

Minutes [FINAL]
Brattleboro Food Co-op Annual Meeting
November 9, 2018
NEYT, Brattleboro, Vermont

Board members present: Board President Beth Neher, Vice President Jerelyn Wilson, Treasurer Richard Berkfield, Secretary Wesley Pittman, Kathy Carr, Anna Edson, and Arion Thiboumery. Board members absent: Mary Bené, Skye Morse.

The 43rd Annual Meeting of the Brattleboro Food Co-op began with welcoming remarks by Vice President Jerelyn Wilson. She thanked shareholders and guests for coming and stated that the evening's goal was to deepen our understanding of the nuances of the relationship we as individuals have with the Co-op.

Greg Hessel, facilitator, introduced himself and the board candidates both present and not present: Judy Fink (not present), Tracy Sloan (not present), Denise Glover, Tamara Stenn, and incumbents Jerelyn Wilson and Beth Neher. He noted that after a short business meeting, the rest of the evening would focus on a conversation with panelists.

The business meeting was called to order at 6:58 p.m.

President's Report

Board President Beth Neher provided an overview of the year. The Board focused on getting the five new directors oriented and productive. All Board members ensured that the purpose, mission, and principles the board is charged with were carried out. She acknowledged and thanked Board members who are stepping down – Wesley Pittman, Kathy Carr, and Richard Berkfield. On Monday night (11/5), the Board went into Executive Session to discuss how to fill the remaining year of Richard's term, and appointed Jim Barker, a staff member, to complete Richard's term.

Beth reminded shareholders that according to our bylaws, the board is responsible for directing and controlling the business in the interest of the shareholders. This happens in the context of a governance policy that defines and limits how our work is done. This year the Board monitored the work of the General Manager (GM) virtually every month. We carried out an annual evaluation of the GM and agreed to a new compensation package for her. We monitored the financial state of the Co-op in depth every quarter, and discussed the state of the Co-op every month, based on shareholder input and the GM's reports. We continued to identify and suggest changes to the bylaws, and to figure out how to advance the vision of greater Co-op engagement and contribution in our community.

General Manager's report

General Manager Sabine Rhyne drew shareholders' attention to the Annual Report, which showed a profit double that of last year's. The auditors adjusted that figure based on the ramifications of the tax cut, cutting our profit to a little over \$8,000 on a \$21 million business. We've reduced our debt, while giving away over \$700K in discounts, over \$16K in contributions and sponsorships, including \$10,000+ in Bag a Bean contribution. This year, we'll catch up on paying out interest on our shareholder loans through 2015. And next year, we plan on paying out interest through 2018. We are in the 2nd year of our 2nd union contract. While starting wages are up, we are still a few years away from being able to offer a starting wage of \$15/hour. We are recommissioning and optimizing our refrigeration/HVAC, and fixing/adding equipment here and there, such as the pinpad upgrade. We are working on smoothing the pavers in the front parking area with a short term fix, while researching a long term fix. We are on track to improve how we serve you and our community better.

That is dependent on you and your neighbors. We hope you shop here: before you use Amazon's OneClick, I beg of you, think first: Is that really 69 cents? Did you remember your discount? Did you remember the work Lizi did with your grandkids last month? Or the talk you had with local producer? Did you think about how you participate in supporting your community? Because as Stacy Mitchell says, Amazon is the robber baron of the 21st century. Because of how Amazon does business, more and more small businesses are being squeezed out of the marketplace. And the cost is huge. Sociologists compared communities dominated by a few large companies to those with smaller businesses. In the latter: people know their neighbors, belong to organizations, etc. Communities with more local economic power have much greater citizen involvement. We need you to shop and encourage your neighbors to shop here. We lost the Harvest Co-op in Cambridge recently. Your BFC will not go that route because of the way our work intertwines with the work of our growers and partners, our superb committed staff, and especially because of you. Thank you for shopping and telling us what you need. We will continue to try and make you proud. Thank you.

Treasurer Report:

Richard Berkfield recounted the story of the Co-op's finances over the past year, likening it to growing a garden. Our sales increased, 3% over last year. If we accounted for the time in the garden – the wage value - proportionally less of our time went into that increase. There was slightly more profit until accountants got their hands on it. Very significantly, our cash position increased this year. The Co-op is getting better at gardening. And part of that is the community that supports the Co-op, and part is the staff and leadership of the Co-op. Please continue to support the Co-op.

Panel Discussion

Sabine: In planning this meeting we had some great conversations about the roots we've established and grown in this community. Who are WE? We are more far reaching than any one of us knows. We wanted to have some people speak about their view of the Co-op as it relates to their work in their own voice.

Panelist #1:

Who are you? Tim Hughes-Muse of Laughing Child Farm in Pawlet, VT.

What's your relationship with the Co-op? When we first started growing sweet potatoes in 2012 or before, we came to the [Co-op's producer department] growers' meeting. Ever since then, we got an idea of what the produce buyer wanted, and went from there.

How does collaborating with the Co-op enhance or impact your work? It was a key, starting right from the beginning, to be able to sell to the BFC. BFC is our largest customer in the state. That's the biggest.

How do you think of what you've done with us so far? How did it develop over time? We've used this presence in this part of the state to expand our business over the past couple of years. Without this Co-op being an anchor point for us, that wouldn't have happened. Going forward, we hope to be able to supply year-round. One of our big goals. That's kind of our big way we can expand. Sweet potatoes store really well. What's important to us is, after a certain time, once our sweet potatoes are sold out, there's buying ...that money goes back into the local economy. We try to pay our folks really well. And of course we care about the environment. Our missions line up pretty well.

Question from shareholder: How does it affect your cash flow that you're going direct, instead of through a wholesaler? Sabine: for us, we enjoy all the touch points that we have directly with producers and farmers. Knowing who is growing the food and knowing what their needs are and vice versa – it's very fertile communication. In terms of cash, we try to pay our local vendors as quickly as possible regardless. Tim: if we sell at a farmers' market we get 100% of the dollar. Wholesale [like the Co-op],

we're getting 65% of the consumer price. If we go through Black River Produce, we get 25%. So it's very important. It's more work for the Co-op, because when you have 20 farms, [Produce Manager] John Truncala is on the phone all day. More invoices mean more work, so it's a cost to the Co-op, but it makes a huge difference for us to be able to direct retail. We also do our own distribution. Before, Black River would pick up from us and ship to the BFC the next day. We'd do the sales and they'd do the shipping.

Panelist #2: Josh Davis of Groundworks Collaborative and a Co-op member.

What's your history and relationship with Co-op. We are a community partner. Groundworks is about three years old. We offer food, shelter and supportive shelters. We have three shelters: the year-round, the seasonal overflow and the drop-in day shelter. We have a food shelf and supportive services. We provide wide range of support in all states of housing. You all are fantastic. He listed all of the ways Co-op supports Groundworks. Latest edition of Food for Thought is a good indication of how much support we receive from BFC. You can get your member hours making meals for the overflow shelter. On 12/1 if you get a Christmas tree from BFC, we get \$15/tree. And Project Feed the Thousands: you donate a lot of food – 50# a month – of things we don't normally get, like GF and vegan items. The food shelf has 5 volunteers in this program and again, you can get member hours doing that. And we get support through your Bag a Bean program.

What is your vision about the future of your relationship with Co-op? That you will continue to give us money, volunteers, and staff! (laughter). I was looking back through Food for Thought and this article in the October issue – about restorative justice. You also talked about how to interact with people asking for money. In the July edition, you sponsored the camp and the community response project. For me it's an example of how the Co-op is a foundation for community. It's like the water flowing down South St.: the Co-op is a catch basin for the community. You can't just pop in for a gallon of milk and run out. You're going to see four or five people and 9 times out of 10 I love that (laughter). Being able to catch up, have some gossip, run into people. The inclusion piece, the restorative piece, and Food for All program is about opening it all up for people who might not otherwise be able to take advantage of that. How do we deepen that?

Do you have any hare-brained ideas? Josh: I do love crazy ideas. There is a stigma around charity services. People come into the food shelf, and there's stigma around that. We know there are people who are food insecure. In my mind that means unmet needs. Stigma even around subtleties – I'm glad you have new [pinpad] machines [which enable WIC and EBT transactions at all registers], without a fuss, it's subtle, but it reinforces the stigma – so , is it possible to combine a charity food space and a discount food retail space under one roof so that some food would be like at a food shelf, and some would be what you would get a discount food store. We'd have to figure out how to deal with it at the register.

Panelist #3: Maribeth Cornell. I'm a business teacher at Windham Regional Career Center (WRCC). I've been there for 40 years. I have taught a wide variety of business classes.

What's your history with and relationship with Co-op? We started teaching international business class in 2006 or 2007. The students get both high school and college credit. International business was the first course in what's now called the Windham Regional Collegiate High School. Years ago the Co-op sent a couple of young people to a workshop to learn what the Co-op is all about. I had an epiphany: we belong together! So I made a contact with the educational coordinator and now I work with Lizi.

How does this have an impact on your work? This relationship is so important because it exposes kids in ways that are more than a textbook. It's very interactive. Coming down to Co-op, what it does for kids. There is the stigma: "I don't know if I want to go there." They learn about the Co-op and it's so

enriching for them, it teaches them about local, global, and social issues, food production, variety of business models, food's role in international business...

What is your vision for the future of the relationship? I would like to come out more often. We come down 5 times a semester. We can talk about sugar, chocolate, bananas, but through that, whatever the food is, we are learning about geography, legal issues, cultural acceptance, safety, profitability, shopping, etc. etc. etc. It's coming alive for young people who feel excited – they are socially concerned. This makes them get it.

How can we enhance this in the future? I love the experience of even having more workshops. But what if we did a business together? What if it were future business leaders of America and we built or sold and marketed something together? There is so much knowledge with all the people who work within the Co-op. It's so eye opening and enriching for kids. Thank you.

Panelist #4 Laury Greening, staff member

Everyone's curious about the folks who work at the Co-op. Laury agreed to be in the hot seat. Who are you? Pass. (Laughter) I'm Laury. I work in the Front End. I just read in The Beet that I had my third year anniversary.

What's your history with the Co-op? I moved to Brattleboro 9 years ago. The coveted job was at the Co-op. I had to beg and plead. It's the last job I'll ever have, I hope.

From your perspective, how this has had an impact on you and your work? It's a long story. 59 years, 6 states, lots of jobs. I've worked at a lot of places that talked about customer service, with meetings and seminars, but no one ever walked the walk, not really. That's what is different about this place for me. There's no shortage of examples. This morning, Whitney came in to help me. Watching YOU bag groceries my first day. That means something. It's everybody. People have your back there. We're people, it's not perfect. It's amazing for me. I love the people, I love the customers, I love the babies, I'm a fool for it. (Laughter).

How do you see this growing in the long term? What do you wish for BFC and staff? I'm not kidding when I talk about the babies. Seeing infants growing into toddlers who are super-excited about the beans [*bag a bean*] - those are future Co-op members. And also, when people are brand new [members] and I can tell by their numbers – we're up to 13,000 or something – “what are you doing, who are you, why are you here?” It's so hard to find meaningful engagement, and [we have a lot of] visitors who come through. We're recruiting, here, c'mon! But really what it is, is, I think is that that connection that we have with people is so important. It's so rare. People don't meet in person anymore. I read that; it's not original. People can't connect like we connect there. I'll never forget day after the election in '16 being with people in their abject sorrow... I don't find that in other places. I get as much as I give. I get so much from it.

Panelist #5 Cor Trowbridge, director of BCTV (Brattleboro Community Television.)

Thanks. I'm a media person so I have a presentation. Sabine invited me to talk about the partnership between our organizations. You may not be aware that BFC sponsors our local government programming. From what I've been hearing, one of the reasons the Co-op is sponsoring our programming is our overlapping mission to connect people I can hear everyone saying “your” Co-op not “the” Co-op. Same with us – your community TV station. It's public access, it reflects the people who use the channel. The other overlaps I've heard of today are citizen involvement and civic engagement. This is why the Co-op wants to get local programs online. [*She played a short video about BCTV, which produces 1,000 hours a year original programming. Half of that is local meetings and the BFC logo appears in the credits.*] Anyone can get their thing on TV with just a little training. BCTV provides equipment.

Cor: I've been a member since '92. I think the collaborative relationship allows us to bring government transparency to our viewers and community members. That's a goal that overlaps with civic engagement that you guys, that we both value. We were able to expand coverage into the hill towns when we signed a contract with southern VT cable. We'd previously only been doing Brattleboro and Vernon. We expanded to 6 other towns and hired the staff to cover all those meetings. Most of those meetings are held the same night. So we need to have a lot of staff to be able to do that. The partnership with BFC allowed us to take that leap.

What's your vision of the future collaboration with the Co-op? "Day Kitchen Demos with Donna" [a show on BCTV featuring demo coordinator Donna Lee Amerman.] We also have, as a volunteer, the producer of that. The ice cream social, Maria [a BCTV staff person] has covered the opening of the new Co-op, and some other BFC events.

What else could we do to deepen the relationship? She's talked with Jon Megas-Russell. We want more of a Co-op presence on the channel. What's on BCTV is a reflection of the people who want to use it. You're already making a lot of social media posts, which could be repurposed to be on the channel. [She showed an example – a picture of Jon with goofy glasses on.] So much goes on at the Co-op like you've been talking about here, conversations and connections, it happens in person there. On BCTV, is another way of showing that connection with people who can't be there, connecting growers and farmers and buyers and consumers. BCTV is another way of strengthening that connection.

Q&A

Jonathan Morse: member since '76. I'm not alone in my discomfort with the people who need to be sitting out there asking for money. I don't know what to do about it. It makes me so uncomfortable because anything I do might not help fix them. I wanted to ask Josh, if you had any thoughts about that. Josh: Sure: I would actually go back and reference the article Sabine did in FFT – If you feel comfortable, make eye contact, say hello, see them as a person. A buck or two isn't going to change their situation. What I hear from people on the street is, folks don't even look at them, they just walk right past them and they're not getting any acknowledgment. Just looking them in the eyes goes a long way. Sabine suggested some products: a cup of coffee, a smoothie, a sandwich. We have food sites where people can access food. There's no judgement if you don't feel comfortable giving money. The other side of it, also thinking about why that person is in that situation. It's a balance of individual responsibility, and a system that creates that gap. It's not all one or the other. What does our health system contribute, what is our affordable housing system, what are the gaps in mental health system, that all are perpetuating these circumstances.

Alex Wilson: I wonder if the Co-op might be able to offer coupons that us as patrons could buy and then hand out. My reluctance to give money is worrying that whether they're going to go up to the bar or use it for drugs. If there were coupons we could give them away. Any thoughts? Sabine: Huh, good idea. Josh mentions the work being facilitated by Emily Megas-Russell, a new initiative called The Community Organizing Effort. It involves organizing folks to talk about what their needs are, and run ideas like this by them. Groundworks is the fiscal sponsor. It's one of the Bag a Bean groups this month. We got some seed money. We pay the participants. The first meeting is in beginning of December.

Q: Bob Remy-Powers: What was the first year of the Co-op? A: 1975.

Q: Tamara Stenn: I'm wondering about diversity. There are a lot of people who look like me, here. With our Co-op even with our board, we [white people] dominate. What kind of efforts or steps can we take to diversity our own membership, making everyone feel comfortable coming to meetings like that?

Jerelyn Wilson responded: A group of board members and staff went to an unconscious bias workshop, a full Saturday, what came out for me is it's important for each of us to speak our own truth, that unconscious bias piece is about assumptions that we make. We make them because we're not showing up. There is a lot of nuance in who we all are in this room, as I said in opening remarks. I can characterize my relationship to the Co-op and when I table as board members and I'm talking to people randomly by the deli, I realize, oh, their relationship is different. So it's not just about diversity, it isn't just about colors. It's about getting to know who we each are in a deeper way. I just am thinking about diversity in a broader way having attended that workshop.

Sabine: We do work actively to try to recruit from non-white communities. I think our staff reflects about what our community has in terms of diversity of color. But it's something we very much would like to increase.

Jerelyn: And didn't you, Maribeth [*Cornell, from WRCC, one of the panelists*], didn't you say those are students who wouldn't otherwise have come to the Co-op? What are we not doing to make them feel welcome? Maribeth: Once they get there, they feel welcome. They hear "it's too expensive" or "granola" or "hippies" - They're not sure, it's just unknown. Until we bring them in. Look at this look at this, it changes everything? Somehow they're just, I don't why it was that they just didn't come in. It became... once they came in the door and they were shown around, it changed everything. And next thing is, they're all here hanging out [at the Co-op] for lunch.

Tania Aparicio: It's great there was training. I can say it's super different when you are from the minority. When you are experiencing othering. For me, I split my time between NYC and Brattleboro and I can totally feel what people are asking - my presence is questioned here because I have an accent. I'm not sure if you talked about that. It's realizing that maybe people that are not white or born in VT or the US can feel different when you are having an interaction and you aren't purposefully othering. It's assumed I might not be a member. Sometimes I felt, is it because I'm not a white person from VT. I agree with your concept of diversity. But different when it's you.

Mary Robertson: I went to the board meeting that one time. I came because I'm on a fixed income. I tell people I shop at the Co-op and here's how can you afford it. We started out buying bits of spices from the bulk dept. Now we buy our coffee here. I kind of came because I'd like to get more people like me to come to the Co-op. Josh Davis: You understand. Mary: People on fixed income - that's why I never came, before nowadays. I'm online, looking for way to get healthy. I'd like to draw more people like me to the Co-op. Sabine: so would I thank you for coming tonight. (Applause.)

Calvin Dame: Cor - you said that connection to BFC help you fill your Monday nights. How did that happen? Cor: Our connection with BFC helped us be able to hire enough staff to cover these meetings that all happen at the same time. Calvin: So it's money you're talking about. Cor: Yes. The other thing, while I have the mike, is in terms of leveraging. You could get member hours to do programming, using BCTV's equipment and training. Sabine: Great idea.

Josh Davis: Question for Jon Megas-Russell: can you speak to the success of the Food for All program, and Co-op Basics, is it going well, can you track purchases down to that degree of detail? Jon: nice question. Jim and I always want to report more. We're close to 400 people in FFA. That's a program that provides food assistance for almost anyone. You get a 10% discount if you qualify for WIC, EBT, or if you just come to us for help, maybe go to Groundworks for [independent third-party] documentation, so families in crisis, we just offer that help. Those sales will hit a million soon. We'll move in that direction over time towards needs-based discounts. I know people who shop based on purple (the Co-op Basics signs). That's been huge in produce, packaged goods, meat, and seafood. Plus you get case discounts, another 10%. You can stack discounts. You can stack discounts for being a working member,

on FFA, using case discounts. Sabine: We gave away over 700K in discounts. That does outweigh that teeny bottom line. Nancy Anderson: How much of that is the senior discount? Sabine: The largest portion by far. We'll be talking about his over the next year. You're all invited to come give your piece on that. How do we structure our discounts and for what purpose?

Jonathan Morse: Every dollar we spend here stays in the BFC area as opposed to almost any other store, even Brown and Roberts. Sabine: 37 cents on the dollar stays in the community.

Steve Lembke: Is there a big cork board somewhere, or boxes with index cards, for people to jot down comments. Make it more convenient to share comments. You might gain more insights. Sabine: we have feedback forms peppered throughout the Co-op; many people use them, usually when they're upset. Most are product requests. We look at those religiously. In addition to that, and thank you for bringing it up, we're looking at a project next summer or fall to do an immediate customer feedback random receipt, via a smartphone, to give us immediate feedback. The purpose of that is that it's a random selection, some people are members, some are not, we would get a broader feedback loop than we currently do, which is self-selecting (when we do our surveys). So we are working on better and more inclusive ways to get feedback.

Joan Marshall: If you want affordable food, I also work at Dottie's. People forget you can get things at Dottie's nice and cheap, we're open from 10 – 6 every day.

Bob Remy Powers: When I talk to people about good food, the price of organic is a stumbling block and my response is it's cheaper, if you measure for nutritional value. Sabine added: in summer it's all local and organic, and we don't bother carrying conventional sometimes because it's not any cheaper. And industry consolidation. Large corporations are getting into organic, driving down costs, but they've been purchased by large companies. So some feel that the organic label has been corrupted. And there are VT farmers are working hard to focus on soil grown instead of hydroponic grown. The word "Organic" is a battle ground. There's places to give some feedback that we should take.

Chris Ellis: [staff nutritionist] I also work at Head Start – I send families to the Co-op for spices, I give small tours, and that gets the families going. Working with families makes a difference.

Q: from unidentified shareholder:: Have Truckload Sales worked? Jon Megas-Russell: This year we sold almost 63,000. A huge success.

Sarah Lott: Tim [Hughes-Muse, panelist] mentioned the percentage of consumer dollars that comes from direct vs ... how many or what percentage of our produce comes direct sales? Sabine: 36% of our produce is local, probably a little more than half is direct from producers. Some use Black River to truck for them, so there is a relationship with the farmer but they aren't bringing the food. We're really blessed to have a lot of choices and long-time relationships with farmers. We have a growers' meeting every year, we get a lot of feedback and share what works for us, which is helpful form them. We have been able to up our game as a result of those meetings. We're not perfect but it's helped a lot. Tim: as Whole Foods is now owned by Amazon – one of the competitive advantage of independent stores, our products are not available elsewhere. You're not going to find that at Shaws or anywhere else. It will only get harder for small farmers to be in those really big stores.

No other questions.

Greg Hessel: That was inspiring. Look at all the ways the Co-op gives to us. Some prices higher, some not, but factor in the 700K in discounts! Greg thanked all the staff, panelists, board members, etc.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Sarah Brennan, Board Administrator

Shareholders Present (not counted – guests and children):

Cliff Adler	Janet Harclerode	Bill Pearson
Spoon Agave	John Hatton	Prema Picardi
Erika Alin	McKenna Hayes	Wesley Pittman
Nancy Anderson	Greg Hessel	Elizabeth Pittman
Tania Aparicio	Pauline Jamardo	Annamarie Pluhar
Mary Diane Baker	Donna K-Brooks	Linda Quay
Jim Barker	Steven K-Brooks	Monika Reich
Richard Berkfield	Shabir Kamal	Donna Remy-Powers
Rosamond (Roz) Blake	Anneka Kindler	Robert Remy-Powers
Frances Boucher	Steven Lembke	Sabine Rhyne
Sarah Brennan	Lynn Levine	Daniel Ridlehoover
Carol Brooke-de Bock	Rosemary Lewando	Lillian Ridlehoover
Will Brooke-de Bock	Sarah Lott	Mary Robertson
Calvin Dame	Susan Lucier	Jennifer Robinson
Josh Davis	Linda Lyon	Scott Robinson
Jane Dewey	Bob Lyons	Kurt Schellenberg
Maria Dominguez	Donna Macomber	Ron Schneiderman
Bruce Dunnan	Kingsley Martin	Marilyn Scholl
Darcy Dunnan	Larry McIntosh	Jill Shriver
Anna Edson	Jon Megas-Russell	Tamara Stenn
Bekka Eowind	Jessica Montenieri	Claudia Teachman
Richard Evers	Erica Morse	Arion Thiboumery
Doug Frantz	Charlene Morse	Hanna Thurber
Tish Fredricks	Dale Morse	Hanna Thurber
Denise Glover	Albert Neher	Cornelia Trowbridge
Eva Greene	Beth Neher	Janet Wallstein
Bradford Greene	Joseph Ninesling	Alex Wilson
Laury Greening	Marlene O'Connor	Everett Wilson
John Hagen	Karolina Oleksiw	Jerelyn Wilson
Rebecca Hagen	Roberta Paley	Ann Wright