

Meeting Minutes for Weaver Street Market's Board of Directors

March 2016 Meeting

Monthly Board Meeting, WSM Admin Center, Hillsborough, NC on March 9, 2016, 6:15 pm to 9:30 pm

Directors present: Ruffin Slater (general manager), Alicia Altmueller (treasurer), David Bright (secretary), Barbara Keith, Jon McDonald (chair), Linda Stier, and Charles Traitor.

Others attending: Andy Sachs (facilitator), Brenda Camp (notes), and Amy Lorang (worker owner).

1. Preliminaries

Owner Input: Amy Lorang, worker owner, expressed that as a member of the Elections Committee (EC) she hopes the Board will acknowledge the importance of voting turnout and recognize that the EC is best positioned and motivated to take on voting participation.

Agenda: An EC item was added, and the recruitment committee report was removed.

Minutes: Minutes from the February meeting were approved.

Decision: The Board approved the February minutes.

2. Update on the Healthy Food Goal

General Manager Ruffin Slater presented an update on the healthy food goal. He noted that of particular importance is the Town of Carrboro's public hearing for text amendment being sought by the Inter-faith Council of Social Services (IFC). The text amendment would change the zoning requirements in order to allow IFC to relocate its community kitchen from Chapel Hill to particular zones in Carrboro that include where its food pantry is currently located. Slater said the public meeting was a chance to state our position about a community solution to hunger and the need for a wider zoning area for a community kitchen.

The Directors found his approach to the public statement effective and offered a few suggestions for refining it:

- Call forth the leadership of the Town of Carrboro to get behind the community approach.
- Emphasize the collaboration among the community groups.
- Speak to the specific issue being addressed.
- Give very specific examples and name partners.
- Highlight some hard facts, such as, "we've already done this, but could do this."

3. Patronage Dividend Preview

General Manager Ruffin Slater presented a preview of the patronage dividend. He noted that he was presenting his interpretation and beginning the discussion earlier since the Board is using its new policy. He noted that his interpretation needs to be consistent with two other financial policies: B1 Financial Condition and B2 Planning and Budgeting.

- The Directors were aligned with how the worker owner dividend has been implemented in previous years. The question was raised whether the worker owner portion could be higher than 50% in the split in order to increase worker's retirement savings.

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- Benefits of the dividend program were identified: It lowers our taxes, it keeps the money local, and we can retain 80% of the funds.
- The Directors agreed that the consumer dividend has a detrimental affect rather than being perceived as having meaningful value.
- Alternatives were considered: Creating a “reserve fund” from the dividends and paying out the rest to worker owners, finding an alternative for consumers that improves consumer experience, and finding a creative solution that benefits consumers—such as an owner appreciation day or event or a series of coupons.

4. Board Business

Elections Committee Report

Linda Stier, Chair of the Elections Committee, requested that the Board approve a new member to the Elections Committee: Becky Laskody, consumer owner. The Board made the appointment.

Decision: The Board appointed Becky Laskody (consumer owner) to the Elections Committee.

Voter Turnout/Online Voting

In the Election Committee’s 2015 Election Report, the EC requested that the Board assign responsibility for voter turnout to the committee. The Board had a general discussion of voter participation within the context of that request. Highlights of the discussion include:

- The importance of considering worker-owner voting and consumer-owner voting separately. (Worker-owner participation in the elections is high.)
- The importance of directing resources toward meaningful participation opportunities. (Consumer owners may not be motivated if they do not perceive the votes as a meaningful contribution.)
- The importance of determining whether the Board and/or the Election Committee have a conflict in promoting voter turnout, and if so, identifying where the conflict lies.
- The need to consider why consumers may not be voting: Consumer owners may be happy with how things are going at the co-op and, therefore, be less likely to vote than when there is something contentious happening. Consumers may be less likely to vote when there is a slate of equally qualified candidates.
- The need to consider all the variables that define a successful, valued election, including fairness and accessibility.
- The need to make it easier for owners to vote immediately; otherwise, they are likely to forget.
- The importance of voting as a fundamental right to vote.
- The opportunity to expand participation in many areas, which would inherently expand voting participation.

The EC chair indicated that the EC intends to include ideas for increasing participation in the draft Elections Manual, which will be submitted for Board approval at the April meeting.

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Worker Owner Participation

Jon McDonald, Board Chair, reported that he and Charles Traitor have been meeting weekly with the GM. The group has drafted communication and participation plans for worker owners. The plans are intended to cultivate both a sense of participation and empowerment. One activity being discussed is the use of team huddles—small groups of workers getting together for 10 or 15 minutes to discuss topics, including workplace issues. Other plans are being considered that will encourage talk among units and across stores, allow workers to provide feedback on new products, and tie everyday tasks to bigger goals.

Board Budget

At the April Board meeting, the Board Budget report for 2016 Q2 will be resubmitted with a formula correction along with the Q3 report.

5. GM Reports

March 2016 GM Report

The General Manager answered questions on his monthly General Report. Highlights include:

- **Sales Growth vs. Budget:** We have achieved 4% sales growth through the first 10 weeks of the current quarter. This is above our 3% budget, which is the threshold to be prepared for the future and accomplish our Ends.
- **March 22 Town of Carrboro Public Hearing:** The Carrboro town board is holding a public hearing on a zoning text amendment to allow soup kitchens in particular zones of Carrboro. I'm planning to speak in favor of the text amendment and will report more in person at the Board meeting.
- **NCG National Meeting in Chapel Hill in April:** Co-op managers from across the country are meeting at the Carolina Inn on April 6-7. The event includes tours of Weaver Street Market.

6. Closings

- Review Decisions and Tasks
- Rolling Board Calendar
- Meeting Evaluation
- March Agenda: Budget, Elections Tasks, Worker Owner Participation

7. Executive Session: Real Estate