

LVC Board Minutes 10/14/2020

Minutes for 9-23-20 approved unanimously.

Present: Jean Bergstrom, Sam Black, Danielle Barshak, Lis Coppinger, Ann Ferguson, Lori Lynn Hoffer, Jono Neiger, Martin Pittman, Karen Traub. Guests Mary Jo Johnson and Kari Ridge

Absent: Jeff Lacy

A. Reports

1. President's Report (5 min)(Sam) Nothing has changed. He sent contractual paper work re Food Security Grant, waiting to hear from Valerie. Should hear from the other grant soon.
2. Finance Committee (10 min) (Jono)

Amanda is making great strides catching up, has been on for a month, Cory is working with her. Cory and Jono met yesterday about budget, have been comparing past year's budget. Trying to get an accountant. Jerry Hirsch may be retiring, so Paul is reaching out to Robb Morton's company to prepare our income taxes. We are still planning to transition to Quick Books. Cory Greenberg is developing a software option which will be cheaper than Sage.

Re bank account, have been running about 3-4K accounts payable currently. Our debts are 50K in GBS credit line, mortgage is at 36K, in our balances we have 35K in regular checking, in Raise the Roof fund (our fundraising account) is 30K. We also have a 135K loan from the IED loan and then 3500\$ from Paypal fundraiser.

Jono re-re-promises to have a projected budget to discuss for next time.

Karen relates that Paul and she were chatting and he showed her the monthly totals, and it was very helpful to see gross numbers. Her question is: How can we hire a GM if we don't know what we can pay them? Is there any way to know how much we have received from the Telethon. Jean thinks we raised \$6500 from auction but other money came from Go Fund Me that should bring it up to over \$7K.

The key question is, What can we pay a GM right now and how much should we use EIDL money through the winter to pay the GM and other staffing costs.

3. Fundraising Committee (Telethon etc) (10 min)(Karen)

Karen thought our Telethon event was amazing and everyone did such wonderful work. She thought Jean and MaryJo's work on the auction was incredible, Ann's interview with Steve Alves about coop history was great, her song was moving, Jono's tour of the permaculture garden was inspiring, Dean Cycon of Dean's Beans and his info about coffee coops wonderful, Steve and Jean show running the auction was wonderful, other musicians were great, finishing up with Patty's meditative yoga was

calming, and the way everyone pulled together was a miracle and was Coop magic at its best. Karen will follow up with Sarah Robertson to edit some of the pieces of the 8 hour telethon to use again during this October Coop month, e.g. Ann and Steve interview, also Jono's visit to the Co-op garden.

There was some initial concern that we might not have met our fundraising expectations for the Telethon. However, we have been getting new members and that will really sustain us. Also our grants are really helping us. Ann pointed out that since Suzette started working for us as a volunteer in May she reports more than 25 new members, a few of which we got through the Telethon, and this shows our Communication committee is really doing their job as is the rest of our team, including staff and interim GM.

Sam asked whether there is there any way to learn what members would like that is not already at the Coop, such as a member survey? He thinks it would be good to expand the arts and crafts section. When we get our new equipment we will be doubling our cooler space so we can carry more produce, and make more revenue this way. There are a couple of areas we could really work on.

Karen said that we can get some ideas of what members want at the Coop by consulting the wish list at front door, and Paul really looks at that. People have mentioned candles, incense and other gifts. We need to get out the message about the range of things the Coop really has.

Jono asked when the message will be sent out about the success of the Fundraising campaign and Karen says that will happen when we get the clear tallies.

[Note from AF: In what follows I have put together the conversations about fundraising and member outreach that were discussed in different parts of the meeting.]

With regard to a Winter Member Pledge campaign (e.g. It Takes a Village campaign) to get members to pledge at least \$25 week spending in the store to get us through the winter (this was discussed in the Member Outreach committee), Lori Lynn noted that we really need to have something to offer them in return for such a pledge. Karen said that we need to get the word out about the range of things the Coop has since a lot of people still don't know, and we can do this through social media.

There was a discussion of whether we should adopt more of a CSA model where people pre-pay and then deduct it as they spend it down. Danielle pointed out that This way we could actually get money and keep our shelves stocked for winter. Lise said that the strong point of the CSA model is that people join because want to get local veggies and also to commit to support a local farmer. Similarly, our message could be that as members of the Coop we need to commit to at least \$25 week to keep our local store to distribute local food. People keep asking what getting, point is.

Mary Jo wondered about how to recapture the past energies in LVC history when the Coop emerged from a buying club. She noted all the enthusiasm in the public meetings last fall at the Town Hall and LES to save the Coop and thought if we could get people more involved in a buying club type aspect, people will want to shop in the store more if they have skin in the game.

Lise pointed out that she is part of a buying club and it doesn't generate any revenue, and Ann in recounting the LVC buying club history agreed that it didn't really raise money per se. Jono mentions that the bulk buying doesn't generate much money. Martin thinks that the people that will pledge are the ones who have already turned us around now. We have demonstrated to them that we are in a turnaround and he doesn't think that getting members to pledge will help do that. Karen asked for clarification re bulk buying and buying club. They are similar: you commit to pay for a quantity in advance and can get a discount. People miss the bulk order option and hope it will come back.

Sam said that a key strategy is to make the store a destination: our mission is not just to avoid a food desert, but also to have more events to draw people to the store. The Board will need to do a visioning with the new GM in this regard.

Jono recommended that the Member Pledge campaign in the Communications and Member Outreach committee develop the idea further and bring it back to the Board.

Personnel Committee (Danielle and Martin)

Danielle is working on a draft of the Employee Handbook and will send it out. Paul is asking for volunteers to work the closing shift on Saturdays and Sundays so he can take time off then. For closing shifts, there need to be a 2nd person on shift. This is hard to find but we need someone new. There was a possible student volunteer who wanted to be an intern: Mary Jo sent her reference on to Paul and Ann will follow up.

Martin reported on the new GM Hiring Process: Formally applications close Friday the Oct 16 and all 6 applicants we have received to date are really worthy. Martin, Danielle, Jono, Karen and Suzette are the 5 members on the Application Review committee). There is a meeting on Friday Oct. 16 to review the applicants. Out of this meeting a shorter list will be targeted for interviews. 3 out of the 5 members of the Applicant Review committee will be picked to do interviews. There will likely be 2 finalists. After this stage is complete, their names will be presented to the Board and the executive officers and Paul potentially staff will be involved in a second interview process with the finalists. The Personnel committee will be discussing how to bring other stakeholders into the decision process. The Applicant Review committee and the executive committee will meet to make a formal recommendation to the Board after all the interviews are completed and the Board will make a final vote to choose the GM.

Questions: Ann asked whether all Board members get to meet the finalists face to face (or at least on Zoom) before the final vote? Martin is sensitive to what Ann raises but wants to do it safely. Board does delegate some things but maybe not this thing. Sam thinks it will be important for the interviews to at least be recorded and played to all the Board so people to listen in to be sure they judge that the finalists have the know how to be chosen. Ann wonders whether there can be a face to face meeting with staff and other interested Board members in the store before the final vote is taken.

Danielle mentioned that Lori Lyn, Jean, Jeff and Lise are the 4 Board members who are not directly involved and wonders to what extent they want to be involved. Lise demurred and is happy to

hear reports from others regarding the finalists. Lori Lynn said she feels the exact opposite of Lise and would like to be brought into final decision-making process. Jono mentions that we were criticized by staff in the previous GM hire that they were not consulted or invited to meet with finalists before the final decision to give any input. Sam mentioned that in academia top candidates meet with all stakeholders, including the members of faculty, also students get to go to a candidate talk. Karen thought all stakeholders need to get to meet in some form with candidates, including staff and hoped for in-person contact in store. Sam said it would be nice to see the list of questions that the Applicant Review committee will use for the first interviews and Martin will send these out. Martin mentioned that his committee is still awaiting news from the Finance Committee to begin negotiations with candidates, since we will need to share the range of their anticipated salary as well as their start date with the candidates so they can know whether want to pursue the job or not.

4. In-store Dining Question (7min)

Lori Lynn raised the question about whether there is any way to make our dining area safe for a few customers at a time, by looking into ventilation issues and possible air-purification systems. Jono talked to Paul, and the latter expressed an openness to consider some in-store dining if we had ascertained it safe. Jono looked at web page on Mass for restaurants re-opening requirements. The question is, what would need to happen in our particular store and what would it cost to make it safe? It would likely require extra staff. Karen said she is shifting her thoughts on in-store dining, and has seen that there is an air filtration system for \$500 that maybe could be purchased to clean the air for a part of the store. In that way we could be low key and try to allow one or two people to sit and have coffee.

Lise said the issue is that we have forced hot-air throughout the store, and it is unclear if we have any way to do air exchange and circulation. The experts are saying we should be having 6-9 full air exchanges in an hour to be safe with Covid. We have a problem that the store has high ceilings, and it is not clear that in these conditions an indoor room filter would really work. These are designed to work in small rooms but our kind of space.

Lise has been working on a HVAC proposal to update the store heating and ventilation systems. Originally the estimate was that it would cost \$12-20K, but no deal has been made, and it appears we can't get the waiver or fees we hoped for. In any case, she is in the camp to ask please NOT to have café open. We are seeing cases rise in the Pioneer Valley as more people head inside. We want to draw people in and to feel safe. Sam hoped it might be possible to wall off a space and have air exchanges within that space, e.g. a see-through partition. Lise thinks that might work but we would have to research that. Danielle asks what costs and what benefits, because it might only be a small number of people who benefit but the downside would be that we would lose people who won't come in because they consider it not safe. We should try to find out what our members would think about it.

Lori Lynn said that because of the concerns people have raised in this discussion, she has changed her mind and hoped the cashiers come to agreement by tomorrow because people seem to be waffling as to what to do. Danielle suggested that it should be Paul, not the cashiers, who make any decision involving safety and Jono agreed that it would be dangerous for the cashiers to make the

decision, since it should be made by Paul. As an alternative, Ann and Sam suggest an outdoor tent (with no sides) and maybe a heater as an option. People should develop proposals and options to bring to the Board meeting.

B. Board Policy Discussion (Mary Jo) (8 min)

Jono wanted to know where we are at regarding the policies. Discussing our Board-GM policy is important but not urgent work. Mary Jo said one thing to do is to get the seven result goals voted on and approved that we already discussed as a Board and send them out to the community to motivate them to support us. She also thought that the Finance Committee and Personnel Committee are the groups that need to work on specific policies for monitoring the GM, and these could better be discussed in small committees so we can look at specific examples. Ann and Mary Jo discussed the pros and cons of whether to frame policies in the Policy Governance limitations language or more as positive guidelines for the GM. We could look at some examples, like the Rutland VT coop which gives their whole monitoring policy for the GM. Mary Jo pointed out that the Personnel Committee may not have time to come up with everything the GM needs to do in next 3 months, or the next 6 months, but just more generally what benchmarks we want to hit.

Mary Jo stated that getting something written down is really important so that decisions are based on agreement and not on personalities. Jono agreed that we need agree to specific policies we need as tools in the near future. We have a job description for the GM we worked on, and the Employee Handbook has grievance policy, sick time etc. We need to look where gaps are. In the discussion on GM-Board policy that the Finance Committee had it came out that we are not one of the big coops, so Board needs works more with the GM than in larger coops which delegate a lot more to their GM. MJ suggested that she could come to next FC meeting to discuss specific policies and would agree to meet separately with the Personnel and Finance committees to work out recommended policies around the GM and Board relationship as it pertains to those committees.

Danielle asked if Mary Jo would look at Employee handbook and see if there are gaps. MJ points out that GM is not a normal employee so the Employee handbook need not be the policy priority right now. Martin points out that the existing job description is vague about bookkeeper and the relation of the GM and the Board.

Jono thanked Mary Jo for her work with the Board around policy, welcomed her to a future Finance Committee meeting, and thanked the rest of the Board for all their committee and volunteer work.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Ferguson, Clerk