

TPSS Board of Representatives Meeting

Open Session (public part of meeting)¹ Minutes

Date/Location/Time: June 17, 2021 meeting (held remotely, on-line) 7:30 pm

Board present: Diane Curran (DC), Bob Gibson (BG), Susan Cho (SC), Adam Frank (AF), Esteban de Dobrzynski (ED), Fred Feinstein (FF), Katherine Tsantiris (KT)

Board absent: Katea Stitt (KS), Elizabeth Teuwen (ET)

Staff present: Mike Houston (MH), General Manager (GM)

Members and Attendees present: Lauren Goldberg (LG)

Minutes submitted by: Solveig Mortensen (SM), Board Administrator

Meeting held by zoom and telephone connection.

Board ACTION:

- The Board approved the May 20, 2021 Open Session Board meeting minutes.

Housekeeping: DC updated the Board that SC is remaining on the Board but moving out of the area; so, beginning in July, ET will be serving as Board Secretary.

GM Report: MH responded to the question of whether the Co-op would be dropping the mask requirement soon: for now, the Co-op is asking both staff and shoppers to wear masks. MH explained that the Co-op's policy is in line with other area businesses, as most OTBA store owners have indicated they are maintaining their guidelines for indoor masking. MH also noted that it is a greater challenge for a business to enforce mask wearing based on vaccination status than to have a universal policy which applies to everyone and avoids stigmatizing unvaccinated people. MH observed that there has been very limited controversy with the Co-op's mask policy; since the pandemic hit, he has only known of two occasions where people have made a complaint.

SC shared a shopper's question about whether the Co-op could explore bamboo or cellulose based packaging to help with environmental and marine life concerns. MH noted that the Co-op is using compostable bags in the produce section and allows people to bring in their own glass containers for nut butters, understanding there is a wait to have them filled. MH asked that the email be forwarded to one of the Co-op manager's for more specific information.

A Board member asked if the Co-op could charge a little more and keep the peanut butter in bulk jars. MH explained that this might be time and cost prohibitive and informed the Board that the

¹ Monthly Co-op Board meetings have open and closed portions. Members are welcome at the open portion of meetings. The closed part of Board meetings is reserved for discussion of finances, personnel, and legal issues.

Co-op is not allowed to take back people's nut butter containers for re-use. If utilizing glass for food packaging, the Co-op is required to first-use glass containers as the Co-op does not have the proper washing facility for re-use. When Montgomery County shoppers reuse growlers for example, they must be thoroughly cleaned, and must have a sticker from the business stating cleaning standards, per HHS. MH noted that the Co-op would need to look into purchasing mason jars. SC shared another member's question about the technical process for lobbying the Board about concerns, such as with packaging options. MH gave the feedback that setting the policy standards for things like the packaging the Co-op utilizes, is something members need to bring to the Board.

Open Member Forum: EV shared that he continues to follow the dealings regarding the Junction and wondered if other area businesses in addition to the Co-op have been vocal about the effects on the Lot of the current development plan. DC shared that the Co-op is still following the cooperation agreement and the lawsuit with the temporary injunction was put into effect, so the Co-op is continuing to operate as usual.

L-2 Communication and Counsel to the Board: MH confirmed that the last 3rd party staff survey occurred in 2019 and following a schedule of providing the survey every three years, will hold one next in the spring of 2022. MH also confirmed that the lowest starting salary for a Co-op staff is presently \$15.30, increasing to \$15.45 this July. Per request, MH elaborated on sub-policy point, L-2.6 re: staff training. MH explained that all new staff have their first day orientation with the HR manager and then within a two month period receive a second orientation with him. MH explained that this gives people an opportunity to have worked at the store, before a more in depth training occurs.

The Board acknowledged the feedback given in the closed session about the structure of L-2 and how it asks the GM to provide monitoring on items overlapping with the collective bargaining agreement. A Board member conveyed that policy sub point L-2.1 re: discrimination could have a broader definition and suggested it should communicate that protected classes include more than just what is allowed under the law. The Board planned to revisit the topic next month.

Board Business:

Committee updates: Membership and Community Affairs Committee (MCAC), FF summarized how the MCAC met and discussed the date of October 17th for the fall membership meeting, the platform of the meeting (in person versus virtual), and that for that meeting they should highlight the Co-op's 40th anniversary. The MCAC also discussed the Co-op's having a forum with Greenbelt Co-op regarding food scarcity. FF planned to consult with MH on ideas and come back to the Board with a proposal for the fall membership meeting.

Presentation--Lauren Goldberg, Executive Director of Crossroads Community Food Network:

BG welcomed Lauren Goldberg (LG) of Crossroads' and invited her to give the highlights of her program and a sense of what she sees as the main food insecurity issues.

LG introduced herself, sharing that she lived in Takoma Park for three years, is an appreciative member of the Co-op, and someone who believes that food cooperatives strengthen food supply chains. LG explained that the Crossroads' farmers market, with expanded offerings, is now in its 15th season. It was the first farmer's market in MD to accept federal nutritional benefits, and the first in the country to also match those benefits, effectively doubling them.

LG described how Crossroads' provides a number of programs to the community. Crossroads' supports microenterprise training. Small-scale food producers and prepared food vendors sell at Crossroads' and have shown an interest in learning how to do micro-programs. So now, Crossroads Community Food Network connects people with the Takoma Park Silver Spring Community Kitchen and provides those small-scale businesses with an affordable space to develop their products. Crossroads' also created the healthy eating program, which provides people with culturally appropriate farm to fork programming.

The Crossroads Ambassador Program, which involves dedicated staff doing market outreach and community organizing to share information, is a newer program. LG noted that some people involved with Small Things Matter collaborate with the Crossroads Ambassador Program.

LG shared that the Co-op has been a long-time partner to Crossroads'. The Co-op has been a market sponsor and, at the onset of the pandemic, was a money donor. The Co-op also provided guidance on the micro business training, created shelf space for products coming from Crossroads' kitchen, and piloted the produce matching program. LG commented that it is exciting to be able to provide people with fruits and vegetables at half off, and described the working partnership with the Co-op's GM as very valuable.

In response to a question about where most Crossroads' shoppers come from, LG explained that their year end 2020 survey revealed that half their shoppers walk and half their shoppers drive to the market. LG elaborated that Crossroads' also works with Fresh Farm Market, who have tracked the zip codes of those attending area farmer's markets and found that most of Crossroads' shoppers come from zip codes just near the market. LG shared that many women and their children frequent the market, and prior to the pandemic the market had music and zumba. LG estimated that seventy-five percent of the vendors are immigrants and a large percentage are women.

LG described the structure of and funding for Crossroads Community Food Network. Crossroads' currently contracts with a CSA coordinator, has a market assistant, and six or seven

ambassadors. Crossroads' receives support from the City of Takoma Park, Montgomery County, a federal grant, and some payment from the small business owners who use the kitchen and storage space. LG elaborated that the micro-business training that Crossroads' offers is free, but people utilizing the program pay for their own business licenses and some other expenses. LG also shared that running the transactions at the farmers market, Crossroads' charges a small fee as a percentage of the transaction. The money Crossroads' generates from their CSA program goes back to the farmers. LG clarified that Crossroads' is not a membership organization, so the people who shop there do not pay membership fees.

To participate with Crossroads', LG directed people to visit the volunteer page on the Crossroads' website. LG stated that the farmer's market needs long term committed volunteers. Crossroads' often works with high schoolers or college students who have more flexible schedules. There is also a Crossroads' staff member, Robin, who connects volunteers with Crossroads' gardening efforts.

In response to the question of how the effects of the pandemic manifested in the day to day operations at Crossroads', LG shared that Crossroads' implemented the following precautionary measures at the pandemic's onset: mask wearing; use of a hand washing station at the entrance and exit; social distancing; spacing the tents and booths ten feet apart; and halting food tasting, food demonstrations, seating, and exercise classes. LG noted that some of the restrictions have lessened; however, they still want to limit congregating and keep people moving.

Furthermore, Crossroads' saw a decrease in the number of customers using vouchers and WIC and SNAP benefits. LG noted that just before she started in her position in May '20, Crossroads' was doing weekly outreach to two senior living facilities re: CSA delivery, but she would like to see seniors return to the market and get fresh air. Last year, Crossroads' healthy eating program in schools was paused, and although the TPSS kitchen previously allowed multiple businesses to work side by side, now they only allow businesses to use the space singly. LG shared that they lowered the rental fee and hourly rate to support those businesses.

In describing the change in the number of shoppers as people returned to the market; LG explained that the market re-opening on May 15th, after the Governor identified farmer's markets as essential, and it was a slow early season. In June and July of 2020 the market traffic increased to half that of a regular year. Last September Crossroads' decided to have the WIC program table outside the market and distribute WIC checks, which Crossroads' matched. At that point, Crossroads' saw a massive increase in attendance, with up to 90% of the pre-pandemic attendance levels.

In response to a question re: the types of growing methods Crossroads' farmers use, LG shared that Crossroads' market includes conventional farmers and ones who use less pesticides, but are

not necessarily organically certified. In response to the question of where the farmers geographically originate, LG shared that Crossroads' farmers come from a 125 mile radius, including Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, as well as, Virginia.

In response to a Board member's question, LG confirmed that Crossroads' has collaborated with Casa de Maryland. The prior year, Casa de Maryland came to the farmer's market and helped people register for COVID-19 testing and vaccine studies focused on Latino populations. Maritza Solano, Director of Education for Casa de Maryland, recently joined the Crossroads Board, and LG shared that Crossroads' is looking forward to learning more about Casa de Maryland's gardening efforts and educational information and wants to partner with them more.

In response to the question of what Crossroads' would do if they won the lottery, LG explained that they would shift some of the requirements for the SNAP program and expand the amount that recipients receive, so SNAP beneficiaries would have additional benefits to buy food. LG, said Christie Blach, her predecessor, was very focused on developing interests and needs-based programs; so to answer the question, she would also want to review people's interests, demands, and needs. LG commented that she knows people are looking for space to grow food and observed how in the micro-enterprise program there is a need for access and financing. MH shared that recently some people from the Small Business Administration spoke at the Montgomery County Food Council and they presented good loan products backed by the American Rescue Plan.

DC reflected upon how LG described aspects of food insecurity that manifested over this last year and how many Crossroads' customers use WIC and SNAP benefits, which Crossroads is trying to amplify to get people healthy food. DC asked LG what she would like to see in our regional food system to address food insecurity in the next five or ten years.

LG identified the following means to strengthen our regional food system:

- Create/find more jobs. When people are earning money they can buy the food they want, which can mean culturally appropriate foods that people know how to access and cook.
- Strengthen local food supply chains and give more support to small farmers. The farmers who come to Crossroads' do not make as much money as if they set up at other markets, but they love the mission. There are nationwide examples of markets not being able to support smaller farmers, but if we can subsidize them, they can be present.
- Create more growing spaces. When you can grow what you want, that gives you the most control and food security.

Board members described having positive experiences taking courses through the Crossroads' community kitchen and interfacing with Crossroads' in the community. Board members and MH thanked LG for attending today and providing this presentation.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15pm

Board Representatives' Committee Memberships:

Membership and Community Affairs Committee: (FF Chair) FF, DC, KT, ET, EdD
Finance and Audit Committee: (AF Chair) AF, SC, BG, KT (DC, ET as ex-officios)
Personnel Committee: (DC Chair) DC, KS
Policy Committee: (SC Chair) SC, AF, KT
Nominations Committee: (BG Chair) BG, FF
Junction Committee:(FF Chair) FF, DC, BG, KS, ET, ED
Expansion Committee: (AF Chair) AF, SC
Board Development Committee: DC, AF (chair position shared)

Term 2020-2021 Meeting Attendance:

	Dec	Jan	Feb.	Mar	April	May	June
Cho	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Curran	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
de Dobrzynski	—	—	—	—	—	*	*
Feinstein	*	Ex	*	*	*	*	*
Frank	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gibson	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Stitt	Ex	Ex	Ex	*	Ex	*	Ex
Teuwen	*	*	*	*	*	*	Ex
Tsantiris	*	*	*	Ex	*	*	*
Velasquez	*	*	*	*	Ex	*	*

(Ex=excused)
(Re=Resigned)

Board Terms:

Board Representative	Term:	Term Ends:

Cho	3 years (consecutive term)	2022
Curran	3 years (consecutive term)	2023
de Dobryzinski	1 year	2021
Feinstein	3 years (consecutive term)	2022
Frank	3 years (consecutive term)	2023
Gibson	2 years	2021
Stitt	3 years	2021
Teuwen	3 years	2023
Tsantiris	3 years	2022
Velasquez	1 year	2021