

Co-op Membership and Communications Committee meeting March 6, 2018

Co-op board committee members present: Fred Feinstein, Diane Curran, Mary Rooker (on the phone). Also present: board member Susanne Lowen.

Visitors – Karen Elrich (a founding board member), Megan Scribner, Sarah Fitzpatrick, Joseph Klockner, Tina Schneider, Emily Townsend

Agenda:

1. April 29 – membership meeting.
2. Takoma Junction development
3. Earth Day volunteers

Membership meeting.

Fred notes that first two topics on agenda are related. Membership meeting will fall in the middle of consideration of NDC revised plan. NDC presented a proposal in September. Council reacted by passing a 3-page resolution. What NDC presents in April is supposed to be responsive to that. Co-op will be responding to proposal.

Membership meeting is part of what co-op can do to inform and engage membership.

Group discusses possible agenda items for membership meeting.

Comments and suggestions –

- Co-op should present its analysis of NDC proposal,
- Co-op should invite political officials to discuss with members. (Fred notes that at the last meeting in the fall, we had all of the candidates for city council come and talk about the development.)
- We need to do a better job of advertising the meeting. Many people did not know about it last year.
- Information about Junction development should go out before the meeting. The meeting should be an opportunity to rally already-informed and concerned members.
- We need to a discussion of policy governance and how it applies here.

Takoma Junction development.

Group discusses member engagement and involvement. Comments by participants--

- Non-board members say they have come to express their frustration with lack of action and communication by Co-op. They present letter with list of demands for action by Co-op (attached).
- Several people said they learned about Junction development from source other than Co-op, and that they could not find any current information about

- Junction development from Co-op website or bulletin boards. "I can't figure out how to get Co-op newsletters by going on website. I had to go to a Facebook page to find out." "Website is unintelligible." Co-op members and shoppers have no idea that there is a development proposal for the lot next door or what it means. The only sources of information are elsewhere.
- Extreme frustration with Co-op's lack of communication expressed. Fiduciary responsibility of Co-op board should include better communication with members about Junction issue.
 - Co-op doesn't look good. Co-op looks like it isn't fighting for itself.
 - Current newsletter consists of ads. The Co-op looks like any other grocery store, not a community institution. Newsletter should have content about the Junction development and other issues.
 - There needs to be a place inside the store where people can see information about the Junction development. There should be a bulletin board in the Co-op – a place to post important events.
 - Question -- Can the member bulletin board outside the store be used? It should alert shoppers to important things that are happening.
 - Flyers should be put in grocery bags. Co-op should be trying to reach shoppers and members, not relying on community group to do it. For one thing, Co-op has access to a much bigger group of supporters than community group.
 - Questions -- What is the interaction between the Co-op and the community group? Shouldn't they be collaborating? What is the Co-op's position on the development? Not possible to tell. What steps is the Co-op willing to take to protect its survival?
 - Co-op has done a good job of advocating for responsible development of Takoma Junction, but information is not getting out to members. Many people shop at the Co-op who are not part of community group and do not go to City Council meetings, so they don't know. How can Co-op reach out to them? but they would be concerned if they knew the risk to Co-op posed by development.
 - Members should be encouraged to be in contact with elected representatives to share their concerns – in anticipation of NDC proposal.
 - Co-op should be telling people the dates of important City Council meetings.
 - Time is urgent – Decision on Co-op development will be made May 9.
 - Workers should be included in effort.

Fred – Member feedback at this meeting is important. Information has "gone up on the wall," but understands the view that it is not enough. There is huge concern about development and it threatens the viability of the Co-op. Those things have been said by the Co-op at public meetings, but is a concern that members are saying many members don't know it. The question is how do we address that more effectively.

Possible actions to propose to board:

- Update website to provide current information about Junction development.
- Make sure it is possible – and easy – to sign up for newsletters by going on website.
- Dedicate a bulletin board or other space in Co-op to information about Junction development.
- Make a strategic plan for informing members about current situation at the Junction, then updating notices as proposal progresses. Include bulletin board, flyers in shopping bags, e-mail letters to members. “People should not walk in the store without knowing about this problem.” (Note that Karen Elrich has a very skilled colleague who makes flyers.)
- Member bulletin board – can it be devoted to Junction development for next few months? (NB -- It is outside store, not highly visible, therefore may not be as useful as in-store bulletin board).
- Work with management to have cashiers provide information about how to get newsletter, also alerts re important meetings.
- Try to identify things that members can do to build support within the community. Examples -- talk with vendors and other people who use the Co-op.
- Set up a “members’ corner” inside the store.
- Find a way for members to interact with each other without having to go through Board or management. Could there be a place in store or bulletin board that is for members only?