

Adopted Minutes
East End Food Co-op Board Meeting
Held Remotely via Cisco WebEx
November 15, 2021

In attendance:

Board Members: Sam Applefield, President; Ariel Barlow, Vice President; Laura Valentine, Secretary; Eva Barinas; Jenise Brown; Tom Pandaleon; Trevor Ring; Marty Seltman

Management: Jennifer Girty, Human Resources

Member-Owners: Tyler Kulp, Erin Myers, Mia Sorada

Board Clerk: MaCall Scott

Introduction

Sam called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Trevor read the Ends statement aloud.

The East End Food Co-op exists to enhance physical and social health in our community.

To these ends, we will create:

1. A sustainable member-owned business open to everyone
2. An ethical and resilient food infrastructure
3. A vibrant, dynamic community of happy, healthy people
4. A creative vision to transform the future

Check-In

Those in attendance checked in to express their feelings and any needs.

Tom joined the meeting at 7:09 p.m.

Jenise joined the meeting at 7:11 p.m.

Amend/Approve Agenda

The Board added a discussion of proposed policy C6 after the B6 report. An Executives Session to discuss expansion updates will commence after the public meeting.

Decision: Motion to approve the amended agenda by Tom. Second by Laura.

Vote: 8.0.0

Amend/Approve September and October Meeting Minutes

Minutes were reviewed for accuracy and clarity.

Decision: Motion to approve the September meeting minutes as written by Marty. Second by Tom

Vote: 8.0.0

Decision: Motion to approve the October meeting minutes as written by Laura. Second by Marty.

Vote: 7.0.1

Member-Owners Open Session

There were no comments from member-owners in attendance.

Annual Meeting Debrief

Reflections:

- Thanks to Eva for putting the meeting together and making sure it happened. It went smoothly and was engaging.
- I loved the ice-breaker question; it helped lighten the mood!
- It was nice to have the meeting in the morning.
- A few suggestions for next time:
 - Introduce Board members, so everyone knows who is on the current Board
 - Be mindful about not using acronyms that lay members may not understand

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- Hopefully, we can do this in person next year – if that’s the case, we should promote that in the marketing to increase attendance. It’s the annual gathering of the community that attracts people.

GM Update

Maura provided the following update to Directors before the meeting:

This report is in addition to monthly monitoring reports. The expectation of this update is to give additional information to the Board of Directors that may not be included in the month’s monitoring report. This report aligns with parts of sub-policy B7: Communication to the Board....’ The General Manager shall not cause or allow the Board to be uninformed or unsupported in its work.’

Membership:

Current total member-owners: 15,380

New member-owners: October – 85 net (4 refunds)

Total member equity: June - \$1,551,165

Register Round Up Total:

September recipient: Book’ Em – \$1,644.54

October recipient: Co-op Community Fund – \$1,210.94

November recipient: Homewood Children’s Village – <https://hcvpgh.org/>

Operations Update:

- YTD sales growth for FY22, through 11/7/2021 = 3.3%
- This month, we are participating in a non-perishable food drive in partnership with a local student group. The bin is located at the front entrance.
- October was National Co-op Month, which we used as a Member Drive. We signed up 89 new members for the entire month!
- This year, Turkey sales are doing well; we have officially sold out of all fresh pre-order turkeys.
- The Café is planning on a smaller menu for Thanksgiving pre-orders this year; those slots are limited and will likely sell out this week.
- Last Monday, I attended a Homewood Community meeting where BUGS Grocery Store Co-op Steering Committee announced to those in attendance that they would be opening the Freedom Foods Market at the House of Manna. BUGS and the Homewood Food Action Committee have been working to open a black-owned grocery store in Homewood for a few years.
- Meade Street was paved this past month, and the trees in the parking lot were trimmed; both happened on the same day.
- The heat exchanger in our administrative office died this past week; the building manager for our landlord was able to have it repaired this past Monday.
- PWSA needs to repair the water meter for the building. They had initially scheduled to come out on Sunday, October 24, so we closed the Hot Bar for the day and the Café Counter for part of the day. Unfortunately, PWSA never showed up for that repair and has rescheduled it for Sunday, November 14, so we will likely follow a similar process and close down the Café Counter in the middle of the day and delay opening the Hot Bar or close it again.

Updates/Questions/Comments:

- Can you talk more about the Freedom Foods Market?
 - Response: It was a community meeting held at the House of Manna in Homewood. They announced that Freedom Foods Market would be located at House of Manna. They will need the help of

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community members to get up and running; Giant Eagle is helping with their store planning, SKU mix, and training for people running the store – they will also act as a wholesaler for them. They still need a Board and members, so there is no timeframe yet.

- How is the pandemic affecting us at this point?
 - Response: Sales are trending about where we thought they'd be. We're up to 3.4% sales growth year-to-date. Last week saw 5.4% sales growth over last year; a lot of that is Bulk being fully up and running and the café hot bar and counter. We've had some challenges with the UNFI deliveries due to staffing issues on their end. We've been getting better at being resourceful about getting products on the shelves rather than waiting for long-term out-of-stocks to return.
- Do we have a budget for compensating committee members?
 - Response: Sam thinks a final amount was not established. Laura and Jenise volunteered to work with Marty on the process of compensating committee members. Marty will call a meeting shortly.

Management Report

Jen Girty, HR Manager at EEFC, has been with the Co-op for 22 years. She shared that her work has changed a lot over the years; she has cashiered, prepared cash deposits, processed AP and AR, processed payroll, and now is focused on human resources.

With year-end coming, she is working on:

- Open enrollment for our retirement plan: we match 100% of employee contributions up to 3% of gross wages.
- Thanksgiving staff gift
- Workers' Compensation renewal: Jen always shops the insurances to make sure we're getting the best price
- Paylocity: getting a grasp on the transition to a new payroll and HR platform
- Hiring: We are looking for a Café Counter candidate and a Cook; finding applicants for the Cook position has been a challenge – this is an ongoing trend in the foodservice industry.
- Safety Committee renewal: we are a certified safety committee, which means we get a 5% discount on our Workers' Compensation insurance.

Questions/Comments:

- What percentage of employees take advantage of the retirement plan?
 - Response: Jen's best guess would be 35% percent. We have many young staff members who are not necessarily thinking about retirement savings yet.

Postcard Mailer Discussion

This conversation is a continuation of one that began in the September board meeting. Article 3.4 of the Bylaws states, "...Individual notification for governance issues will be primarily by email, but members will be given the option of choosing to be notified by postal mail when they become new members, and current members can opt-in to paper mailings at any time." The plan is to send out a one-time paper mailing notifying them of the change in Policy and letting them 1) sign up for all member-only emails, 2) sign up for a new governance-only email list, 3) continue to receive notification of meetings and elections by paper mail. Anyone who chooses not to respond will be considered to have been given "reasonable notice." The question is how many members does the Board want to send postcards to; it would cost about \$6,000 to send it to all 15,000+ members, or about \$2,400 to send it to our active members.

Comments/Questions:

- At the October board meeting, Directors determined that if we have a member's email address, they should get an email – if we don't have an email address, we should send a postcard.
- We could reduce the number of postcards sent by only mailing them to PA addresses or choosing a radius around the store.

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Final decision: Mail postcards to members in Pennsylvania that do not have an email address on file, provided the cost is less than \$4,000.

B6 – Staff Treatment and Compensation

Comments/Questions:

- On page 25 of the report, there is a triple-negative in sub-policies 1,5,6,7. Laura will reword the sub-policies and email the edits to the Board for a vote at the December working meeting.
- Regarding pronouns on staff badges: are pronouns on all badges? It seems that to make it a standard, everyone should wear one.
 - Pronoun buttons are optional for staff. Forcing our staff to do something will not be well received; even if we required it, we would not achieve 100% participation.
 - Trans people who aren't out yet may not be comfortable wearing a pronoun button that aligns with their gender presentation but doesn't align with their gender identity. It's terrific to normalize it, but it's not good to force people to do it.
 - We are trying to navigate that we have a diverse staff and community; we are learning that there's no right way to handle these things. It's an ongoing conversation that the Diversity & Inclusion Committee is having.
- I'm concerned about the standard deviation on the discrimination-related questions on the staff satisfaction survey.
 - Columinate did follow-up interviews: all employees agreed there is no discrimination at the Co-op. At the same time, some comments indicate we need to better accommodate people with disabilities, and there is a lack of racial diversity among managers.
- I'm thinking about the future of wages at the Co-op and what the Co-op values. We strive to be above the living wage; the goal is to get to \$15 per hour by 2024, but the living wage will likely be higher than that.
 - That bar has to keep rising; the wage conversation is getting stronger and will not disappear. Co-ops have high values for humanity – how do we be the best? Maura's mind is there.
 - The cost of buying food alone has soared; the number of people using SNAP, WIC, etc., has significantly increased. There must be a correlation between wage increases and increased food costs.
 - How accurate is the data on the local living wage?
 - The MIT model says rent and utilities in Pittsburgh for a one-bedroom apartment are \$660. The NCG model, which relies on HUD information, says \$840. Both of those are a longshot.
 - We offer great benefits, but those benefits don't pay the bills. How do we keep offering those benefits and have a wage that equitably serves our staff? This goal is not always to be chasing a fair wage from behind.
 - Maybe we could survey our staff to determine what they pay for housing and utilities.
 - Directors are interested in pursuing this data. Jen will research to determine if there are any issues – she thinks it will be okay as long as the survey is optional.
- Do you have plans to offer training opportunities to staff who want to move up at the Co-op but don't have the necessary skills?
 - Maura wants to start cross-training opportunities by paying those who opt-in a higher wage to learn new job skills. She hopes this will be part of the 2024 Union contract.

Decision: Motion to accept the B6 as non-compliant by Laura. Second by Ariel.

Vote: 8.0.0

Discussion of Proposed Policy C6

This is a potential new policy that Maura introduced recently. The general idea is to codify practices that are already occurring and have a policy that articulates the expectations for how the Board treats the General Manager.

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The proposed Policy is as follows:

C6. Board – General Manager Treatment

The Board will not cause or allow the General Manager to be treated in any way that is unfair, unsafe, or unclear.

The Board will not fail to have an Employment Agreement with the General Manager that:

- a) Establishes compensation and benefits that are internally and externally equitable.
- b) Provide for fair and thorough handling of grievances.
- c) Is reviewed as part of monitoring this Policy.

Decision: Motion to approve the C6 Board General Manager Treatment Policy by Marty. Second by Tom.

Vote: 8.0.0

Committee Updates:

Finance

We don't have a new Finance Chair; Tom and Shawn will meet before the reporting of the B1 next month.

Board Perpetuation and Elections (BP&E)

The informal onboarding session for the incoming board members is upcoming before the December meeting. Planning for the January board retreat needs to begin.

Tom acknowledged that there was evidence of dissatisfaction that the Board appointed the new directors rather than holding an election; the Board will strive to recruit more board candidates next year.

Since every member doesn't get The Cooperator, Marty noted that an email should go out announcing the new Directors and their term lengths. Maura and Elly will coordinate to make this happen.

Member-Owner Participation (MOP)

No update; the Committee will meet Wednesday this week.

Annual Meeting

No update; the Board offered congratulations on a successful meeting.

Bylaws

Laura continues to take notes and collect materials for the process document that will be an extension of the bylaws.

Expansion

The Committee met last week. Jenise will send out notes from that meeting. There is nothing for the Board to focus on, but hopefully, the capital campaign will move forward soon.

Resilience

The Committee had a small meeting recently; nothing of note to report.

Action Items

#	Description	Who is Responsible?	Status
174	Discuss opportunities to revitalize the Co-operator	Tom	Ongoing

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175	Write next Co-operator article	TBD	Trevor will write an article about what the Resilience Committee is up to. The deadline is 12/1.
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Closings

Next Meeting: Monday, December 20, 2021

Packet submission due: Monday, December 13, 2021

Decision: Motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:46 p.m. by Tom. Second by Laura.

Vote: 8.0.0

The Board entered Executive Session at 9:47 p.m. to discuss Expansion developments.

Minutes respectfully submitted by MaCall Scott, Board Clerk.