



Council Special Meeting Minutes
November 25, 2019
Facilitator: Scott Hess
Note Taker: Rowan Sherwood

Present: Katie Michels, Eva Schectman, Dr. Eric Jacobson, Scott Hess, Julia Goldstein, Olivia Dunton, Andrew Sullivan, Steven Farnham, Pat Siergiey, Jess Knapp.

Staff: Kari Bradley, Jay Wisner, Amelia Salata-Hartman, Lisa Rochelle, Rachel Andreyev, Stephani Kononan, Diane Stark.

Guests: Billy Donovan

1. **Welcome, Agenda Review.** 6:30PM Scott opened the meeting; welcomed and congratulated the new council members: Olivia, Julia, and Andrew; and reviewed agenda.

2. **Community Comments.** 6:34PM – To allow more opportunity for input from guests, Scott asked if there were any objections to extending the Community Comments beyond our standard 5 minute time allotment. There were no objections, and the time limit was suspended.

Billy asked if there was a date set for the council retreat. Scott replied that a date was not set and we'll be discussing that at the next regular meeting.

Billy asked about members attending the council retreat. Scott said we do not have a policy on that and we can discuss it at the regular meeting.

Billy inquired about council packets and the “one voice” policy, in particular, wondering who drafted the prepared talking points written to address anticipated questions related to contract talks. Kari drafted them and executive committee reviewed. Billy expressed concern over muzzling individual expression. Kari said that the council should decide together what their positions are. Eva said she did not feel wed to the talking points and that is why she did not respond to them. Billy expressed concern there was a power issue. Scott stated that the intent is to present everyone with the same information – the council needs to understand where negotiations are at. After further discussion, Billy retracted the word “muzzle” with regard to individual expression.

3. **Discussion of Contract Negotiations.** 6:39PM What is the council's role in negotiations? Kari stated that the executive committee thought a special meeting would be helpful to discuss. It was agreed that looking at what has been said in policy is a good starting place.

Julia asked how our co-op compares to other co-ops and industry wide in terms of wages and compensation. Kari said we compare very favorably on both counts. Julia wondered if the members knew that. Kari responded that aside from an employee memo, we have not issued a statement on negotiations. He said he has received 12 emails from members and has responded to each individually. Julia thought it was important for members to know these things and Kari

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said in the interest of not being inflammatory, the Co-op has not issued a public communication on the matter.

In response to a question from Julia, Kari reminded us that they can only talk about the last official offers – the details of negotiations during mediation are confidential. Pat said she has seen responses from members at the union’s urging but does not think they have the full story.

Eva said it is good to hear from members to see what they feel about the subject and wondered if we have heard back from anyone who received a response from Kari. Kari said we have not. Eva would like to know what they think after hearing both sides. From conversations that Eva has heard, there is concern about transparency, particularly in relation to wages and salary. Member Barbara Dall thought transparency would foster trust.

Eric noted that members want resolution and asked how to resolve it. Kari responded that mediation has not been successful. Julia asked if the national average for wages and the fiscal position of the co-op have been discussed with the union. Kari said no, not national averages, but external benchmarks like livable wage have been discussed and the union is generally not interested in such comparisons.

Andrew clarified that he is not speaking on behalf of the negotiating committee, then asked if co-op financials are available to the public. Kari answered financial statements are, but not individual wages or salaries.

Andrew acknowledged that we cannot speak to strategy in open session, but can we touch on issues? Kari reiterated that we compare favorably in our compensation industry-wide but he does not think that will influence negotiations. Andrew expressed that it is important information for people to have.

Eric pointed out that the role of the council is to represent the members and the members want a resolution that will address the needs of the co-op and the employees. He thinks that the impact of our low profits have not been made clear to members.

Scott asked if there were any other voices to be heard? Is the Council’s current role sufficient?

Olivia asked if we should facilitate a member forum where both sides could share information. Kari asked what the goal would be. Olivia responded it would be a chance for members to receive information and ask questions. There was general support for this idea.

Eric said we all feel like many members are not very involved – if members are not participating, it cannot be a functional co-op. Pat asked how to do that. No clear answers.

Andrew stated he is all about member participation. He would like to discuss the L4 compensation and benefits package and clarify some of the terms. Kari responded that that policy is up for review in February. Kari will send around last year’s report. Andrew wants to know how we determine what is “equitable” and said that if managers’ salaries are much higher than bargaining unit members then that’s a problem. Kari said that any employee who has worked here more than 3 months is making the Vermont Livable Wage.

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Eva noted that we are not seeing a lot of growth, and asked if we were healthy overall? Kari replied that our overall balance sheet is in good shape, but our income statement reflects concern. A brief discussion of the meaning of these two statements ensued.

Katie asked how the council could help, not hinder – should the council issue a public statement?

Kari said that the members elect the council to run the show, but the council delegates operational responsibility to the GM. Their role is to exercise oversight over Kari, to stay informed of the issues and to take action if they feel it is necessary.

Olivia asked for clarification on how the council is to differentiate between the different hats they wear when they speak. Scott responded that we represent the co-op, despite our other roles. Kari reiterated that the council should not pick sides, but seek to facilitate resolution. Scott said that when we speak as one, we need to be informed. Jay added that when negotiations are underway the union will often tentatively agree to something on the condition that they need to bring it to the Bargaining Unit members. Management can do the same, but consult with the council.

Amelia suggested that anyone, including council members can always talk to staff about their perspective, including union officers and stewards. Jess asked people to not rely solely on the perspective of union officers and stewards – there are a diversity of opinions among staff.

Eric expressed that it is important for the council to make a statement to members, that it is our obligation to communicate with members.

Break 7:45PM,

At 7:49PM, Scott moved, Eva seconded and the Council voted to enter executive session to discuss labour contract strategy. The council exited executive session and adjourned at 8:15PM.