A SECOND LOCATION, HOLIDAY HOURS, AND THE PERILS OF DARK CHOCOLATE: MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

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By Anita Bushell

The PSFC May 2023 General Meeting, which took place on Zoom and was attended by 128 people, focused on the referendum to approve the opening of a second PSFC loca-

tion, in addition to elections for the Annual Revolving Loan Committee, and the Annual Pension Education and Reporting Committee.

OPEN FORUM

In the Open Forum, members brought up several concerns, including the size of pre-bagged bulk aisle items, which some say are too large for those living alone. General Coordinator Joe Szladek said pre-bagging alleviates crowding in the aisle and that there are no plans to suspend it. Another member asked about paid staff members training Food Processing workers; General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky said workers must be trained by food handling professionals. The member clarified they would like to see this expense reflected in the general budget. A member requested where the names of current board members are; General Coordinator Ann Herpel said the names are not on the PSFC website, but are in Member Services. One member asked about masks being reinstated; Herpel said this issue might be addressed at the July General Meeting. Finally, Coop Treasurer/General Manager Joe Holtz acknowledged outgoing Board of Directors member Bill Penner and thanked him for his 15 years of service.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz shared the financial summary for the 12-week period ending 4/23/23. Highlights included:

- Average weekly sales were $1,046,541 (2023), compared to $902,058 (2022)
- Money generated by sales/gross margin was $2,467,000
- Expenses for the same period were $2,383,000
- There was an $84,000 gain (for the first time in years)

Holtz spoke about how membership growth could increase sales; (currently there are 15,700 members, compared to 17,000 before the pandemic).

In addition, Holtz discussed an informal agricultural loan of $100,000 for seeds to a farm in financial need. Holtz reviewed the history of this practice, which was suspended during the pandemic, and stated this loan was a General Manager, not a General Coordinator, decision. Holtz mentioned the need for community-supported agriculture, suggesting members create a formal loan program, in anticipation of farm growing seasons. During the Q&A period, a member asked about communication; Holtz said the farm reached out to the PSFC.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Szladek reported on the recent Consumer Reports study on high levels of cadmium and lead found in several brands of dark chocolate. 28 brands were tested, and cadmium or lead were found in 23. The PSFC contacted the FDA about the the study's findings and is awaiting a response. Szladek also spoke with the National Cooperative Grocer; one solution is to place signs in the chocolate section alerting members to the CR study. Szladek stated the PSFC is waiting for more information before making a decision.

Herpel reported on staff changes: Receiving Coordinator Tim Mahoney has resigned. New Receiving Coordinators Eric Alger and Dennis Dorgan have started on night/weekend schedules. Part-time Receiving Coordinator Tanya Steinberg has moved to full--time status. Membership Coordinator Jack Stroman has rejoined the PSFC staff on a part-time basis.

Herpel discussed Juneteenth and July 4 holiday shopping hours (Juneteenth: Monday, June 19, 8 a.m–5 p.m; Independence Day: Tuesday, July 4, 8 a.m.–5 p.m), and new office hours because Member Services has reduced demand for in-person services. Leave of Absence requests can now be made in Member Services. Length of a leave currently aligns with the six-week work cycle. Finally, Herpel reminded shoppers to stand in line (not proceed to a cashier) until called upon, avoiding congestion. During the Q&A a member asked about when Animal Welfare Committee guides to meat and dairy purchases would be available.

AGENDA ITEM: ANNUAL REVOLVING LOAN COMMITTEE ELECTION

Staff Liaison Holtz outlined the committee background in context of the International Principles of Cooperation and history of the PSFC advising other coops. As the practice continued “sometimes advice wasn’t enough; sometimes maybe money should be involved.” The Revolving Loan Fund and committee were created in 2012, with a donation of $60,000 from the Coop ($20,000 a year for three years). It is a donor-advised fund, and the committee looks after the money, directing where it is invested. Currently there are two outstanding loans to Greene Hill Food Coop ($10,000 and $12,000) at a 2% interest rate. Committee member Wendy Fleischer’s term is expiring, and Holtz gave Fleischer’s background, urging members to re-elect her. Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and Fleischer was re-elected. During the Q&A period a member asked about loan defaults; Holtz stated the money is in a foundation. A loss would be to the fund, not the PSFC, as it no longer has fund access.

AGENDA ITEM: ANNUAL PENSION EDUCATION AND REPORTING COMMITTEE ELECTION

Jesse Shapiro gave the committee background, stating that he, Allison Thrush, and Kathy Martino are seeking re-election for second two-year terms. The committee does not act as an advisor or make decisions; its primary function is to monitor pensions and follow the investment guidelines the pension trustees have established. Shapiro gave his, Thrush, and Martino’s backgrounds. Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and Shapiro, Thrush, and Martino were re-elected. During the Q&A period a member asked about overlap with newly elected members, as well as current projects the committee is working on. Shapiro responded that overlap would take place because of committee-term length, and that projects in development include a *Linewaiters’ Gazette* report.

AGENDA ITEM: REFERENDUM OF PSFC MEMBERS TO APPROVE SECOND LOCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Second Location Committee member Jonathan Farber started the presentation, outlin-

ing the history of the proposal, introduced at the February 2015 General Meeting. A Second Location Study Committee was approved in July 2016.

The highlights of the proposal are as follows:

1) The PSFC should rent/lease a building of similar size to the PSFC that would allow for doubling pre-pandemic membership/revenue; 2) Locate the building near Park Slope; 3) Establish a budget of up to $20,000,000, raised through a PSFC member loan program and outside funding. The key recommendation is for a referendum of all members to 1) form a new Second Location Steering Committee to prepare the Coop for this expansion; 2) to authorize the officers of the PSFC to approve the transactions and contracts necessary for implementation; and 3) to allow the Steering Committee to abandon the project if it is unworkable or undermines the financial strength of the PSFC. The group believes the study remains relevant to the future of the PSFC for four reasons: 1) Opening a second location is a multi-year process requiring significant advance planning; 2) the current membership drive demonstrates that demand for joining remains high and is key to success at a second location; 3) other Northeast communities in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Maine have successfully expanded coops; and 4) Brooklyn retail real estate has fallen significantly, making a second location more feasible.

Farber asked the membership to review the report, located on the PSFC website, and outlined next steps, which include voting to authorize a referendum of all members to decide if/how the PSFC opens a second location; and hold the referendum, hopefully in September, for members to approve/disapprove the recommendations of the Second Location Study Report.

Holtz spoke about the ongoing demand for PSFC membership. New applications were processed starting in December 2021, but the demand continues to grow. “We have built a good thing, this cooperative that we all contribute to; what is our obligation to others when we have a good thing?” Holtz asked members, urging them to approve the referendum.

Micheal Freedman-Schnaap outlined key findings of the Second Location Study Report, noting that the last PSFC expansion was in 2000-02. He stated “we are testing the limits of what is possible in this space” in terms of current membership versus how much food can come in/out of the building.

Holtz defined what a referendum is, in this case advice to the Board of Directors on whether to empower a Second Location steering committee.

In the Q&A period members asked about the comparison to coops that are not located in New York City; the age of the report, which predates the pandemic; and the financial feasibility of a second location.

Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and the referendum did not pass, by a vote of 74 no and 64 yes.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVAL

Bill Penner asked the Board to approve the April minutes and asked the Board whether they were in favor of accepting the advice of the membership in reference to Agenda Items One, Two, and Three from the 5/30/23 General Meeting, which the Board accepted.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. She just published Object Essays.