

TPSS Board of Representatives Meeting

Open Session (public part of meeting) Minutes

Date/Location/Time: March 19, 2020, meeting (held remotely, on-line) 6:30 p.m.
Board present: Diane Curran (DC), Fred Feinstein (FF), Adam Frank (AF), Susan Cho (SC), Bob Gibson (BG), Sawa Kamara (SK), Susanne Lowen (SL), Katea Stitt (KS), Katherine Tsantiris (KT)
Staff present: Mike Houston (MH), General Manager (GM)
Minutes submitted by: Solveig Mortensen (SM), Board Administrator
Meeting held by Zoom video and telephone connection.

Board ACTION:

- The Board approved the February 27, 2020 open session Board meeting minutes.
- The Board accepted the GM's Monitoring Report: Policy L9-Membership as submitted.
- The Board approved the renewal of the Co-op's membership in National Co-op Grocers (NCG) for the upcoming annual membership period.*
- Due to the newly-arisen need to handle the impacts of the COVID-19 disruption, the Board tabled work on the Co-op's five-year strategic plan.

***Note:** The Board discussed how historically, prior to the Co-op's participation in NCG, the Co-op attempted to do collective purchasing with neighboring co-ops that could not meet NCG's requisite sales quotas. The collective effort did not work out, and the Co-op then joined NCG. MH has reported to the Board that NCG membership provides substantial cost savings; and without it, the Co-op would need to increase grocery, frozen, refrigerated, and bulk product prices by 15-20%. With the Co-op's union contract staffing model, current sales volume, and commitment to keeping prices lower, the Board agreed that continued NCG membership was the most responsible option.

Housekeeping:

1. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Board held the March meeting by Zoom and posted the following notice on the Co-op website:

“Consistent with government guidance regarding protection against the spread of coronavirus, the Co-op Board of representatives will not be holding an open in-person meeting at Historic Takoma in March. On March 19, 20 the Board will meet by telephone/video. Any members who have questions or comments they wish to be addressed at the Board meeting are encouraged to write to Board@tpss.com.”

2. SC enrolled the Board in a “Basic” version of a Business G Suite account.

The new account gives the Board Administrator a more secure Google system for Board communications and documents. The G Suite account is completely separate from the store

operations account. It allows current and future Board members to track their own actions more accurately, and it reduces oversight from Google itself. The Board members agreed that once all members have access and know how to use it, all future Board communications will take place through the G Suite account.

Open Member Forum: No other Co-op members present._

GM Report:

Monthly GM Report, including response to COVID-19

MH reported the Co-op's taking the following steps in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- reducing hours
- hiring temporary staff, including many former restaurant workers, and paying them at an hourly rate and eventually providing them workman's compensation coverage
- scheduling more breaks for staff; with the increased activity and volume of sales, the average staff shift is more challenging than usual
- starting an employee's line of credit, so employees can purchase groceries without having to put money down
- ensuring that the Co-op remains stocked with cleaning supplies, such as paper towels, bleach, and other cleaners
- contingency planning for an employee PTO bank, so no one staff will have to exhaust all their PTO
- contingency planning for several tiers of staff succession for unexpected vacancies and for various operational functions--ordering, scheduling, and making payroll
- contingency planning for a scenario where there is a limit on the number of staff who can be present in the store, or staff become ill, or the Co-op needs to shut-down
- ensuring remote ways to access the Co-op's systems if staff cannot enter the physical store

MH shared that Co-op management and staff have had to make quick decisions in response to the COVID-19 concern, but that the staff and store are doing well. Staff are managing all the extra ordering and delivering; he expects ordering to begin stabilizing. MH projected giving a report on the recent buying and basket size increases in a couple of weeks.

In response to a question re: whether the Co-op is monitoring crowding in the store, MH shared that other stores practicing limited access are capping their capacity at fifty people, counting their employees. MH explained how if the Co-op limits in-store access, it would be at thirty-five people and additional people would wait outside. MH confirmed that a change in CDC and the Department of Health guidelines would trigger the Co-op's limiting access.

In response to a question re: the Co-op's taking measures similar to those taken during the furlough, MH stated that the Co-op has set-up a similar support for the staff. MH noted how in the case of the furlough the need was limited to government workers, who would receive back pay. In the present COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Co-op does not have the capacity to means-test lost work hours or project the time period people would need a credit.

In response to a question re: designating early morning shopping hours for senior and immune-compromised individuals, MH stated that this option was considered but rejected for the time being. MH explained how the beginning of the day is when the Co-op is less likely to have the

most items in stock; how the practice of designated hours can give a false sense of security; and, how as a membership organization, the Co-op should remain available to all member-owners. MH noted the community guidance he has provided to encourage shoppers to limit, not their purchasing, but trips to the Co-op and to encourage shoppers to buy for neighbors, partners, kids, and vulnerable populations, so more people can stay home.

MH proposed the Board could give the Co-op support, by following the Columinate consultant's suggestion of asking other local co-op's what they are experiencing right now. The Board planned to follow up.

MH informed the Board that the City contacted him about using the parking lot on the east side of the Co-op as a temporary space for the Takoma Park Farmer's Market. The Farmer's Market was seeking a larger space to increase safety for shoppers during the COVID-19 threat. MH shared that the Co-op would support the Farmer's Market by giving them a certain space on the Lot, which would allow each vendor to use only one 10x10 tent and spread out. MH stated that the City was working with the Co-op to provide parking for Co-op staff across the street. Some parking spaces will also be left on the parking lot.

While the Board did not oppose hosting the Farmer's Market, Board members discussed concerns about risks and benefits of hosting the Farmer's Market. Concerns were raised that this venue may result in crowding and congregating and that outside vendors would need to be mindful of best practices, such as not providing samples. On the other hand, the Farmer's Market is a food source for the community, and provides resilience when large scale distribution systems become fragile. Outdoor grocery shopping may also alleviate some of the COVID-19 risks. The Co-op may find that it will move some products outside as well. MH planned to share the Board's concerns and questions with the City and the Old Town Business Association.

MH stated that he met with Janet Rumble, Interim Executive Director of Crossroads, and Crossroads consultant Christy Balch. They continue to collaborate on a pilot program which would double reimbursements to users of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for fresh fruits and vegetables. The program is known as "GusNIP."

L-9, Membership: The Board approved the GM's monitoring report of policy L9 as submitted.

Board Business:

Five-year Planning Process: MH reported that the Co-op's response to COVID-19 is now his primary focus and is quite time-consuming. Currently, MH and staff do not have enough time to work on the five year strategic planning process or to evaluate the shopper survey data. The Board agreed to table the five-year plan. The Board offered to provide help in reviewing the results of the shopper survey.

MH confirmed the final tally of submitted surveys to be 1,059, an excellent level of participation.

Committee updates:

Membership and Community Affairs Committee (MCAC): FF reported that the MCAC met, confirmed their committee chair (FF), and reviewed the type of tasks the Publicity Committee

would do. FF and MH noted that the Co-op’s Earth Day is cancelled and the Co-op’s Thursday night events are on hold.

FF reported that on May 7th, the Co-op’s Community Engagement Manager Leandra, SK, and BG will be attending a training to learn to train-the-trainers of SNAP outreach, *i.e.*, learning how to train the people who will provide information about SNAP benefits to communities.

FF also shared that SK, Leandra, and Roxanne continue to partner with Kokua foods to provide food distribution to food-insecure families. They pick up food from different restaurants and take it to local families. SK has also started her own food distribution process in Montgomery County through the non-profit Small Things Matter.

Policy Committee: The Policy Committee had no updates at this time.

Nomination Committee: FF shared that the Committee met, SK is continuing to work on their charter, they are discussing creating a timeline so their notices go out earlier, and they are creating a topical calendar too.

7:50 pm meeting adjourned

Board Representatives’ Committee Memberships:

Membership and Community Affairs Committee: FF, SK, BG, DC (FF Chair)

Audit and Finance Committee: AF, SC, BG, KT (AF Chair)

Personnel Committee: DC, SK, KS (DC Chair)

Policy Committee: SC, AF, KT (SC Chair)

Nominations Committee: SK, FF (SK Chair)

Junction Committee: FF, SK, KS (FF Chair)

Expansion Committee: AF, SC, SL (AF Chair)

Board Development Committee: DC, AF (chair position shared)

Term 2019-2020 Meeting Attendance:

	Dec	Jan	Feb
Cho	*	*	*
Curran	*	Ex	*
Feinstein	*	*	Ex
Frank	Ex	*	*
Gibson	*	*	*
Kamara	*	*	*
Lowen	*	*	Ex
Stitt	*	Ex	Ex

Tsantiris	Ex	*	Ex
-----------	----	---	----

(Ex=excused)

Board Terms:

Board Representative	Term:	Term Ends:
Cho	3 years (consecutive term)	2022
Curran	3 years	2020
Feinstein	3 years (consecutive term)	2022
Frank	3 years (consecutive term)	2020
Gibson	2 years	2021
Kamara	3 years	2021
Lowen	3 years	2020
Stitt	3 years	2021
Tsantiris	3 years	2022