

## Minutes for LVC Board Meeting 2/24/21 at 7 p.m.

Present: Sam Black, Danielle Barshak, Jean Bergstrom, Lise Coppinger, Lori Lynn Hoffer, MaryJo Johnson, Jono Neiger, Martin Pittman, Kari Ridge, GM John Calhoun,

Guests: Ann Ferguson, Karen Traub, Jake Messier

**Minutes of Annual Meeting of Feb. 10, 2021** approved with change by Karen Traub: The total amount raised during the 2020 fundraising drive, including the September telethon event, was \$59,000. Minutes were unanimously accepted as amended.

**President's Report & Constitution of New Board (Sam):** Jono is stepping down from his officer positions on the Board and, with Ann leaving the Board and her role as Clerk, there are openings for Board officers.

Sam nominated Kari Ridge as Clerk and she accepted. Martin said he is ready and willing to step up to an officer role and would serve as Treasurer. Danielle said she is willing to be Vice President. New officers were unanimously accepted and Sam welcomed all and said there will be a meeting of the executive committee at a later date.

Discussion of term limits: Sam, Jono and Lori Lynn are starting the second halves of their two-year terms. Jean, Lise, Danielle, Martin, MaryJo and Kari are starting the first of their two-year terms.

**GM Report:** John asked if Board members had read the 4-page **GM Report from Period Jan. 28 to Feb. 19, 2021**. He said he has been here for 7 weeks and that he has been brainstorming ways the Co-op can grow sales, when he saw that there had been several years of declining sales. John said he wants the Co-op to be a place where people can find the items they want so they do less shopping at other places and the idea is for it not to be a "convenience" store, but rather a place where members can do all their shopping. He's looking toward having a well-stocked produce section, adding that this region is rich in locally produced and grown offerings and that the Co-op has great long-standing relationships with local vendors with room to grow that. He sees the Summer produce offerings as being almost completely locally grown (besides things like avocados and bananas) and he'd like to create signage about the farms to educate shoppers about benefits of supporting local growers.

John said the two types of members he sees at the LVC are people who want regular grocery store items and people who want organic and locally produced items, and he said there should be a focus on the more affordable items that people want. He added that there is a lot of potential to increase customers' basket size without having to necessarily increase customer count. John said in March we can start looking at options for the café, and pointed out that even when the café was open fully before the pandemic, 80% of store sales were the grocery portion,

while 20% were from the café. When it comes time to hiring someone to work in the café, he said he wants to take the time to do it right and he wants to focus on the grocery store for now.

Martin said it is great to hear John's ideas and he appreciates receiving the written GM report in advance of meetings.

John said that sales were a bit short of projections this January and February and prices on everything just keep going up, but that he's seeing the percentage of produce sales increase and that produce constituted 8% of sales in Feb.

John said he plans to be the Produce Manager, as well as the store GM, while Catherine, who was recently hired as the part-time buyer, will do the UNFI ordering, as well as the beer & wine and wellness dept. ordering.

Lise said Board members, who are already familiar with local produce and vendors, can offer invaluable support and resources for John and that some topics he mentioned already exist (such as CISA signage). She asked John how Board members can support him in his visioning.

Jono said it's important to ask the community what's needed and he supports trying the produce section in different ways.

MaryJo said she echoes Lise' question about wanting John to let Board members know how they can support him. She added that the pandemic offers the Co-op an opportunity to gain shoppers who are afraid to go to larger stores.

Danielle said there is a balance between allowing John, as GM, to make decisions, with Board members having vast knowledge and resources. She said that perhaps Board members could start by making a list of resources to give to John and let him run with it. Ideas for resources were included in the Chat portion of this Board Zoom meeting for John.

### **Committee Reports:**

There was a discussion of the role of Board committees going forward. Sam said the Board Manual is clear that the primary goal of the Board is to transmit the desires of the membership and added that, as we move forward, we could reconfigure committees and talk about what Board members feel their roles ought to be.

Ann said it should be discussed which committees should stand independently and which should transition to people doing volunteer work with John. John said he has been thinking about this for a long time and there's no one-size-fits-all with co-op governance. He said most of the committees are things he's used to doing as a GM or which the GM then delegates to staff and volunteers. He added that he supports the board helping with big-picture things like member engagement/linkage and GM monitoring, but not with the day to day.

Jono said starting last Feb., the Board had to run the store and is in a letting-go process now. He added that the board has served as an extension of the staff and said there is still so much

work to do that the hired staff will not be able to cover it all without volunteer help. Jono said the board has a financial oversight role and has been crucial in obtaining grants and funding sources and that the Co-op doesn't yet have the money for all the capital projects and things it wants to do. He added that the Board needs to continue to do fund-raising.

MaryJo agreed, saying that fund-raising is important as a small store surrounded by bigger stores and that for a lot of people in the community, affordability is a big deal.

Sam said we've had great luck with getting Federal and State pandemic assistance grant money but there are few potential assistance opportunities remaining.

Martin said that a lot of what the Board did over the last year falls under the auspices of a GM and added that the Board can help with infrastructure and finances in the long term.

**Member Outreach & Communications:** Lori Lynn and Jean said they are happy to continue to co-chair this committee. Ann said the Newsletter Committee is planning to publish quarterly. John said he loves both that the newsletter exists and that he doesn't need to manage it, so he can stay focused on the operations of the store. He added that the newsletter is a great voice of the Co-op and its membership, that it's a way to update people about things happening in the store and he'd like to submit an article each time and also to be involved with the Co-op's weekly emails. Getting people more engaged with the Co-op, beyond just shopping here, John sees as a Board role. Kari said she has begun working on the Gratitude for Paul & Patty Project and looking into options. She will email the board about this.

**Discussion about Solidarity Memberships & Possible Membership Changes (Ann):** This would be something that a person couldn't cash in, but it would provide all the other benefits of a regular membership. This could broaden memberships to people who otherwise wouldn't become members, due to cost. Ann suggested that new memberships might have a payment plan in which they would be full members and paid up in two years, rather than the current system that allows members to take 6 years to acquire full membership. She suggested that new members could buy 9 shares in their first year and 8 in their second year. She said these changes would fulfill the Co-op's commitment to social justice, make things a lot easier for members and ensure they wouldn't fall through the cracks, resulting in achieving "inactive" status.

MaryJo asked if we are having an interaction with members in the Spring and said we should include the membership in any decision involving changes to memberships. She added that \$170 (for a full membership) could look like a lot of money to people who are struggling financially. She said there are a lot of ways to look at this issue and pointed out that her Co-op in New York had a \$20 flat fee each year.

Lori Lynn said it would be beneficial if the Co-op worked to bring in younger members.

Karen said she is a member of Quabbin Harvest co-op in Orange and they could be a great resource for the LVC if/when we consider these types of changes and about other matters. She said she would be happy to help connect the LVC with Quabbin Harvest.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kari Ridge, Clerk of Leverett Village Cooperative