

TPSS Board of Representatives Meeting

Open Session Minutes

Date/Location/Time: October 21, 2021 meeting (held remotely, on-line) 6:30 pm
Board present: Diane Curran (DC), Bob Gibson (BG), Adam Frank (AF), Susan Cho (SC), Esteban de Dobrzynski (ED), Fred Feinstein (FF), Elizabeth Teuwen (ET), Katea Stitt (KS), Kathy Tsantiris (KT)
Staff present: Mike Houston (MH), General Manager (GM)
Members present: Joy Edmundson (JE)
Minutes submitted by: Solveig Mortensen (SM), Board Administrator
Meeting held by zoom and telephone connection

Board ACTION:

- The Board approved the September 23, 2021 Open Session Board meeting minutes.
- The Board accepted the monitoring report for policy L-3, as submitted by the GM.
- The Board accepted the Ends and Indicators report, as submitted by the GM.

Open member forum: Co-op member JE shared that, years ago, she served on a Co-op Board committee in the Co-op's previous location. JE asked where to find the Board's committee chairs' contact information, expressed an interest in becoming involved with Co-op communications, and mentioned that there be more in-store signage regarding membership meetings. The Board acknowledged JE's feedback and noted that in-store signage was routine when the meetings occurred in person. Committee chair contact information can be obtained by emailing the Board and all Board and Board committee meetings are listed on the Co-op's website under "Happenings". (Note -- DC wrote an e-mail thanking JE for attending and offering to talk or meet.)

GM Report: In response to a Board question regarding a place for people to learn about supply chain issues, MH shared that the Co-op wants to make a concerted effort to communicate that while we don't know the exact products that will be out of stock or for how long, we will have plenty of food available for customer purchase.

The Co-op is a presenting sponsor for a two part Food Council Policy Advocacy event happening in October; MH will speak at one of the events. MH explained that this is an instructional event for organizations becoming involved in non-profit work; the events for nonprofits engaged in advocacy are next week.

In response to the Board's question of the Co-op's role in reaching out to the public and officials re: food policy, MH shared that he has made calls, been working to connect people when bills arise, and signed onto a letter about sustainability. MH elaborated that reaching out involves informing the membership that the Co-op is active with the Montgomery County Food Council and highlighting how the Co-op can act as a voice for our values in the community.

A Board member asked if, at the recent Takoma Park Street Festival, there were questions or mentionables which were relevant to work of the Co-op. MH stated that the event seemed well attended, though cut short by the rain, and noted with its being fair trade month, people discussed that topic. MH also said he observed receiving less questions about the Junction than in previous years. FF shared his sense that attendees seemed a little circumspect this year, as people were being precautionous and wearing masks and recognition was probably more challenging. FF also recounted having a good discussion re: food issues, with a candidate for an at large position for the council. ET described her conversation at the event re: the recent fluctuations in SNAP benefits. ET summarized how MD SNAP benefits were recently increased after they were significantly reduced from the pandemic coverage amounts and suggested the Board/Co-op could remain informed of SNAP benefit changes.

MH confirmed that at the virtual, fall NCG meeting he saw a lot of new GMs for the eastern corridor. MH explained while he had no data from a survey, etc., early retirement and pressures from being at the front of retail seemed to be significant reasons for the high GM turnover.

MH shared that there is a substantial amount of food system policy work happening throughout the region and the Co-op has been involved in Montgomery County's efforts to work on developing food systems. MH reported participating in some D.C. centered food system events, including the launch of Nourish DC, an effort (of retailers, food producers, food distributors) to bring investment and collaboration to the DC food system. MH remarked that some working on these initiatives in D.C. may already meet goalposts, such as developing commercial kitchen space, co-packing, and distribution/aggregation.

MH suggested that with the expansion being on hold, it might be time to consider additional location options. MH shared that he may begin a conversation with the development consultants at NCG and UNFI and contacts in Montgomery County to explore relocation and/or remodeling options. Even throughout the pandemic, NCG helped other co-ops with expansion pursuits and after their Supervalu acquisition, UNFI has also helped with development tasks, such as finding equipment and advising on new storefront re-sets. MH confirmed that the Co-op has previously made use of NCG's marketing materials and may also use their core-sets, which assembles data from various co-ops and recommends lay-out categories based on sales activities.

In response to a Board member's query re: costs of an additional store, MH shared that he spoke with Nourish DC about grants for development within D.C. The Board and MH recalled the available state grant funds and discussed reconvening the Board's Expansion Committee.

L-3 Compensation and Benefits: MH and the Board noted that MH renewed his contract this year. MH confirmed that the Co-op provides its employees with Blue Cross insurance and described the type of coverage provided under the various plan types.

In response to inquiry, MH explained that the Co-op does not have a policy for paid maternity or paternity leave, but offers generous paid time off and covers staff up to 4 months under the Family Leave Medical Act and allows staff to share their paid time off through a PTO pool. The Board and GM acknowledged how the matter of pensions is a topic raised in collective bargaining discussions.

The Board and GM also reviewed the topic of hiring people with disabilities. MH stated that anyone can apply for a job at the Co-op, and there are also opportunities to do work trials with a job coach to determine the job's viability. However, unpaid work is not permitted at the Co-op, so offering this opportunity would need to be considered in collective bargaining discussions, first.

Ends and Indicators Report: A Board member observed that this Ends and Indicators report was very comprehensive. Board members also made the following points:

- As related to ends indicator #2, “member’s having knowledge of the benefits and responsibilities of Co-op membership”, an observation--this aim had to be extra challenging in the pandemic.

- FF commented that Co-op’s leadership’s role in this aim is exemplary and noted that he believes the end is also relevant to what the Membership and Community Activities Committee (MCAC) seeks with developing membership engagement. FF noted a broad interpretation of this end, including ways to engage the membership beyond providing information and referenced other co-ops, who achieve notable attendance at their membership meetings. The Board recognized that the Board leads the charge in gaining membership turnout. MH suggested, over the next several months, the MCAC set four measurable membership engagement targets.

- As related to ends indicator #6 “Co-op staff having a positive and empowering workplace”, it has been good to see various measures implemented, such as weekly manager meetings, the solicitation of staff ideas, and internal promotions. The low employee turnover and all the recent, internal promotions demonstrates that the Co-op can be a place for skill development and advancement. The Board also noted that the GM has been an active player and leader in the community.

- AF noted a correction: the Ends and Indicators Report stated that net sales were down for the reporting period, when they were actually up.

Board Business:

Committee Updates:

Membership and Community Affairs Committee (MCAC):

Meeting report, Member-owner meeting agenda and assignments review:

Board members gave the following feedback about the recently held, fall Membership meeting:

- The meeting was well done and a recording is available on the Co-op’s website.
- The Board candidates for this year’s election supplied good information, but it would be good to have more candidates and meeting attendees.
- Various factors may have affected attendance: a non-contested election, a pause on Junction updates, and the amount of time people already spend in virtual meetings.

FF reported discussing in the last Membership Committee meeting plans for the fall membership meeting and the evolving focus of the MCAC. KT summarized how the MCAC considered if the

Committee’s concerted focus on its policies may have moved the Committee away from actually engaging with Co-op members. The MCAC, she explained, wants to work with the GM and be mindful of its role, while developing a membership engagement proposal for the upcoming year. KT listed the different ideas the MCAC had brainstormed and planned to bring to the Board: a speaker series, possibly re: food systems and climate change; membership meetings with specific discussion topical; “theme” months; recipe sharing; and potentially a “challenge” that members could sign up for.

FF also reported the MCAC’s discussing what would engage members and accessing the Co-op’s consultant for ideas about how to learn the membership’s interests. A Board member shared that she had spoken with the consultant and heard that membership engagement is a challenge for many co-ops. Another Board member gave the feedback that the MCAC may just want to focus on what connects people to the Co-op, promote those features/interests, and look for a turn-out. A Board member recognized how interest is generated by conflict and gave the feedback that the Board’s role may entail illuminating urgency around issues.

MH shared his experience that this co-op does not always see scheduled event turn-out, but does garner economic and remote participation. MH noted the successes of food and jacket drives and member surveys, which can be completed on people’s own schedules.

Nominating Committee:

Board proposed slate of Board officers and Board staff to certify the election; BG stated that there are three slots on the Board and three people running for the election. The Board selected a Board member to certify the election.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45pm

Board Representatives’ Committee Memberships:

- Membership and Community Affairs Committee: (FF Chair) FF, DC, KT, ET, ED
- 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
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion KS (Chair), SC, AF, BG, KT
- 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 | July | Aug | Sep |
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