

LVC Board Minutes 8/26/2020

Meeting started at 7 pm.

Present: Jean Bergstrom, Sam Black, Lise Coppinger, Ann Ferguson, Lori Lynn Hoffer, Jono Neiger, Martin Pittman, Karen Traub. Guest Mary Jo Johnson. Absent: Danielle Barshak, Jeff Lacy.

Minutes Approved unanimously.

Announcements:

1. It was agreed that going forward, Board meetings will be the 2nd and 4th Weds. night of each month. This means our next Board meeting will be Weds. Sept. 9.
2. Ann mentioned that the NFCA is having a webinar Friday Sept. 11 to discuss Membership issues with other regional coops. She is going to represent our Board, others welcome to register.

A. Short reports:

1. **President** (Sam 10 min)

Paul wants 2 3-door coolers and one produce display case. Sam has bids on various other kitchen equipment, including a new pizza oven, which comes to 51K. The guestimate on the generator is from 50-60K. Contacted Erbin's contact Zoe re the new grant application for the state Food Security program and she thought it was strong for a food security grant.

Sam spent a couple hours with Paul about what Paul expects of Board and self and found it helpful. Everything Paul does is thought through in a deep manner with the end to build the inventory to build the customer base, including the credit card minimum, based on years of working on the store. Pricing is important. He has been raising prices beyond what he thinks is reasonable in order to get close to what they would be when UNFI is our main distributor. He sees continuing on this path for 6 months until our revenue is about 1 ½ times what it is now, which is what he thinks we need in order to be able to afford to pay a new GM. At that time what he would expect from the Board would be to prioritize increasing membership and holding events to keep the store in public's eye.

Sam is working on several grant applications, and wants to know how much it will cost to take old pizza oven out of stove. Lise suggests it could go to metal recycle, and what about asking Brian to do the removal of the old stove? We should come up with one other option for a quote.

Ann asked re Paul's comments about hiring a new GM. Sam thinks the executive committee (EC) needs to discuss this more with Paul but he might be willing to stay for another 3 months. Jono says Paul has committed to overlap training period so we may be talking about 3-5 month even if we move along on our present trajectory. Sam says that looking at the finances it is scary to replace GM and also to replace cashier volunteers with paid staff.

2. **Finance Committee** (Jono 10 min)

- New Vendor and Board policy for rotating guarantors

- UNFI status, COD and accounts payable policy
- Other financial issues

We have no financial statements!! We discussed problems with the present bookkeeping situation and the history of the current bookkeeper. The finance committee is getting advice from Cory Greenberg about how to handle it. We had the aim to switch to Quick Books Sept 1 but might be delayed. Our fiscal year ends at the end of August so we will need bring a new person in to help with the conversion to Quick Books.

Insurance for liquor and pouring licenses is up for renewal. Even though we are not presently serving wine and beer because of the Covid crisis, the Finance Committee decided to pay that insurance to keep the pouring license active.

Re guarantors for vendors: We have gotten advice from Paul that conflicts with that of Erbin and we will be deciding that and let you know next time.

Re budget: we do have a draft in the Finance Committee 2020 google docs. Jono will send the link. It will show that presently we don't expect to have the revenue to hire a new GM without using some of our IED loan in the short term and a robust plan to generate more revenue going forward.

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

Radio ads are coming to an end and Sam and Karen are getting heavy pressure to continue. Karen told the person in charge that we can't afford to pay for any ads going forward. Sam wants to know if we can get targeted ads, e.g. a few a week before the telethon. Karen thinks it costs \$100 a spot, so maybe worth it. Karen's advice is to not spend the \$\$ but to get free ads, and it has been suggested that she talk directly to Monte Belmonte at WRSI re supporting it as a community project.

Jono suggests that the Board could consider allotting some money for the Telethon if the Fundraising committee comes back to us with a budget proposal for the Telethon. Re corporate sponsors: John Howland, the President of the GSB, wants to know how they can help. Karen suggested they match the \$7K matching grant. Howland will talk to Mark Grimoli, the bank officer working with LVC, who will talk to us.

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce reports that two anonymous donors are paying for our next year's membership. The ACC shared our GM job ad.

Regarding the program for the event:

- Dean Cycon from Dean's Beans is thrilled about the Rattlesnake Gutter festival, and will donate 1000 coffee cups. In the event he is willing to talk about food coops and coffee coops.
- Steve Alves and Ann will collaborate on showing short clips from his documentary film about national and local food coops Food for Change. We will concentrate on Steve doing a brief

discussion of the importance of food coops and also clips showing the philosophy and activism of Suzy Polucci, a local actress who worked at our coop as well as the Greenfields Market coop.

- Sarah Robertson is interviewing local farmers.
- Diemand Farms is a sponsor.
- Jean and Karen are working on the auction. We have about 50 items already donated. Maple Mamas will give away various packs of beverages. Sam says Tom will make coffee mugs. Karen says we should all invite our friends on FaceBook, etc., and start putting out the word.
- Mary Jo is working with an online auction business to help us produce it. Lori and Karen are meeting re promo stuff. Montague TV and NOHO Media group two community cable are being contacted re tech stuff.

Time line: PR has to go out 2 weeks before the event. Karen would like to have a tent and table and camera to film on site and plug in videos which have been pre-recorded.

4. **Personnel Committee** (Martin 10 min)

Martin says the job ad for the GM has gone out. He sent a message to the applicant review committee regarding the draft interview questions and relating them to the job description in ad. That committee will develop criteria for evaluating interviews. One local application has come in. Martin has gotten the LVC account active with national Cooperative Grocer in order to advertise the ad, and that has been a difficult process. The committee will discuss to what extent to specify salary range, benefits etc. Paul is playing a consulting role.

Sam would like to thank Martin and emphasized the importance of bringing Paul into the hiring process for recommendations based on his years of experience and expertise as GM. Sam points out that, given our current and projected fall and winter revenue shortage, we may have to dip into IEDL funds to pay a new GM. Martin is comfortable with the pacing that we are going through. Jono has talked to Paul to ascertain his time limits continuing as interim GM and he is willing to stay for 3-5 months in order to overlap and train a new GM. Present budget projection has us 2-5K in the hole for winter months. Sam says we need to continue to energize our member base, we have to keep pushing this. We have to keep hitting them with the message with what is new.

5. **Communications:** On Friday Karen and Sam are meeting with the student Covid Response Team who will have specific suggestions re how to get Full Share members back involved. Lori Lynn doesn't know whether our members realize that our numbers plummet in winter. We need to be talking about this. Jean wants to know what to put in Thursdays Mail Chimp! Jean is working on auction and having some problem with auction, has at least 50 items for auction!! Lori can support with the auction.

6. **Board Training on Board Manual and Policies** (Mary Jo Johnson (MJ) facilitating) (30 min)

Work sheet to share:

Themes: What unique needs do we fill for our members, consumer, community? What is our desired impact in the next year? Next 5 years? Go around.

- Jono: Central is helping local food availability, people able to buy closer to home to support farmers, growers, businesses, healthy food and sustainability.
- Jean: Convenience store aspect, being able to pick up stuff when run out, love seeing neighbors and community people, that store people know her.
- Lori: Years of living so close by and can send kids to complete a recipe, it is about community.
- Lise: Longevity in the community as a hub where we can interact with each other. In next years, support farmers and community in having very local food. Problem of food desert re CSA share, produce has been a problem. In next 5 years a farmers market regularly.
- Ann: It is about being a coop, an alternative democratic structure and also about being an in-person community center and restaurant where one can meet friends and have events. Mutual aid important, as evidenced by our recent agreement to be a pick-up site for Sunderland Farms Collaborative orders.
- Sam: Coop is a hub for community involvement, should be driving sales for small scale farmers. Should be a hub for older customers. Also wine, beer, cooked food, families and older people don't want to cook, could be part of pop up art market. Nice to be known as a part of a village.
- Martin: What is most important is getting staples reliably, so it has to be core. Having the outdoor space be really inviting. Also support idea of beer and wine outside as part of enjoyment of coop. Would like to see it as a gathering spot even for others to organize events, e.g a farmers market.
- Karen: People are surprised to be asked how they are doing. For her it is all about the coffee: local organic coffee, also to sit and enjoy coffee with friends. We want to get more of people who are committed to get stuff from coop first before big box stores. People come into buy breakfast sandwiches, people from DPW, people who are biking and hiking. Beer and wine is convenient to shop for especially new selection, also come in to use bathroom. Shop local, people not profit.
- Paul: With tongue firmly in cheek, he wants to assure the continuance of a plethora of unhealthy food options!! Sugar, salt, oil, beer and wine, cigarettes have been a driving force of sales. We try to have the least # of products with preservatives etc, but the LVC has always been a store of choice. Sense of community derived from day to day involvement with shoppers and their lives is so important and a lost art, and gives purpose to those who have to work every day.

We discussed how to achieve our Ends (listed above and on our historical Coop Missions and Values statement (attached and what Policies we need to put in place to achieve them

There are three questions regarding ends and the policies to achieve them:

1. What those ends are, specifically.
2. For whom we are achieving those ends, and
3. At what cost.

Paul: We can never compete with big box stores so can never have a low cost profile compared to other coops. Sam: We have to seek ways to promote our added value. Ann says we need to think of low income people. Paul suggests a gift certificate program donated by those with higher incomes for those with low income.

MJ says it is important to have GM present at the Board because he has the day to day perspective. Going forward it is important to take advantage of Paul's experience.

MJ points out the difference between the RVM statement of ends and ours. They really don't talk about sustainability, community etc. Further, they give a lot of power to their GM. Members were not really involved with their decision to open a second store in Easthampton.

MJ suggests that we need to get very strategic re staff. What is interesting to get people to do as volunteers? And what do we need to pay staff for because of their specific skills? What about hiring someone part time or share GM responsibilities (co-GMs)? At her coop in NY (High Falls) where she was President of the Board, they had buyers for their departments but couldn't pay that well.

Paul says before he left 2 years ago, he met with the then Board to offer the idea of a co-GM but it was dismissed by the Board. So there has been some discussion of co-GMs. The problem is how to proceed when such a strong need at the present is for a strong GM. Sam says the executive officers would really value pursuing that idea, but the question is who has the time and expertise and availability. Jono mentions that the cost is higher if we hire two. Jono says we need to get clearer about what our expectations of GM are, will need more guidance and clarity.

MJ suggests this might be a time to write more detailed policies so as to inform our search for the GM. MJ would be able to help with creating a draft of the policies which we can put on google docs. She would be willing to work with us to create such a draft to discuss at next Board meeting. She will start with a draft of Ends policy, using our discussion, our Mission and Values statement, and our Board Policy manual, that we can discuss and review.

Paul wonders if it might be helpful to do research on our tiny rural coops. It would be so useful to look at their approach, e.g. whether they have mission statements, end policies, GM and Board coops etc. Paul has an institutional memory of these coops. Jono has been in touch with the Creamery and Quabbin Harvest, and they have expressed interest in a big zoom call with them. Martin doesn't see the Mission and Vision statement on the Coop web site. Ann and Lori Lynn will work on locating that and getting it up there.

In the next meeting, Martin suggests we need more time to discuss this, not just 30 minutes. The question is: What is connection between Ends Policies and Policy Governance? MJ is working off of how local coops have interpreted the Policy Governance models. MJ points out that Policy Governance is used in governments, nonprofits and for profits etc. Jono asks for recommendations and feedback on the best way to do this work since it takes so much time.

We have had Cooperative Grocers subscriptions in the past, We received 2 newsletters from them, but our subscription may have lapsed. It is worth looking at, since they have so many archived articles that are related to what we have discussed. MJ: Most Coops have Board policies available on line, and there is a lot out there for free. MJ suggests that we could sort out policies to be discussed in different committees.

Meeting adjourned at 9:07 pm