

High Falls Food Co-op Board Meeting

Tuesday March 4, 2025 5:00 – 7:00 pm

Minutes:

Meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm on Zoom

Board Members Present: Karim, David, Ginny, Amie, Michael, Zach, Jerrie

Staff: Lucy

Guests:

Introductions, Pronouns, Gratitude

Open discussion:

Approval of minutes:

Approved

Board Education:

Intro to Consensus Process - Led by Karim

Intro:

Consensus is a Democratic decision making process oriented towards inclusivity, fairness & cooperation

Consensus decision-making, as a self-described practice, originates from several [nonviolent](#), [direct action](#) groups that were active in the [Civil rights](#), [Peace](#) and [Women's](#) movements in the USA during [counterculture of the 1960s](#).

Decision Making Process: (see flowchart)

Stack & Progressive Stack (<https://neighborhoodanarchists.org/facilitation>):

Stack is a system of meeting facilitation that uses a set of hand signals to help keep order for when people want to speak without interrupting one another, let people express their thoughts or feelings without having to speak, and help structure and focus a conversation. A facilitator often keeps track of stack (or that can be a specific role).

Progressive stacking can be used to give marginalized groups, voices that are often submerged, discounted, or excluded, and those with lived experience a greater chance to speak by placing them before those on stack without lived experience or who have already spoken.

Hand Signals (See chart):

Facilitator roles:

- **Keep the meeting on track** – Keeps discussion to one topic at a time and finish each topic before moving on to the next one.
- **Stack** – Tracks who wants to talk and whose turn it is to talk. (More below)
- **The big picture** – Makes the purposes of the meeting and topics clear to all. - **Vibeswatch** – Maintains awareness of participants' levels of emotional, mental, and physical needs throughout the meeting/conversation.
- **Timekeeper** – Keeps track of time and what's left on the agenda. Reminds people of the time so they can decide what's important to prioritize.
- **Decisions** – Checks for consensus and temperature checks for decisions as needed. Follows the decision making / consensus process the group has agreed to. (More below)
- **Conflict Navigation** – Evaluates how to handle conflict if it arises. (More below)

Questions:

Manager's FYI:

Lucy: We have started the year off with fantastic sales growth. We had a lot of high expenses in January, so it's important to talk about that. 12 new members, we raised money for our change for good recipient.

Jerrie: You mentioned we had high repair costs. Is there anything we can capitalize on those expenses? That means it's put on the balance sheet and depreciated over time.

Lucy: The expenses we had were related to furnace repair. I capitalized our new phone system and wiring. Furnace repairs were just repairs

Jerrie: You could argue furnace repairs were for the entire year, so you could divide it over the year.

Lucy: Good to know because we have a maintenance agreement for our compressors Jerrie: Could even out the month to month stuff

Lucy: One guy said we needed a new furnace, but turns out we just needed a switch repaired. We had a few other capital expenses for the downstairs reset. Tables.

Jerrie: On the customer count graph can we track seasonality? The graph from previous years laid over the current year.

Lucy: I can put the previous year's same month back on? I can do that with the graph.

Jerrie: Average basket size was about \$33 last year and now it's \$34 so our average basket has jumped a dollar.

Lucy: It has definitely gone up somewhat, and we have a higher customer count

Michael: Every day I've been in this year it's been packed.

Ginny: I usually go to the coop around dinner and it's always packed. I'm surprised our basket size isn't larger because I feel like people are doing real shopping at the coop, not just convenience store runs.

Jerrie: Can you explain why personnel costs went up so much?

Lucy: Wages we're really high, we're looking into that by dept and people used a lot of paid time off, so I'm interested to see what that looks like for march. We had some staff expenses like holiday pay, sweatshirts and gift cards, and some of that hit in january. Some of that was just time of year, but wages are where we're focusing.

PG: GM Monitoring:

B4 Report

Jerrie: You reported non compliance with B4 because of annual meeting attendance. I would argue you have been compliant because the board is supposed to be partially responsible for attendance.

Lucy: I could change the definition of that, and there is an education element of engaging membership, but the annual meeting is not the most interesting thing for members.

Jerrie: I would recommend that you change the definition and resubmit this.

Ginny: I think you've been doing the work to communicate this, and it's not your fault.

David: There are a lot of variables for compliance and noncompliance, and I think changing the definition is a good suggestion.

Jerrie: The patronage dividends system requires an annual report, I'm asking her to change it to april

Amie: Are you proposing it be an april report this year or every year.

Jerrie: Every year because taxes happen in march.

Amie: Maybe May?

Jerrie: That could make sense, but no later than May. Very excited we can do patronage refunds this year. It will be small, but it will be something.

Amie: Powerful year to do it given how the world is blowing up.

David: You just don't get things coming back to you from other grocery stores, so it's good to make sure people are aware of it.

Lucy: We have 6 new members already this month

B5 Report

Jerrie: You reference in your report that there is a spreadsheet for comment cards. Would you share that with the board? Might be interesting, though i don't think it's necessary for approving the B5 report

Lucy: Comment card use has decreased, but our responsiveness has increased. When we started it it was a great idea, but we now have a culture of calling back every single person, so some of this isn't in the spreadsheet.

Ginny: To me it's an indication of engagement. I imagine that people using comment cards is a good indicator.

Lucy: Card use has decreased, but we have a ton of engagement with customers who call and email, and none of that has been tracked. We've trained staff to never say I don't know or we don't have that, but instead say "we can order it" or "get in touch with someone and they can help you out"

Micael: I love looking at the customer count. Wow

Zach: It's the customer service that's making the coop a store people want to shop at. Having informed people to explain product selection and pricing is great. It speaks to people shopping at the coop.

David: What does the health inspection consist of?

Lucy: Everything from is the meat slicer clean, do people have their hair up, are the soups the right temp, are there cobwebs? Is the exterior tidy? Clutter...We have a fire safety building inspection that happens every year as well.

Amie: I had the kindest and nicest experience, and I wasn't asking anyone for anything , but I couldn't find the cherries, and the guy who cooks in the kitchen said "you look like you're searching for something" and he found someone else to help. And it was great to not even ask out loud, and have two people help me.

Approved

PG: Board Monitoring:

C1 & C2

Approved

Member Engagement:

Lucy: Meeting scheduled at D&H canal museum from 6-8 pm. Jerrie is putting an agenda together. David is getting wine. Sarahana is our speaker who will speak on the central hudson...We talked about board members calling members to attend so we'll divvy up a list. I have a list of politicians to reach out to.

Jerrie: in the past we've found that board members taking a list of 10 people and reaching out directly is the best way to get attendance. We did this a couple years ago, and I think it will make a good impact. Jan is pulling a list of newest and oldest members as well as top shoppers

Lucy: We have another meeting next wednesday, and should have a list after that. We also have a board vote. We had two cancelled events in February, but we took it as a sign that we're not doing classes this winter or spring, and focusing on other things instead.

Jerrie: We also talked about ad hoc committee for 50th anniversary, and there is interest from members. Jan and Ginny, I had asked you to write a charter for that.

Lucy: I can ask other coops if they wanted to share their charters.

Amie: What was that about board elections?

Lucy: We have a few seats up for reelection, and we have an open seat, so hopefully someone will run to fill it. If there's anyone you think would make a good board member, now's the time, though they will have to fill in their application before april

Expansion check-in:

Jerrie: Lucy was going to tell us about her experience because she's the only one who has gone through this process.

Lucy: It's so specific to the coop, the time, the location...Springfield food co op opened in 1992 and had already gone through one relocation. It closed and opened 3 months later. The coop had a shoppers survey just like us. Same team and data. The coop was in a different position, they had really high sales, but they had many of the same takeaways we had. It took a number of years to get a market study done. We looked at the current site, and then a few others, and it was interesting to see how things start to come together. Over 2017 and 18 things really picked up. We hired a team from national coop grocers to consult on feasibility, and what readiness looked like.

Some of you were on the board when we rated ourselves using an expansion tool. We got this proforma, and the coop board clashed with some of the coop grocer people, so we kept that and moved forward with someone from Columinate. A non-profit in town became our fiscal sponsor, and we identified a building in town. The town was interested because they were trying to revitalize the downtown. Between 2017 & 18 we were trying to manipulate this proforma, and at first glance it didn't work at all, but you find out what the funding will be, it's a living tool based on relationships and knowledge you're gaining. In 2018 we committed to a building and then had a capital campaign that Columinate helped with. Board members got together to make calls and we made a lot of money. Board hired a project manager for the capital campaign, and they worked with the town. There were multiple angles to the capital campaign.

A group of board members ended up purchasing the building with the understanding that the coop would pay them back in (10?) years. At the same time the board was coming up with ideas for the building. One board member was a contractor who left the board to work on the building. A lot of people got excited and involved with the project. We were really engaged with the community, and with staff. The building had been lawyers offices, but was originally a grocer, and they were able to open during covid. Actual sales growth fell below the projections, but I think that's just how it goes.

Amie: You were discussing board members purchasing the building. What happened?

Lucy: They decided to form an llc, purchase the building and lease the building to the coop. It was a lease to own situation

Jerrie: What Lucy said that's important is that people start to care about the project, and then they want to help even if it doesn't seem like the best investment.

Lucy: We also got a bank loan, and I don't remember all of the particulars, but these people put their heads together and figured out what they needed to do, and just did it. The proforma helps with the financial projects. So it's not just how to achieve the project, but how it will be sustainable in the long term.

I did hear that 50% of coops that expanded in the last year are operating at a loss. Inflation put a lot of projects in jeopardy.

Jerrie: I just wanted everyone to know about the process, that it was hard and long, but that it is possible. And Lucy has gotten us to a great place with profitable quarters.

Was everyone able to comment on the powerpoint Ginny made?

Ginny: I need some data from you Lucy, and then we'll use a couple slides from it in the annual meeting

Jerrie: We should also talk about board succession. We've been getting by with last minute additions to the board, but would be good if we could get ahead of it, so that if you were asked to be president or co president you would feel comfortable.

Michael: I had said that I would come up with a game plan for what to do next with the letter to the editor, but I was sick last month, and only just had a (good) meeting with Lucy.

Jerrie: Did we get any responses? I was at a political meeting, and someone commented on a great letter Zach wrote.

Michael: I was able to review the toolbox Lucy referred to earlier, and I think it's required reading. There's a comment section on what board members wish they had done, and it really highlights how the process can be. It's very illuminating. It's the expansion tool box that Lucy distributed after our last meeting.

Lucy: It's basically a how to guide

Michael: It's a lot of pages, but it's very good. Will let you know what we're up against.

Members in good standing:

Lucy: Members in good standing definition is that they patronize the coop and are current in their equity payments, so pretty simple actually. We're figuring out how to monitor who is in good standing, and what to do if they are not in good standing. Currently Jan sends a letter to members if they have a payment coming up. Some coops don't offer benefits to members not in good standing, and equity payments go to paying equity. We just want to iron out how to handle this, especially with equity payment coming up. Also we're implementing a new reward system next month, and members not in good standing won't be able to benefit from that.

Jerrie: I would like to see # of members not in good standing in your manager's fyi quarterly.

Amie: a member in good standing has an equity share, but is also shopping, but we can't make people shop?

Lucy: We can revoke their membership, and we have a full sales record for every member. We have a pretty small membership for a coop of our sales volume, and I'm not looking to get rid of any members.

Amie: At bagels with the board it was interesting, because when we talked to people by asking if they were members, they got scared, so we tried to start conversations in other ways.

Lucy: half of our sales come from non members. It's not a number we should look at in isolation. Because of tourism, we might never have more

Upcoming Columinate and other trainings:

Jerrie: There is an upcoming 4 session training on policy governance process. There is another training on leadership. And then two weekends from now there is the NFCA meeting in Greenfield MA. I'm driving, so let me know if you want to go.

Meeting Adjourned

Ginny	GR
Jerrie	JG
Michael	MRS
Zack	ZB
Jan	Abse
Amie	AW
David	DDP
Karim	KT