

**La Montañita Food Cooperative
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2016 – 5:30 pm**

Board Present: Ariana Marchello, Tracy Sprouls, Marshall Kovitz, Lisa Banwarth-Kuhn, Greg Gould, James Esqueda, Jessica Rowland, Tammy Parker, Courtney White

Board Absent: None

Also Present: Dennis Hanley (GM), John Heckes (CFO), Deborah Good (admin assistant), David Hurley (facilitator), Jeffrey Hertz (research assistant), Michelle Franklin (staff), Sharret Rose (staff), Robin Seydel (staff), Karolyn Cannata-Winge (staff), Mark Lane (staff), Frank Kraus (member), Amanda Weinstein (member), Hanh Nguyen (member), Kyle Johnson (staff), Jim McCully (staff), Sonja McCully (member), Derrick Leich (staff), Susan Tredway (member), Janet Mason (member), Jane Gordon (staff), Kari Smith (staff), Adam Fischler (staff), Susan Clair (member), Denise Tessier (member), Adrian Nadler (member), Jason Trant (staff), Robert Veilleux (staff), Charlie Wisoff (guest, CivNet)

The meeting started at 5:33 p.m. at the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque. David Hurley facilitated and Deborah Good took notes.

1. Welcome

Issues Raised: All present introduce themselves.

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

2. Board Study / Community Education Series

Topic: Using Online Platforms to Increase Membership Engagement

Issues Raised: See Appendix A

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

3. Approve the Agenda

Issues Raised: Ariana moves and Tammy seconds to approve the agenda.

Actions Taken: The agenda is approved unanimously.

Actions Required: None

4. Member Comments

Issues Raised: A larger number of people than usual wish to speak. Speakers address the Board members, who mostly listen.

- Speaker 1: I have been staff for ten and a half years. I am also a member-owner and shopper. I am concerned about the treatment of staff. We would like a voice in the decisions being made without us having any say. In the last five years, I have worked with my heart and soul and have had only a \$1 raise. Not all staff are receiving the same treatment. People of color are being reprimanded, written up, and forced out. There have been comments made about race, age, accents, and body type. Jobs have been given to

some people that don't have to go through interviews, or the interviews are a formality when a decision has already been made. I don't think this organization is transparent. There is a lot being held back from the staff. We want to help with decision-making, for example the recent decision to bring the Clean Fifteen into our stores to make more money. The produce department has done very well on organic.

- Speaker 2: I have been a member-owner for 20 years. About 10 years ago, I stopped doing comparative shopping and just shopped at the co-op because I believe in what the co-op is doing. The Clean Fifteen email I received is an example of corporate values and propaganda. I did not understand after reading the email that we had introduced conventional non-organic produce. I was outraged. It feels like the co-op not only brought in conventional produce but has lied about it. I will have to decide whether to renew my membership. Something that has been highly cherished by myself and many other members died when pesticide-grown produce came in on the truck. I bought some not knowing because the email was so confusing. The co-op cannot survive by becoming Whole Foods and Sprouts.
- Speaker 3: I am a member. I just found out about the Clean Fifteen today. I heard that the rationale was to compete better with Sprouts. But we should be the one to emulate, not regressing to the big box grocery type model. Some of the staff were perturbed but their input was not valued. Giving staff a voice, I think, is also a co-op value.
- Speaker 4: Why can't this be a dialogue? Can't we get answers and feedback? It sounds like we have to wait to hear an answer via the newsletter or through some other avenue. I have been staff for five years. Our customers rely on it all being organic or chemical-free or local. Bringing in conventional produce permeates what the core of the co-op is about. The power structure of how the co-op works - it is about member-owners. Could we schedule a dialogue because this feels so one-sided?
 - Board response: That could be a possibility. We may need to schedule some additional co-op cafes as it appears this is needed. We are not disregarding your comments, and it's not that we don't want to interact. It's just that this is not the body to go to for snap decisions. We don't make operational decisions. We are taking into account what you have to say.
- Speaker 5: I sent a long letter to the Board of Directors and to the General Manager. The letter articulated much of what has been said. Organic is the most important. But we also have to remember that by us supporting conventional agriculture on any level, we are supporting depletion of soil, companies that have not supported the environment, and violations of human rights. It calls into question whether I want to be a member. The co-op should be progressive, compassionate, supportive of the environment. The education series is fabulous. We have to find ways to bring in more members and not lower our standards to be like the other stores. Are we going to re-sign the stores, change the mission statement, change the ends? Selling conventional produce is not regenerative agriculture and not healthy food. I don't know why the Board is allowing this because it is not leading to the Ends. People who use evil means to reach positive ends are deceiving themselves.
- Speaker 6: I am a department manager at the Rio Grande store. I have been in this business for many years, having started in a conventional, corporate setting. Those type

of people look at profits and don't see people as people. It's okay to make some money, but the way you are going about it has to have integrity behind it. This is the fortieth year of La Montañita. I say with passion: what a shame that we can't be the trailblazers of this business and this model. We have to be able to progress smartly. We believed in a cause that no one believed in. You had the corporate model and the coop model. The coop model is a very special business. And if it is all about the dollar bill, shame on you. Those fields with the pesticide going into the soil, water, bloodstream. If one person leaves here tonight not renewing their membership, that's dollars lost. Think about the forty years. How did we get here and how can we progress smartly? If you think that making an extra buck is going to help you out, talk to me in ten years.

- Speaker 7: You've heard a lot of the same sentiments. There are a lot of years of experience among store staff. If you asked for ideas about ways that with integrity we could make more money, you would get a lot of solid suggestions. Instead you are telling us to implement things that we don't believe in. It feels like we are looked at as lower-class, not valued for the experience and expertise we bring. This is undermining the integrity of what the co-op has sought so long to uphold.
- Speaker 8: I have been a member since 2005. I am new staff. Ethically I am highly challenged at this time, mostly because the Chiquita bananas are on the floor. The shipment came in while I was working. I think organic is important. I am big on fair trade. I know what that company (Chiquita) does to people. I am having to ask myself: Do I really want to stick around and earn a pay check here? I'm not really sure where you are going. So I'm showing up and listening.
 - Board member response: I have been on the board for 35 years, and I have been a member since the co-op started, so I have had an opportunity to watch the co-op change, and the market too. I also took a leadership role in the General Manager search that resulted in our hiring Dennis Hanley, so I think I can express a good deal of the sentiment of the search and can explain some of the rationale and vision. I have a perspective and opinions, and I would be happy to meet with you one-on-one. This Board member provides his email address.

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

5. Consent Agenda

- a. Board Meeting Minutes (February 16, 2016)
- b. Member Engagement Committee Minutes (February 22, 2016)
- c. Board Development Committee Minutes (February 24, 2016)

Issues Raised: Tracy moves and Tammy seconds to approve the consent agenda.

Actions Taken: The consent agenda is approved unanimously.

Actions Required: None

6. Management Monitoring Report - X6 Counsel to the Board

Issues Raised:

- James moves and Ariana seconds to approve the report.
- General Manager:

- West Side location is making nice progress. The team is doing a great job. Our store team leader is very supportive. NCG is very interested in that store and is asking a lot of informational questions about what we are doing there. Co-ops across the country are on financial watch. At the West Side store, we are faced with competition in addition to having a challenging location.
- Organics are what we want to be known for, and we need to keep improving in that area, increasing SKUs.
- The west side store has cost the co-op a lot of money. Two others are also not making money. That is why change is necessary.
- We are increasing our assortment of chicken products, which will lower cost.
- NCG is giving guidance re: providing more assortment in products. Co-ops across the country have lots and lots of conventional items.
- Member comments:
 - How will you amplify the image of our co-op in the community?
 - Are small amounts of evil okay, as long as we are not doing as many as other co-ops?
 - What is your vision? We are not talking about bottom line. We are talking about people.
- Board response:
 - The GM is providing the board with reporting as required at this point in the meeting. He is providing data that we have asked for.
 - We are talking about dollars because the financial success of the co-op determines a lot of what we are able to do in the community. In the past we didn't have so much detail in the reporting, and things got away from us. It is about money right now because that is what we need right now to keep programs and employees. It is a hard thing to talk about. The co-op is not about money. But we are at a point in time that we need to knuckle down.
- Member comments:
 - To grow and grow and grow might not be sustainable.
 - The GM has a lot of expertise in the world of food and grocery stores. It seems like the Board is mesmerized.
- Board response:
 - Thank you for coming and please come back. This is the most participation we have had from member-owners and staff despite many efforts on our part.
- Member comments:
 - Having no one respond makes it feel like you didn't hear what we had to say.
 - Communication is a big key. Maybe holding something separate from the Board meeting to discuss these issues—like a town hall meeting format—would be a good idea, because I know you have business to attend to.
- General Manager:
 - Town hall meetings will be happening monthly at the stores. I am listening. Keep the feedback coming. I am always available. If you don't feel like your voice is heard, reach out again. I definitely have a vision: we have over 50 initiatives underway.

- We have 17,000 member owners and 285 team members. They are not all going to agree. Please engage in the conversation.
- Our number one mission: Assortment of organic produce. Change is hard, especially if it is happening to you. Hang with us and keep that voice coming. We are not trying to beat the corporate entities. You will always get respect from me.

Actions Taken: The report is approved unanimously.

Actions Required: None

7. Board Functioning

Issues Raised:

- a. Board Self-Evaluation: Board members, complete the survey by the end of the month.
- b. Earth Day schedule: Board members, respond to Lisa's Basecamp message.
- c. Board Retreat on March 26 at the Albuquerque Friends Meeting house. 8:30am-4:30pm. Following, Board only will debrief with consultant Art Sherwood over dinner.
- d. Farewell to Jessica: This is Board member Jessica Rowland's last meeting. She is ending her term early in order to care for her child. The Board acknowledges the insights she has brought to the Board.
- e. Upcoming Committee Meetings:
 - Member Engagement – 3/22, CDC 5:30pm
 - Board Development – 3/24, church, 5:30pm

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

8. Task List

Issues Raised: Tasks will be added to the ongoing to-do list in Basecamp:

- Deborah to write Co-opera article.
- Board members to complete the self-evaluation; Deborah will send a reminder.
- Jeff will email Robin with next month's Board Study / Community Education Series topic.

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

9. Meeting Evaluation

Issues Raised:

- "Sigh."
- The meetings are fuller and more exciting with more members and staff coming. I hope we can continue to draw this level of engagement as time goes on. It is a slow dialogue because we are deliberative body which is not always satisfying. I have come to appreciate that the Board does take its time.
- Most of our work is happening in the committee meetings. These meetings give us a chance to talk in depth without the other business we have to get done at the monthly meeting. I ask member-owners for your forbearance.

- To member-owners: What you are telling us is very important and we do take it seriously. Anyone who emails bod@lamontanita.coop gets a response. Please use all those methods of communication as well.
- Something has changed in the energy of the co-op, and it may be related to the new management. Staff are coming and saying what they think and feel. This could be a sign of exasperation, but may also be that they feel there is an opportunity for them to voice their thoughts.
- I think there may be some things that could be done to ease the awkwardness of the Member Comments part of the monthly board meeting, when members bring concerns but get what feels like a very inadequate response. I think some of the awkwardness has to do with needing more clarity of the facilitator's role versus that of the Board President, General Manager, and all Board members. Perhaps this is something that can be discussed further in a committee.
- In addition, the structural way the room was set up today created an us-and-them format.

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

10. Next Meeting Agenda Construction

Issues Raised:

- Nominations & Elections Committee will get rolling. Lisa will be chairing. Other Board members should think about joining her.
- Member Engagement will work with Robin to talk about this year's Annual Meeting.
- Newsletter article on running for the board should be done for the July newsletter.
- Finance committee will be determining scope of the CPAs annual review.
- Board Budget proposal is developed by the Board Development Committee.
- Board will reviewing the self-evaluation of the B policies, including discussing policy scenarios provided by the research assistant.

Actions Taken: None

Actions Required: None

11. Adjourn Regular Session

Issues Raised: James moves and Ariana seconds to adjourn.

Actions Taken: Meeting adjourns at 8:11pm, followed by an executive session.

Actions Required: None

ATTACHMENT A: BOARD STUDY / COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES

La Montañita Food Co-op
Board of Directors Meeting – March 15, 2016

Using Online Platforms to Increase Membership Engagement

Facilitated by: Jeff Hertz

Topic: We will explore the challenges and opportunities of using online platforms and other informational technology to increase membership engagement. This includes exploring our use of Basecamp, the co-op website, and social media among other tools. A guest speaker will share about a new local app called CivNet that is under development as a community-building tool.

Presentation

*Guest speaker: Charlie Wisoff, Founder of CivNet
charlie@civnet.co*

- CivNet (civnet.co) is a web platform with a civic engagement purpose - helping people and communities be involved and create change on issues they care about.
- I have been committed to and studied civic engagement over the past five years. There are challenges:
 - Organizations are siloed
 - Despite the increase in online options for social networking, only 25% of people using online civic and political spaces are becoming more engaged. There are multiple barriers to engagement.
- CivNet helps people organize and empowers users to:
 - Understand what's happening in their community
 - Connect with others who care about similar issues
 - Find opportunities to get involved
 - Take action on shared problems
- Users can organize around action plans with a common interest/goal
- The goal is not to displace other existing services. La Montanita is building its own app, has a website, and Facebook page. This is to supplement that, not replace it.
- CivNet is much more project oriented and helps measure social impact by collecting data on participation.
- Everything I have talked about so far is free. There are some organizational services that we will charge for at some point: Cheaper and more effective community outreach and data analysis.
- We are piloting the beta version. It is not perfect yet, but good enough for people to start using it. There are 270 beta users signed up. These are “super citizens” — very involved in the community.
 - Charlie passes around a sign-in sheet for folks to sign up for Beta testing the platform.

Questions/discussion with speaker:

- All in New Mexico? Yes. Piloting in Albuquerque. Open to expanding to the surrounding area. Intention is to go statewide and eventually national.
- Our hope is to go beyond the usual categories of donate, sign a petition, volunteer.
- We are offering a lot of hands-on support at this early stage.

- What is your timeline for the beta phase? Six months to a year. Some of it depends on funding. We are prioritizing development right now with the funding we have. We have a focus group coming up. Contact Charlie if interested.
- For-profit or nonprofit? We are structured as a B-Corp for-profit. Funding is from private family investment.
- Do you have a plan for broadening your reach? I do a lot of presentations. We also have had some publicity in the *Journal*. One-on-one, face-to-face marketing has been the best. We are conscious of wanting to represent the racial diversity of this region.
- Also happy to be a resource in developing the app for La Montañita.
- Code for Albuquerque is a group of volunteer technologists. offers to connect La Montañita with resources there.

Discussion, Organized by Topic/Theme:

Web-Based Tools

- Healthy Community Assessment Tool is a HUD-sponsored neighborhood level assessment tool with over 40 indicators of community health. It may be possible to use this tool as a form of increasing membership engagement.
 - We have some upcoming topics related to this tool. For example, in June on leveraging data. Public policy and regulation in October. Right now our City and County are updating our comprehensive plan. This is a tool they are using to help with that product. Only four cities have been piloting this tool, and Albuquerque is one of them.
 - Link: <http://HCAT.healthyplaces4nm.org> (hosted by Bernalillo County Place Matters, trying to use this tool to get folks involved in the land use conversation)
 - The impact measurements made available through the Healthy Community Initiative provides the opportunity for great results and Ends Reporting.
 - Healthy Community Assessment Tool Road Map - Identify different neighborhoods in Albuquerque and how they rank in terms of economic, social, and physical health.
- Basecamp is a project management tool that the Board uses to keep itself organized and to archive all documents.
- CivNet, as discussed, is a civic engagement platform.

Board and Co-op's Use of Online Platforms

Broader discussion about how platforms could complement what we are already doing and using.

- Basecamp is CivNet for the Board. Helps us organize committees and projects, as well as store documents, which is very important. We tried Sharepoint in the past, and Group Loop, but these were much clunkier. Over the past year, Board members are becoming more comfortable with Basecamp.
 - Board is using Basecamp as an archive system. It would be worthwhile to try to figure out how to engage people more, get them involved in more than posting the document for next month's meeting.
- CivNet strikes me as a cross between project management and social media. It seems like it might be more palatable for older generations (as well as others) than Facebook because it is more focused and purposeful.
- Co-op's Marketing Director, Karolyn Cannata-Winge: We do have a La Montañita app through Genius Central. That contract comes up in July and we will not be renewing. We are developing our own app. The website is also going through a redesign and restructure. One goal is that member-owners be able to renew their membership online. CivNet could be a great tool for organizing our volunteers. We are also going to change how we use our social media and how

that integrates with our website – a much bigger project. Karolyn is more than happy to receive ideas and suggestions. Karolyn also says she is interested in connecting with Charles (CivNet).

How Could Members Engage with Online Platforms?

- Using an app to check prices, compare to other stores. I think that would really benefit the customer. Price comparison.
- How representative are we in our community with who shops and who is hired? Online platforms could give that visibility and start a discussion. That has been a challenge we have had in an ongoing way.
- Virtual shopping would be an interesting option - where people can take a look at what is available in stores.
- Also it would be cool to track local products and produce. Where different producers' products are being sold, and when.
 - QR codes that could be in the store - linking to info on products.
 - As a Board member, I'd appreciate not only featuring the products but the connection to the Ends, and also provide data on the results — like the \$\$ amount supporting the local economy in comparison to non-local products.
- I'd like to see a better way to get our deli hot bar specials online. That would be a good way to attract people to the stores for lunch.
- Also highlight some educational pieces - why we are not carrying certain things at certain times, why things cost what they do, the value of local, what is coming up.
- What do people think of some co-op food education online videos? Would people take advantage of it? Keep it short and sweet, and they can make sense on social media.
 - We do have a YouTube channel. We could do a teaser on social media, and then link to longer videos.
- Virtual shopping - Has the board looked at the High Plains Food Cooperative and the Oklahoma Food Cooperative? Their approach links urban and rural, and redefines what local means. It is done through an app and website. Interesting model we should look at as we think about the future of La Montanita. It could broaden the reach of the co-op.
- KidsCook could have little demos and could maybe be part of this effort. That would be one way for kids to think about shopping local and cooking fresh.
 - That is a partnership we are moving forward with.

Using Online Platforms to Make Board Meetings More Public?

- Would it be possible to live stream the Board meeting?
 - We once had a conversation about this, and our attorney cautioned us about it because of the opportunity for manipulation—but that was a long time ago. Could this be revisited now, maybe requiring a sign-in for members?
 - CivNet provides an opportunity to chime into the conversation.
 - It would help member-owners get to know who the Board members and staff leadership are. Reading the minutes is one thing, but it's another to actually see faces and hear voices.
 - Also staff don't want to come after working all day at the co-op, and also families with young children have a hard time coming at 5:30pm.
- We are also looking into having Board members logging in remotely. If we find a good service for this, it may open up the option of streaming more broadly.
 - If the Board is looking for assistance, there might be someone in the community who can spearhead this effort for you.
 - As a next step, we could start an action plan on CivNet that integrates a lot of this feedback.