APRIL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

June 11, 2024



By Anita Bushell

Personnel Policies, Childcare Woes, and Home Delivery: Highlights from the April 30 General Meeting

The April 30, 2024 General Meeting focused on personnel policies, updates to the Personnel Committee and General Coordinator roles, as well as solutions for families without childcare.

OPEN FORUM

In the open forum, members brought up several concerns surrounding the Israeli/-

Palestinian conflict, including opinions on boycotting Israeli products to protest the war in Gaza; the issue of whether the group Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) supports violence; and a 4/30/24 *Linewaiters' Gazette* letter titled "Coop Members Engage in Intimidation Campaign." A member who had recently traveled to Israel and Palestine spoke about the need for inclusivity at the Coop at this time. Several members advocated for hybrid (in person and video) General Meetings to accommodate those who cannot get to in-person meetings. One member spoke about how successful the Coop is and the need to bring the model to other neighborhoods. A member asked why childcare is not returning to the Coop.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz began his report by answering the question about childcare. The Coop cannot reinstate childcare because insurers will no longer provide coverage unless the Coop becomes a licensed childcare facility. Holtz shared the financial summary for the 8-week period ending March 24, 2024. Highlights included:

- Average weekly sales were $1,122,000 (2024), compared to $1,049,000 (2023)
- The gross margin was $1,724,000
- There was a $49,000 shortfall to cover current expenses of $1,773,000
- Cash and cash equivalents were $7.8 million, as opposed to $7.3 million in 2023
- Employee health benefits were 3.93% of sales as compared to 2.90% in the same period of the prior year

Holtz spoke about the gross margin drop this period versus the same period last year, as a result of decreasing the 25% markup to 24%, which lowers gross margin. Another factor in lowered gross margin is "shrink" (a loss of inventory because of factors such as damages, theft or administrative errors).

Holtz discussed the Coop's financial plans for the future, which include: home delivery, which will begin in approximately one year; restoring nine regular checkout stations (as opposed to the current seven); a savings plan of $7.5 to $10 million for the next pandemic because of concerns that the grocery industry will not receive the same support from the government that it got during the Covid pandemic.

During the Q&A period, a member asked whether expenses will be going up; another member asked what current interest rates were (5–5.25%). The question of how many members there currently are came up (15,900), and a discussion ensued about membership size control since 2009 because of lack of space at the Coop.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Joe Szladek opened the report by introducing the possibility of home delivery on weekdays as opposed to weekends. He then outlined the state of the current online member labor system, which has now been in place for three years, as member labor returned in full in July 2022. Szladek elaborated on the ongoing challenge of full operation with enough member labor, while having enough shifts for members to sign up for.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel added that it was important that members schedule more shifts if necessary to stay up to date, as well as plan for the summer, in case of absence for vacations. In addition, she reminded members that the online system responds to sales decreases, and fewer slots will be available when the Coop is receiving and selling less food in the summer months. During the Q&A period, members asked about growth in membership, beer committee work and an increase in stocking shifts.

> A PUBLIC JOB PERFORMANCE REVIEW IS CONTRARY TO GOOD HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICE AND COULD EASILY RESULT IN A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE COOP.

Previous open forum questions were addressed, including push notifications for early--morning shifts, whether member labor would be involved in the proposed home delivery system, as well as shifts for the recently created Youth Committee, whose members are between 18 and 22 years old.

AGENDA ITEM: ROLE OF PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

General Coordinators (GCs) Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore presented a proposal for new Personnel Committee (PC) practices. Holtz stated that the GCs, in reviewing General Meeting-approved personnel policies, realized that there were deficiencies that needed to be addressed. Holtz referred to a 1981 policy that states that one role of the PC is for all performance reviews of GCs to come to the GM in writing and verbally. Holtz stated that a public job performance review is contrary to good human resources (HR) practice and could easily result in a lawsuit against the Coop. HR-related discussions must take place confidentially under the guidance of qualified HR professionals. The GCs work with the PC and an attorney recommended by National Cooperative Grocers to develop comprehensive policies that comply with widely accepted HR practices and establish a system of accountability and fairness. Holtz stated that the role of the PC, as delineated in this evening's proposal, is a result of that process. Additionally, Holtz said, the Coop and the GCs need a fully functioning PC. Passing this proposal would be a vital step to rebuilding the PC, which currently has two of the seven authorized member positions filled. Approving this proposal would allow the Coop to once again look for additional members of the PC.

The GCs and the PC have explored the possibility of implementing an appeals process, however after consulting multiple HR attorneys the Coop has been counseled that such an implementation could result in legal action against the Coop. The proposal outlines a neutral outside employment lawyer to conduct an investigation of complaints.

Moore then read part one of the PC proposal, relating to the role of the GCs in personnel policies. Moore stated that the proposal asks to combine into one coherent policy

the current policy which was granted to the GCs by the GM over two separate proposals, in 1995 and 2002, and has been the practice for decades. Moore stated that the turnover in Coop staff is extremely low. Additionally, Coop employee policies are regularly reviewed by employment lawyers and employee handbook changes are regularly made with the input of Coop staff.

Moore then outlined and read part two of the proposal, which addresses the role of the PC. The purpose of part two of the proposal is to establish a system of accountability for the management team. The current proposal was approved in 1981, when standards were lower on PCs and would leave the Coop open to litigation. Moore re-emphasized the importance of rebuilding the Coop in order to clarify the role of the PC and asked for the GM to support the proposal.

> THE COOP NO LONGER HAS SQUADS AND SQUAD LEADERS, WHICH HAS ROBBED THE COOP OF A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, SAID A MEMBER.

During the Q&A period members asked questions including who appoints the members of the PC, and why it is currently understaffed. Another member asked about grievances and how they would be handled by the PC. Moore outlined how the current grievance process works. A member referred to a previous issue with a GC and how it was handled 15 months ago. Moore stated that personnel matters remain confidential in reference to this incident. One member asked whether members would be on the PC or only GCs. Moore answered by stating that PC applications would be from the membership pool, and then outlined how the applications process works.

After discussion, the meeting voted by hand count, because not enough ballots had been prepared. There were two attempts at counting hands. The first result was 71 yes, 86 no votes. The second result was 80 yes, 85 no votes. Thus, the proposal was voted down.

AGENDA ITEM: CHILDCARE

Member Lauren Belski presented the agenda item, and proposed returning to a more "family friendly" Coop. She described the struggle of parents who cannot make it to GMs, or work shifts because of challenges with the current online labor system. In addition, Belski spoke about how the shift cycle is now different and that the Coop no longer has squads and squad leaders, which has robbed the Coop of a sense of community. Belski also brought up the possibility of hybrid General Meetings so that more members could attend. Holtz reminded the meeting that the Coop bylaws state that meetings must be in person (they were remote only during the pandemic) and that a change in meeting style would first mean a change in the bylaws. Members presented their views regarding childcare and hybrid meetings.

PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

Elizabeth Tobier presented the minutes of March 26, 2024; no corrections were made.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Tim Hospodor chaired the meeting and all members of the board present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the members on the minutes of the March 26, 2024 GM. All members of the board present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the members on Agenda Item 1, Personnel Policies: Personnel Committee and General Coordinator Roles.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

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*.*