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Council Retreat Session #2 Notes

March 28, 2022

Attendees: Jade Barker, Eva Schectman, Catherine Lowther, Jen Porrier, Steven Farnham, Nick Sivret, Julia Scheier, Lauren Antler, RJ Adler, Andrew Sullivan, Kari Bradley (notes)

Eva called the meeting to order at 5:00pm. There were no community comments. She provided an overview of the evening and turned it over to Jade to facilitate.

We shared the results of the icebreaking activities in the small groups.

The first topic discussed was council purpose and mission. The small group summarized their report by identifying two primary purposes: fiduciary and legal requirements and bigger-picture, longer-term strategic leadership. Council members shared their reactions which included:

- Bigger picture thinking has not generally been a council priority.
- How will we find the time for this type of work?
- We would benefit from having more time for brainstorming and creative thinking.
- There is not a need for new policies or focus in this area.
- Climate change is an important aspect of the big picture.
- Leadership thinking is difficult, we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves
- Council is where the "rubber hits the road" with the Co-op's ideas and values.
- If we commit to this direction, we may need to learn how to do it well
- Request for explanation of purpose of our JEDI work as an example of this issue
- More education would help the Co-op be more impactful.
- Beyond the fiduciary role, is the purpose of the council clear?
- Council is actually heavily committed to strategic thinking around JEDI self-education
- Communication (including articulating what we are already doing and why) is so important to group understanding
- Education is an end unto itself, we don't always have to be results-oriented
- Defining a yearly theme or value could be helpful in creating space for creativity and learning

The second topic was council recruitment. The small group summarized their discussion. Recruitment is fundamentally important to Council effectiveness. Their recommendation is to identify desirable characteristics, supporting broad communication and consideration of stipends. There is already a recruitment committee to focus on the mechanics of this work. Discussion points included:

- We have some solid recruitment materials already
- All council members have a role in recruitment
- Recruitment is a strategic topic: what talent do we need to get where we want to go?
- The #1 reason people join boards is they are asked, maybe more than once
- The quality of our meetings is a very important recruitment tool
- Retaining council members and recruiting new ones are closely related

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- Lets make a list of desired qualities/characteristics
- Lets communicate that list in a way that makes everyone feel included
- Successful recruitment comes down to relationships
- Creating tiers of engagement works in other organizations, “a pipeline to council”
- Have some tiers in place: volunteers, committee work
- People like rewards and incentives, to know their work is valued
- Mixed reactions to prospect of stipends
- Compensation is about leveling the playing field for different council members
- Idea: each council member commit to recruiting people they know
- Idea for recruiting parents of young children: consider child care, change/shorten meeting times
- People want to feel that they are actively participating in substantive decision making. And also stipends in the form of a coop gift card

The third topic was operations. The small group pointed out that growth is sometimes “greater, not more”. Economic and environmental impact are important criteria. The group brainstormed a number of ideas that the Co-op could pursue. Council can have a role in identifying strategic opportunities.

- Be careful about considering ideas that are not viable, overly risky, times have changed
- Could benefit from clarifying the role of council regarding operations, good starting point for future discussions
- Need to consider environmental impact with focus on local food
- Solar project was good example of council-staff partnership around a strategic opportunity
- What are ways we can leverage our members and resources?
- What is the nature of the need and how does it relate to our community values?
- Always say “yes and…” to continue the conversation.
- Lets embrace creative ideas because we are not sure where the conversation will lead us.
- Education might be a way to affect change we want to see.
- Figure out ways to partner with other organizations, can create new opportunities
- There is a clear need for more housing in central VT.
- Support for a second retail grocery location, possibly a merger
- A next step might be articulating a process for developing ideas that will ultimately be operational.

We discussed the pros and cons of this retreat format, small group topic discussions leading to full council discussion. Some ideas suggested for improvement:

- Start planning earlier
- Articulate the topic, questions and parameters for small groups
- Provide opportunities for participation in multiple small groups
- Clearer reports and more time to digest them
- Meet in person especially as a larger group.

We finished with reflections on what we gained from the retreat session.