

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Members of Hunger Mountain Co-op approved a comprehensive rewrite of the Co-op's bylaws at a special meeting held on Zoom on Thursday evening, May 12. The vote, delayed two years because of the pandemic, was the culmination of work begun in 2018, when the Co-op's council appointed a committee to draft bylaw revisions, with member input. The revisions went through two rounds of vetting, with members giving feedback at forums, conversations at tables set up at the co-op, and written comments.

"The bylaws were in need of reorganizing and clarifying," bylaws committee chair Carl Etnier said. "The committee began by reorganizing the existing bylaws in a more logical way, and then we scrutinized every line to see if it could be clarified or otherwise improved, or deleted. We also tweaked the substance, mostly in the direction of empowering members more."

Hunger Mountain Co-op members have been extraordinarily engaged in the bylaws revisions," commented general manager Kari Bradley. "Many of the co-ops I'm in touch with update their bylaws using a template. Our members wanted to make sure the Co-op's governing rules reflect the members' values and interests. This approach paid off with four of the five proposals receiving 89% approval or greater."

Bylaws committee member Stephanie Kaplan had opposed several previous attempts to revise the bylaws but supported the committee's draft that she helped write. "The newly approved bylaws are not only easier to understand," she said. "They also require the Co-op to set up ways for members to communicate with each other, rather than just using one-way communication from the Co-op to members. And they make it easier for members to call a special meeting of the members, if the council is not responsive to an issue members think is important."

In addition to approving the comprehensive revision of the bylaws, members also voted to start elections and other ballot votes at member meetings (rather than closing the vote at the meetings), to increase the transparency of employee compensation, to clarify rules on what council members are allowed to say about an issue when asked after a council vote, and to clarify language in the Co-op's articles of incorporation about proxy voting.

There wasn't time in the two-hour Zoom meeting for all the agenda items. Votes had also been scheduled on whether to allow the council to conduct its annual retreats behind closed doors and on whether to develop a bylaws amendment that would allow family memberships in the Co-op. (Only individual memberships are permitted now.)

The Co-op was preparing to vote on the bylaw changes in spring 2020 but canceled the plans when the Covid-19 pandemic closed down large, in-person gatherings. After two annual meetings of the members were successfully carried out on Zoom, and with no foreseeable timetable to safely hold an in-person meeting, the council voted in February 2022 to hold a special online meeting of the members to amend the bylaws.

Council president Eva Schectman opened the meeting and appointed Paul Gillies as moderator. Gillies brought his experience moderating town meetings for Berlin, Vermont on Zoom. "My job as moderator

was to keep the meeting on track, to follow the rules, and to respond to the will of the members,” Gillies said. “When I ruled a procedural motion out of order, I followed the ruling with a request for a vote to sustain my ruling. We had quite a bit of discussion about how to proceed, but the articles all passed by a clear majority of votes. Zoom meetings bring a special challenge, but for this meeting, with more than 100 members, the process worked surprisingly well.”

The bylaws committee will meet again to review the results of the meeting and to consider recommendations to the council for future work on the Co-op’s governing documents.

More information on the bylaws decisions is at www.hungermountain.coop

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Hunger Mountain Cooperative exists to create and sustain a vibrant community of healthy individuals, sustainable local food systems, and thriving cooperative commerce.