an opportunity to participate. Some members we will need to touch more than the others. Offering preferred stock options is a tool used by some other coops.

The committee meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month.

Expansion committee

The committee met today and worked on drafting a communications plan around the expansion project. That will be coming together. The committee is being very thoughtful about maintaining good communications with and between groups.

Staff Report –

The Collective is about to hire 6 new people.

We continue working with Dr Bre at her soulful Saturdays at ASSHO – come get your therapy this Saturday!

Double Digit growth continues at both stores.