

VegTO: Annual General Meeting Minutes

December 02, 2023

Online (Zoom) 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm

AGM Chair: Kimberly D'Oliveira

Attendees: 25+1

1. Meeting Convenes: 1:47 pm

- Kimberly convenes the meeting and completes a land acknowledgement
- This is the first in-person meeting since the start of the pandemic
- The Board of Directors has no conflicts of interest to declare

2. Approval of Last AGM Minutes: 1:52 pm

- Emily Smith (secretary) walks through the 2022 AGM meeting minutes
- No questions or feedback from the audience
- **Motion to approve the 2022 meeting minutes dated November 26, 2022 by Jenny McQueen. Seconded by Peter McQueen. All in favour, no oppositions. Carried.**

3. Financials: 1:56 pm

- Fraser Gibson, Treasurer of VegTO for 2022–23, presents the financial statements
- A licenced accountant (Bruce Taylor) has been hired for external financial review
 - Olena Stevenson (VegTO bookkeeper) worked with Kimberly to assemble a full financial package which was sent to the accountant; all parties collaborated to produce the final statements
 - Qualified conclusion: based on the external review, the Toronto Vegetarian Association (VegTO's legal name) is compliant with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations
- Fraser noted that the fiscal year ends in June (July 1, 2022–June 30, 2023)
 - Statements do not include VegTO Fest (happened in September 2023)
 - The documents reflect the lack of our regular festival in 2022
 - Some items related to VegTO Fest 2023 appear on this statement
- Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loan:
 - Government support provided to businesses during the pandemic
 - As long as we pay back \$40K before January 18, 2024, we will not need to pay back the remaining \$20K (from the total \$60K loan)
- **Motion to approve the financial statements for fiscal year 2023 by Dharma Jain. Seconded by Kirthi Shah. All in favour, no oppositions. Carried.**

4. VegTO Board of Directors Report: 2:05 pm

- Nital Jethalal (co-president) thanks the 2021–2022 Board of Directors along with all the committee chairs and members and acknowledges their work as volunteers

- Reminder of our **mission, vision & values** □ we want to expand our scope beyond food to encompass all aspects of vegan living, meet our community's needs, increase our reach and impact
- The pandemic really had an impact on many charities, with ongoing financial challenges for smaller charities in particular
 - In 2023, we had a greater operational focus than in past years (e.g., expense containment, HR support)
- More board-driven programming this year, especially VegTO Fest 2023
 - Elliot—calls to donors
 - Ina—volunteer coordination, hype-person
 - Emily—small programming
 - Nital, Peter, Fraser, Karel—large programming (panels)
 - Dharma—volunteer support, fundraising
- **Greater focus on impact: city**
 - Toronto is a good-food city (part of the C40 group) = signed a declaration to move towards a more whole-foods plant-based diet
 - City council has been focusing more on this recently, which is an opportunity for VegTO to further our mission
 - Most cities account for emissions in terms of production, but food represents a large proportion of emissions that is not currently being recognized
 - City council adopted recommendation to explore moving 20% more plant-based in Q1 2024
 - Deposition at the Infrastructure & Environment Committee meeting (with Matt Noble)
- **Greater focus on impact: schools**
 - Canada's Food Guide is currently underused in schools
 - Collaborating with other changemakers and organizations to connect with school boards □ tailor letters to each board's specific values
- **Expansion in our partnerships & collaborations (examples below)**
 - Better Food Foundation
 - Plant-Based Data
 - Greener by Default
 - Humane Society International
 - Plant-Based Treaty
 - Reimagine Agriculture
 - Nutritional Sciences University of Toronto
 - Plant-based Cities Movement
 - Youth Climate Save
 - Toronto Vegan Food Bank
- **Outgoing directors:** Nital thanks the individuals leaving the Board this year and highlights their contributions

- Emily Smith—secretary, committee work, small programming (VegTO Fest 2023)
- Looking to the future: maximize impact, enhanced strategic support, revenue generation through impact activities
 - Identify and target behaviours that motivate people to move towards a more plant-based lifestyle
 - E.g., more plant-based options at non-vegan restaurants
- Question from the audience: *How does VegTO plan to hold city council accountable to their promise to move at least 20% plant-based?*
 - Answer: continue building our network and identifying champions
- Suggestion to share the links for the reports
 - Presentation is in the Google Drive □ slides will be amended before sharing
 - veg.ca/agm
- Question from the audience: *How many members do we have?*
 - Answer: about 1000 members = 30% growth from last year

5. Staff Report: 2:25 pm

- Kimberly (ED) presents the staff report
- Down to two full-time staff (Kimberly—executive director, Sarah—event and programs coordinator) and one part-time staff (Olena—bookkeeper)
- Kimberly noted that the organization is still recovering from the effects of the pandemic
- Presentation includes an overview of the current staff and the work completed by staff from Dec 2022 until November 2023
- Dec 2022–Mar 2023:
 - Holiday Silent Auction and Fundraising Campaign
 - Veganuary Campaign
 - Ontario Trillium Foundation application
 - Black History Month Campaign
 - Canada Summer Jobs application (unsuccessful, likely due to HFC cancellation in 2022 = didn't use the full funds; plan to re-apply this year)
 - United Way grant
 - Moved office to dedicated desk space at CSI
 - Veg food fest planning □ successful in acquiring Nathan Phillips Square
 - ProVeg International
- Apr–Jun 2023:
 - Marketing audit with Toronto Metropolitan University's Advanced Marketing graduating class

- Launched “The Green Room Series” = six-part video interview series on our YouTube channel with the aim of helping people go vegan
- VegTO Fest production begins
 - Recruitment, securing suppliers, rebranding the event, rebuilding the website (collaboration with Studio Millie)
 - Public launch to members and audience
 - Exhibitor recruitment
 - ‘Dispatches from Emily’ weekly newsletter
- Jul–Sep 2023:
 - Worked with Studio Millie to update and rebrand the website
 - VegTO Fest planning begins
 - New operating name and website soft launch
 - Work on VegTO network begins
 - Grant applications
 - Brand voice and social media audit
 - Farmhouse Garden sponsorship—Eddie the Rooster
 - VegTO Fest 2023 on September 9 & 10, 2023
 - At a glance: 25K attendees, 102 exhibitors, 85 volunteers, 27 hours of programming, 10 newsletters, extensive social media content
 - Net earnings: \$125,544.29
 - New venue and pricing changes
 - New brand and message—more Toronto, urban, contemporary, greater focus on benefits for animals
 - Business development activities □ had to work harder to identify and acquire exhibitors for this year (related to current financial conditions)
 - Sponsorship: total amount of approx. \$50K (Odd Burger, Nongshim, VegeCert, Sweets from the Earth, Bullfrog Power)
 - Marketing, promotion, and audience engagement
 - Programming opportunities: board members leveraged their networks to secure high-quality speakers
 - Grants and fundraising led by Elliot Alexander (phone campaign, direct connection)
 - Complete report available on veg.ca/agm
- Oct–Nov 2023:
 - Concluded “Giving Tuesday” fundraising campaign (\$2400+) □ shared community stories, hope to continue to do this in future campaigns
 - Korean Tourism Organization partnership: sponsored a media trip to South Korea, Green Korea dinner at the ROM, cultivating a partnership in 2024
 - Ultimate Vegan Prize Holiday Fundraiser
 - Working with local businesses
 - Concludes December 18, 2023
- Kimberly thanks attendees for listening and for their support

6. Volunteer Appreciation: 2:39 pm

- VegTO Fest 2023 would not have been possible without our 85 volunteers
- Time commitment: 3000+ hours of planning, 14 event hours, 19 hours of set-up/tear-down, 150 hours of post-event wrap-up and reporting
 - Full list of volunteers available at veg.ca/agm
- Special thank-you to Board members
 - Programming was a big area of focus
 - Special shout-out to Ina for her invaluable volunteer coordination

7. Affirmation of Board of Directors (2023-2024): 2:43 pm

- Board size is 11; however, there are fewer candidates than positions, so all directors will be affirmed (no vote)
- Completing 2nd year of two-year term:
 - **Elliot Alexander:** been on the Board for 3 years; very rewarding experience; focus on fundraising (key to the survival of the organization); special recognition to Kimberly for her sponsorship work in 2023
 - **Peter McQueen:** been on the Board for several years; happy to be returning; shout-out to a long-standing member, Michelle Brennan (unofficial co-founder of Veg Food Fest)
 - **Dharma Jain:** learned a lot about VegTO this year; hopes to contribute to the best of his capabilities
- Standing for re-election:
 - **Karel Vredenberg:** been with the organization for many years, on the board for three; acknowledges challenges faced by organizations and is very proud of our collaboration and accomplishments; looking forward to the future
 - **Fraser Gibson:** looking forward to engaging the community more, more consistent structured programming
 - **Nital Jethalal:** thanks community members for their support; a lot of room for impact; looking forward to taking a bigger role in fundraising and sponsorship
 - **Ina Maria Tonescu:** joined during the current board term; impressed by the passion and commitment of the organization and community; wants to help move towards system change
- New directors (affirmed):
 - **Kelly Kerr:** food business; vegan activist for over 9 years; born and raised in Toronto; corporate background in operations, community management, and customer support; excited about what she can bring to the board
 - **Marc Goldgrub:** lawyer, green economy law (specializes in working with green businesses and non-profits)
 - **Adrienne George:** recovering from COVID, statement read by Kimberly: ethical vegan for 6 years; global marketing director at Animal Save Movement, PBT campaign; co-organizer and safety marshal at Toronto Cow

and Pig save; marketing and promotions degree, history degree; volunteers with an animal sanctuary (Ass Menagerie)

- Leaving:
 - **Emily Smith:** excited to see how the organization grows, hopes to stay connected and engaged in the community
 - Special thank you from Kimberly
- Kimberly thanks the new, returning, and departing Board members □ sincerely appreciates the work done, looking forward to working with current/new members
- **Motion to affirm the election of the board candidates by Kirthi Shah. Seconded by Dharma Jain. All in favour, no opposition. Carried.**

8. Intermission: 3:00 pm

- 20-minute intermission, Kimberly invited attendees to view the VegTO Fest slideshow and to enjoy baked goods from Sweets From the Earth

9. Selection of Board Terms: 3:20 pm

- Emily randomly chooses two names out of a bowl to determine which board members will serve a 1-year term
- The following board members will serve a 1-year term:
 - Karel Vredenberg
 - Adrienne George
- The following board members will serve a 2-year term:
 - Nital Jethalal
 - Fraser Gibson
 - Ina Maria Tonescu
 - Kelly Kerr
 - Marc Goldgrub
- The following board members are continuing their second term:
 - Elliot Alexander
 - Peter McQueen
 - Dharma Jain

10. Strategic Planning 2024: 3:23 pm

- Presented by Kimberly (ED)
- Improve success rate of plant-based objectives, support people interested in transitioning to a more plant-based lifestyle and help those that were unsuccessful
- Pillars of our strategy: planning, partnerships & outreach, delivery, data & infrastructure
- Priority in 2022–23: digitizing discount card + revitalizing the member program
 - A large portion of membership revenue is used for administrative purposes

- Digitization provides the opportunity for members to start using their card immediately (will still offer the option for physical cards)
- Greater interest in veganism among individuals between 20–25 years □ strategic outreach to this group
- Support via a \$20K grant from The United Way, Resilient Communities Fund
- VegTO network (first introduced at 2022 AGM):
 - Piloted with VegTO Fest 2023 exhibitors and volunteers
 - In 2024, we want to integrate the platform into the membership offer
 - Photo, profile, social groups, chat with community members, professional connections
 - Expand reach and engagement
- VegTO Fest 2023: approximately 40% of attendees were omnivores
 - We have already applied for Nathan Phillips Square in 2024
 - Want to continue to grow our exhibitor network
- Grants and Funding: over \$55K of support for the organization in 2023-24
 - United Way Resilient Communities grant (digitization of card)
 - Vegan Grants (VegTO Fest)
- We have saved money through our downsize to CSI (\$650/month vs. ~\$2K/month)
- Continue to cultivate meaningful relationships with like-minded organizations
 - E.g., deposition of city council, title sponsor with Green Korea

11. Member Questions and Opportunity to Provide Feedback: 3:36 pm

- Attendees raise their hand to pose a question or feedback
- George (question): *Do we have any relations with the 'vegan group' in Toronto?*
 - Response: we are working with sister organizations in the sector; Kimberly can answer in more detail directly via e-mail
- George (question): *Is there any hope of going back to Harbourfront Centre?*
 - Response: the most common feedback from VegTO Fest 2023 was that NPS is a great alternative, but they miss HFC. The decision to return is made by HFC, not us (they have shifted their priorities and are no longer willing to work with us for financial reasons).
- Jenny (comment): *Loves the past accomplishments and future direction of the organization; is excited by the new faces on the board; thinks the new spaces (CSI and NPS) are working well*
 - Response: we have a lot of room to grow at NPS; City Hall enjoyed hosting us and is happy to do so in the future (different from HFC); event success will improve now that we have a better understanding of the opportunities there
- Ray (question): *What is the proportion of non-vegan/vegetarians at NPS vs. HFC?*
 - Response: comparable; most of the people came in mixed groups (mix of vegans and non-vegans); comparable walk-through opportunity
- Allan (question): *What are the plans for VegTO Fest dates in 2024?*

- Response: we applied for our traditional weekends and the two following weekends (in response to concerns regarding summer temperatures)
 - Response: we are building from the ground-up at NPS, staff and volunteers are on-site for ~10 hours on Friday; we are exploring extending the event hours on Saturday but need to be cognizant of lighting and safety requirements
- Allan (question): *Is there a chance of bringing back the member appreciation event seen at previous Veg fests?*
 - Response: this year, we were focused on navigating the new space; there are definitely opportunities for it in future years (either before or during the event)
- Steve (comment): *During the year, we need lower-key events that are face-to-face*
 - Response: during the pandemic, we were one of the first organizations to pivot to virtual events; successful at the start, but over time people became less interested in attending (3–4 attendees □ became a matter of resources)
 - Response: we want to create opportunities for community members to start their own group
- VegTO Member (question): *In the past, there were Spring markets at Wychwood Barns with speakers, books, etc.—is there any chance of bringing them back?*
 - Response: smaller events require hundreds of hours □ possible in the past when we had more staff, but less feasible in our current situation; at this time, the cost of the events (financial and time) does not warrant hosting them, but something to be explored in the future
 - Note from Sarah that we are amplifying other markets that are happening (i.e., even though we don't have the capacity to host, exhibitors are still being supported)
- Kelly (question): *One of the barriers to entry for vendors is the current climate which has left businesses struggling—what was the feedback regarding pricing?*
 - Response: we were the lowest-cost event across the three options (VegTO Fest, Vegandale, Planted Expo) and made sure to do our research before deciding on pricing; every year, some people say that the price is too expensive = tough balancing act as we also need to cover our costs
 - Response: we are the only event that doesn't charge admission = we rely on exhibitors to provide revenue; we did our best to manage the margin between exhibitor charge and profit (\$15K profit from exhibitor booths)
 - Response: cost for next year is unknown; we will continue to try to be the lowest price option available; if we increase the number of exhibitors, we can reduce cost overall for everyone
 - Addition from Peter: some expenses were unique to NPS (e.g., \$5K penalty for damage to the surface of the square) □ our prices reflect this risk
- Jenny (question): *Did vendors who were selling things provide feedback re: profit?*
 - Mixed feedback □ some made a profit, some made less than previous veg fests, but all made comparable or more profit than at Planted or Vegandale
 - Just over 50% said they met or exceeded their revenue expectations

- Ray (question): *Toronto hosted the IVFF this year, Shawn Stratton announced his resignation and is looking for someone to keep the festival going, with a possible arrangement between Toronto and Los Angeles—is this something that would make sense for us to get involved in?*
 - Response: when we hosted IVFF in the past, we had an agreement with Hot Docs that made it feasible; if the numbers make sense, we will consider hosting it in the future
 - Response: it is difficult to run with two people, but we are happy to promote and be involved in some capacity (e.g., screening at VegTO Fest)

12. Closing Remarks: 4:02 pm

- Kimberly invites everyone to contact her and Sarah at donations@veg.ca with further feedback and questions
- Reminder that the member resource folder (veg.ca/agm) will remain open, including the financial statements □ additional questions welcome
- **Motion to adjourn the meeting by Elliot Alexander. Seconded by Allen Jaffee (sp?). All in favour, no oppositions. Carried.**