

## Member Linkage Committee Meeting

### Minutes June 8, 2010

In attendance: Andrea (Facilitator)

Jocelyn, Ari, Heather, Mary, Jordi, Shanti, Cheryl, Martin, Eli, Sarah, Susie, Scott (Members)  
Melissa, Dusty, Anni (Staff)  
Jim, Stephen, Elliot, Tracey (Board)

Basic ground rule is respect - share your voice and listen.

We started with a round of introductions.

Stephen introduced the topics for the meeting, decisions by the board and changes at the store.

We'll spend time on each item.

Stephen's goal is to offer a venue for providing feedback to the board about board decisions and to ask questions to become more educated about the role of the membership of the co-op in relation to the board, the store, the management.

If you have other questions, comments outside of that this is an informal conversation.

- Decisions by the board

In 2010 the board has made two decisions that have a long term effect on the co-op that relate to co-op structure and member benefits. In march the board voted to adopt patronage refund at the start of 2011. What feedback the board received was that we hadn't educated the membership.

The second big decision was to go forward with a permanent general manager. We have received all kinds of feedback around that.

Susie - What is the patronage dividend?

Stephen - If you are a member currently you get a 2 percent discount in march the board voted unanimously to move to patronage dividend in 2011 part of the discussion was to educate before deciding but decided to just do it. Based on your patronage you get a percentage back if the co-op is profitable. Tax benefit for the co-op and members.

Shanti - I think that this meeting is little bit backwards. The intent is to get feedback from the membership and to educate the membership about their role members understand their role but the board is not educated about their role. The board has broken policy and bylaws and they are the ones that need to listen to the membership not the other way around.

Stephen - The board are your elected reps, the membership elects the board to make decision about the direction of the store. So there is a range there between having a referendum and the board making it's decision with out member feedback. Where should we be in that range?

Shanti - In recent meetings the board has been ignoring the membership. The management has disciplined staff for collectivizing. The board is not listening to membership.

Melissa - I think that the board has done an excellent job of navigating. The board has been weighing the information carefully. I don't envy their position. The members that are giving feedback are not representative of the entire membership. There are lots of positive queues growing co-op, thriving co-op growing membership. We should be aware of emotional evidence versus fact.

Jordi - People go in the co-op because they like the staff not because the decision the board is making.

Eli - I strongly disagree with Melissa. most of the membership would be pissed if they know what is going on. People are shocked by what's going on. The response to member owners, I have been flabbergasted. The board president ripped down a letter, that's ridiculous. It's frustrating to come to the store. We come to the board meeting once a month with no response and seemingly no effect.

Stephen - The board meetings are a formalized process. They are designed to enable the board as volunteers. This isn't their full time gig, to allow us to do our work in a small amount of time. We have a member linkage committee meeting and taking minutes to be able to consider the information and desires of the membership within that formal process. I would still encourage everyone to come and comment at the board meetings. We have that formal structure but we love you and we want members to be engaged. If you have input about other ways to do this please let us know.

Tracey - i just wanted to say that we are breaking new ground with members being invalid. There used to be one member at the meeting every three meetings. The emails are new and we are receiving more feedback through email then ever before. We are discussing how to handle this and a way to answer all emails. It may not be totally satisfying but jim has done a good job responding and we are getting the feedback. The member linkage committee is key, this committee can help us determine where to go. This is going to be a challenge. We are at a turning point in the co-op history. All growing, all changing. The board is doing the best job they can. We are here to answer you questions. if you have a specific question about a decision. Kelly Miles wrote an email but can't be here. the board is reminded of their job - make decisions, maintain financial health, management of co-op has tools it needs to succeed. Only 25% of sale is to owners most shoppers could care less about the structure they want healthy affordable food. Consider that most of the people that we serve are not owners. There are a lot of emails out there.

Jim - I think that when I hear - you're a vocal minority, only 25% are members, the way that i hear it is that your concerns are not valid. I don't see my job as a board director to make tough decisions. I don't want to be tough. We are working within a structure. We haven't seen some of the things in the structure that aren't working for the members. If we can find a way to shift the structure to make it work better for people let's do it. It's easy to look at what we don't like. It's easy to think that people are gratuitously ignoring us or doing what we don't like. Most of us are trained to think in terms of personalities. We are working with in a structure, bylaws, tradition. If we want something different we have to create it. We have to brainstorm, be creative, and create what we need. It's not just going to be there. When i read what Kelly has to say I thought what is the definition of success? Financial? What is it that sets us apart? Everyone has to compete, everyone has customer. We need to remember that democratic control sets us apart.

Sarah - Red flag raised - 25% of sales to members but a minority. If there are people that are members they are members for a reason. If the board thinks it's worth while to have people at the board meetings maybe the board could consider have two questions and take time to answer them. Things could happen more in depth at the member. The staff wants to collectivize and the board is making that difficult. The violations of freedom of speech and firings. I would like to hear from the board about those things.

Tracey - Without taking a long time to discuss the history. Courtney and Emily started the process with ...

Stephen - The board is not happy with it's self the board is self critical the board is not happy with the decision making process.

Tracey - I appreciate that you are volunteers. In this time and moment I voted to go with general manager structure, the information that i had, in this time of turmoil. The staff is split. The gmt couldn't stand the treatment. This is not the time to transition to a collective with out a proposal in place. Create stability the board must be highly functional. The board has to be strong in order to support a collective management system. The board is to ensure the success for all members. As for collective management I support that courtney and emily supported and paid people to explore management structure. This is not a good time for this to happen. We hire the management to run the store. Courtney and Emily reported to the board even though it was not in their preveue. I have the documents - i can send it out - that would be great. It would have been good to have the board send out a formal statement. We are not a consensus board - i apologize for that - the members are like what is going on - as a board we can come together to send out some information.

Stephen - There were pleas for the board to come together but the board chose to vote the board strives for consensus but the board chose to ignore that.

Heather - If we did there was a way to hit the collective reset button. Could we get a sense that the board is willing to hear us? I have talked to 30 people about collective management. We represent a lot of energy. It takes a lot to show up. As a member i would like to know that the board is willing to listen. I disagree that the plan is not viable. I am interested in helping but I am not interested in moving forward with a general manager. There has been a vacuum of member involvement and it must be frustrating. Is it possible, can we do that?

Jordy - Respond to Tracy - Collective isn't happening because the board is split. That isn't a good reason to go forward. Maybe we need to reset the board. Maybe there needs to be a re-election. When did the board stop striving for consensus?

Stephen - There is no firm rule. The tradition is that we would discuss, straw pole, discuss more and then vote so that the minority would feel heard. It was a 7-2 vote to move to the general manager structure.

? - What do people want out of the co-op. Successful, viable, discounts, my personal interest is in the happiness of the workers. I am affected by the co-op but i put priority in the happiness of the staff. Being respected and supporting them in their work.

Melissa - We are a democracy - majority votes wins. The general manager decision was voted on. This is a vocal minority. It would take several hundred members to say they want collective. We could put that questions out there at the membership meeting. What emily and courtney suggested have a two year break from the collect process to build skills for the staff and the board. The decision was to take a two year break as staff. The co-op is not a collective, it hasn't been. It's always had a manager. It can continue to have a manager and a democratic tradition, if we support it. When we talk about supporting a collective. I don't think that everyone has the truth. Many of the things in the letter that was taken down had mistrusts in it. Operate on the truth. The staff is not sure that the staff wants a collective and we hadn't defined what that would look like. We are all interested looking at the collective. We didn't have a format. The 25 of us didn't agree what a collective was. We couldn't agree. The board couldn't agree, the members can't agree that we want a collective. The current structure has been serving us.

Jocelyn - My definition of success for the co-op. We are getting better are building community around food. My biggest fear with collective management is that people will put their personal desires. The staff people deserve to be treated justly and fairly. What is good for me in the moment it is difficult to think in the big picture. I worked as a co-op manager. The discussion has been going on since at least 2004. A lot of emotion and energy. I started out much more hopefully. I know it can work. I want to have folk have a good understanding of what a management structure would look like. If people knew. When i hear that i have talked to a lot of people and it just depends on who you talk to you. Collective management is not a cut and dry thing. Consider everyone's voice. We want the store to continue forward. Some see it as the only way to run things fairly and justly.

Mary - I was a working member for 2 years. I resigned because of the atmosphere was a nightmare for the past year. There were a group of management favored employees and it made me very uncomfortable. in the hierarchy - transmit only, top - down - members in the store and the manager in the trailer. This is a really big issue for me. There have been very serious problems. Communication is not working. Top down or bottom up, both are not working. You can motivate with fear or you can motivate in other ways. We are going to be better off if you are out there about this. You could do a survey of the membership with the website. Maybe we should deal with some of the communication issues before we try a survey. I support the staff and want to support them. I am the expert on my emotions and that is what i am sharing. I am coming from the bottom and the feeling is that the feelings of the bottom are not as valued as the top.

Scott - Step back - process and governance - relatively young organization - growing community of owners - electing owners hiring board and manager bearing the weight. Passive membership. Uninformed elections - happy customers. Democracy - owner, democracy - collective. Cultural learning. They are two very different democracy values and interests of people that are coming to the co-op - food justice. We have to evolve in our governance - how do we bring in this energy - how do we realize our goals? I have been here two years - two weaknesses - snarfing of energy. 1. communication between board and the membership - trickle of information is increasing but polarizing. Open it up by forum - more decentralized more open - periodic - every story can be told - transparency - comments recorded and posted. We won't know until there is a low energy way to have - all board members are volunteers - have board members have a working member working for them. I would like to see the board be supported by a board of advisors. Representative of the diversity of membership. Responsible for gathering feedback on possible decisions. Help us remain in touch. I would like to see everyone exposed to more information so that we can all be humbled by the complexity and diversity of the information. As individuals it is easy to take a position but it much more challenging to utilize out collective gifts.

Shanti - I think that it would level the hierarchy it would muddle the hierarchy. I prefer to have regular face-to-face meetings with the board. Regardless of collective discussion moving forward we need to improve the processes at the co-op. I have heard that collective would be harmful to the co-op. I have heard lots of different ideas of success. Democracy and collectivism appeals to me. All of the ideas of success are compatible with collective. I would like to see the discussion of collective continue. I would like to see it realized. In a collaborative cooperative way to move it forward. I would like to see staff working on it, the board working on it. I would like to have membership involved in working on it.

Lisa - Might be different if we voted today for the collective. Elliot and Tracey are you philosophically open to collectivizing? How long of a contract are you planning to offer? If you have a gm structure and people vote having someone make \$60K is not just.

Tracey and Elliot - Not opposed to collective - made decision based on the best interest of the co-op. The recommendation from management to the board - the board made the decision based on information. The gm hiring committee will be deciding the contract length - the committee or board has not made the decision. The wage was decided on by the board. It is competitive in our market. Our policy says we need to review it.

Martin - This is a dangerous vulnerable time for the co-op. 9 years ago it was a buying club. The vision has been realized. I just assumed that the co-op was anti-corporate. I am in favor of collective. It may fail. Nothing in the newsletter describes any of these issues.

Sarah - I want to reiterate the comment about supporting the workers. I would think that hiring someone in the interim. The staff wants to move to the collective hire someone who has experience. If the staff doesn't know have someone help the staff move forward. The workers did not want the conversation to end. The workers make the co-op happen. I don't want to go against the workers.

Jim - I am trying to learn and get better. I love being a part of this big group of people. In getting to yes and non-violent communication - strategy versus needs. We did change our structure. From 3 managers to one. It only took 7 people to change it why do we need hundreds to speak. Melissa, Elliot, and Tracey have no philosophical argument against it. If it's two years let's get a timeline and plan together to make it happen. The problem is that the structure of gm will have the consolidation of power that will allow the conversation to never happen. That gives the idea that there is some room to move back to the conversation. What we have in our structure is a common phenomenon of isolating energy. If we don't use a process that looks at all the needs that addresses all the different people. The majority will continue to go back and forth if we don't strive to get people involved.

Dusty - So many of the problems are caused by poorly designed structure. We made many of our decisions democratically. The staff formed the SSSC. The manager had confusion about the purpose of the committee. The committee was tasked with looking at collective. The staff voted to give a timeline extension. The committee could create a structure that the staff and board could consider. Several weeks after that the SSSC would not be funded and disbanded. We were told by management that we are not going to discuss collective for 2 years. We had finally hit upon a systematic way to begin to deal with the issue and management told us to stop and that hit us so hard. The board has not asked me how the management gave no reason, there was a vacuum of information. I don't know who did what and if there are specifics about how managers were mistreated. I think that structural issues need to be addressed.

Jordi - Response to collective detracting from food availability. I think that people's is a greet opportunity to learn from and provide a lot. they have a huge support system and they do a great job. My understanding is that ... if we are talking about vocal minority in the staff it is the people who don't want collective. There are maybe 3 people on staff who don't want to collectivize. Was Lori Burg up for the gm position and why wasn't she chosen? We can't talk about the decision making process. The hiring committee did the work and the whole board voted on the final offer.

Melissa - I agree with dusty in the formation of the SSSC. Everyone had the best intention. The SSSC didn't get the work done. The management team had the responsibility of the personnel budget and the development opportunities that we were missing. Here at alberta we have been open to the idea but we haven't made it happen. We can continue to perseute it but we may miss opportunities to meet our vision and mission. I am tired of the conversation that's move on, let's have farm tours, classes. Put our energy towards other things. There are hundreds of co-ops that are not collectives. It is not going to be a consensus decision we will not meet everyone's needs.

Susie - Thank you for speaking - especially current staff since it feels like a really big risk. I can see people's faces twisted or voices shaky. I appreciate that people are putting themselves out there. I appreciate that Scott brought it back to process. Having good communication. The lack of clear communication through the layers. There is something in my that i haven't figured out how to articulate. Admist the tension there is a general agreement about being connected, cooperation, food, community. It's easy to lose sight of that.

Tracey - My experience about process since the beginning of the year. Courtney and Emily resigned in march. The focus of the board went from board work to addressing what was coming to us from the management. Our energy has been involved in the management structure. More energy than 2 hours a week. I am unable to focus on anything else. We want communication to be strong we want staff to be happy. We have a mission - we haven't been able to talk about it in six months. It's a lot of foot work and it's a lot of time spent. That's the reality of the situation. That was behind the decision we made. What are our limitations of the board. I believe the decision was made in a sound way. Have we been able to set any parameters, training?

Stephen - New board members voting is that sound?

Andrea - The conversation is really rich - moment of high conflict - building common value statements - the co-op needs to clarify who we are - speak your intentions for now and in the future - the board is charged with this work - lots of options for the board - it's easy to participate when feelings are high but continue that participation. Every decision the board makes is going to be suspect if the common values are not clear. A real conversation about common values. I was on the collective at People's - I have been facilitating board meetings there and never seen this many people in the room. This is really hard and full of conflict - it's beautiful. Regular - open meetings that are posted - the next meeting will be in the evening so that people that come to that - shortly after the next board meeting. Can the minutes be posted to the entire membership? Yes. Need an owner on the committee. Scott and Shanti agree to be on the Member Linkage Committee.

