



Council Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2026

Present:

Council: Carl Etnier, Steven Farnham, Jeff Roberts, Giles Brulé (Online 5:45), Greg Gerdel, T Gram (Online), Catherine Lowther (Online), Mark Seltzer (5:33:04), Leesa Stewart (Online)

Staff: Mary Mullally, Jess Knapp, Rowan Sherwood (Online), Elly Wood, Tom Wright (Online)

Facilitator: Elly Wood

Guests: Rita Ricketson

[Audio](#) (Timestamps in blue indicate where audio corresponding to a given paragraph can be found in the recording.)

1. Commencement 5:30:09PM (0:00:02)

Carl called the meeting to order, welcoming Council members, staff, and guests.

2. Agenda Review 5:31:05PM (0:01:00):

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

3. Ice Breaker 5:31:39PM (0:01:32):

Elly posed the following question to each participant in the room: What was your first job, and would you go back to it for a day?

First jobs included scooping ice cream at Ben and Jerry's, creating floral arrangements, working at a diner, "everything" at Dunkin Donuts, golf course grounds keeping, restaurant dish washing, State of Vermont Human Services, building computers, tree service, line cook, McDonalds, yard work & selling greeting cards door to door, dairy farm work, peeling onions at Tasty Freeze,

Responses to willingness to go back for a day ranged from "would love to, definitely, sure, I think so, why not, yes, on the condition that I could quit early, and spend most of the day in my grandmother's kitchen, except for selling door to door, other than the onions, if it wasn't my first

day (on that job), probably not, couldn't do it now, absolutely no way,

4. Community Comments 5:39:35PM (0:09:31):

Rita mentioned that she'll be working with Strategic Planning.

5. Consent agenda 5:40:32PM (0:10:30):

[Jeff](#) moved to approve the Consent Agenda. [Greg](#) seconded. Ayes: 7, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 0. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Shopper Survey Results 5:42:00PM (0:11:55):

Rowan reported the results in various categories, noting that the survey is non-scientific. Total responses was 1024, a significant increase over last year, 94% of which were co-op members. Most categories reported were level with, or improved from last year. Overall Store, overall products, and overall service were all 4.4 or 4.5 (out of 5.0).

Results are consistent year over year. In large part, respondents agree that the Co-op has a positive influence on their health. Categories: the Co-op can be trusted to make ethical decisions, is a valued source of information, and is a responsible

employer... are all recovering well from a drop a couple years ago. A word cloud illustrating members' desires for the future emphasised affordability, facility expansion, and continuing what the Co-op already does well such as supporting the local food system, food access, and sustainable practices. 91% are likely or highly likely to recommend the Co-op to others.

Mark appreciated the inclusion of historical trends in the presentation, and requested clarification: The majority of questions on the survey are the same from year to year, with a few extras that change. 55 respondents indicated an interest in more involvement with the Co-op.

Jeff asked if there were "surprises," and if the results indicate if non-member respondents have a different "mindset" than members: Most respondents reported that they receive most information about the Co-op from signage at or in the store. Consistency in the results indicates respondents are already "invested" in the Co-op. As the survey is currently designed, it's not possible to discern significant difference between philosophies of members v. non-members.

Carl indicated that he'd like to see higher numbers in response to the questions about the Council, but appreciates the fact that those questions were included, and would like to see them included in the future.

Greg inquired what is the amount of advertising, where and which are most effective. Advertising appears in the *Times Argus*, *Bridge*, *The World*, and a little in *Vermont Digger*, Vermont Public, Front Porch Forum, and Central Vermont Community Radio. There is not a mechanism to determine which yields the best or most results.

Steven mentioned that it appears that participation in the survey was greater than the 6% reported; he thinks it's closer to 9%... 13% if considering only members who receive a patronage refund (the latter number assuming that respondents who

shop infrequently are also unlikely to respond to surveys). He also explained the mystery of why some of the Survey Monkey bar graphs start mid-scale instead of zero: When the height of the bars are all similar, stretching the y axis and displaying only the tops of the bars on the graph, makes it easier to read the difference from one bar to the next. He asked for an explanation of "access," and if there was an estimate available for the cost of a truly randomised survey. No. and "access" refers to a combination of product mix and affordability.

Greg asked if public relations and paid advertising are tracked separately. Advertising is by definition paid.

T asked if the priority questions were open-ended or if options were provided. Both (in the reverse order T asked).

7. Monitoring report: L1 Treatment of Customers & L3 Treatment of Members 6:08:12PM (0:38:08):

Jeff moved to accept Monitoring Reports L1 Treatment of Customers, & L3 Treatment of Members. Mark seconded.

Mary reported compliance on all facets of L1 and L3, highlighting a comprehensive safety program that is reviewed monthly. There were three safety incidents, none of which required emergency medical attention. The co-op passed the most recent Health Department inspection in July (Score: 98/100), and the weights, scales and measures inspection in December, but still waiting on the entryway floor inspection.

Mary addressed questions and comments: To Carl's question, 11,500 individuals pass through the Co-op in a week (598K/year, which is only slightly lower than Vermont's population). Only three incidents in that volume of traffic suggests a stellar safety record.

Carl asked how Co-op sponsorship of music events was evidence of compliance with L1.2, which is about "access to information and educational opportunities regarding products sold at the Co-op, food, nutrition, health, and consumer and environmental

issues.” Mary explained that usually the Co-op tables at such events.

On Website engagement, Mary explained that the rate of 61.37% is determined by the quantity of views the website attracts, the number of website locations viewed, and the duration of said visits.

Steven asked for a definition of “emergency medical treatment”: Any event resulting in a call to emergency services or subsequent medical treatment.

Steven asked “...customer comments and suggestions are compiled... and posted...” where on the website? [Community>News>Questions & Comments](#)

If a member writes and submits a suggestion on paper, is that (along with the response) transcribed, and posted on the site? Yes. Mary explained the source of “customer experience survey data,” was in reference to survey questions presented to customers appended to random customer receipts.

Steven asked if consideration was given to modifying the question cashiers ask regarding the “give change” donation program, so customers are asked if they would like to round to the next five or ten dollars, instead of just the next whole dollar. The system can accommodate that, but it is not the question asked.

T asked what “counts” as safety incidents, e.g., a hypothetical incident in which a customer was exposed to acetone. Mary replied that it’s generally not counted as a safety incident unless someone is physically injured, or its reported they sought medical attention as a result of said exposure.

Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 0. The motion to to accept the Monitoring Reports L1 Treatment of Customers, & L3 Treatment of Members passed unanimously.

8. Draft Governance Budget 6:25:09PM (0:55:06):

Leesa explained that a 39% increase resulted from no credit from CBLD, \$23K for strategic planning facilitation, an

Draft

assumed increase in officers’ insurance, professional services (audit), committee member compensation, and family care.

Steven asked if the \$23K increase in Council meeting expense shouldn’t be under professional services since it’s to pay for a professional (consultant for strategic planning)? Response: This is the way it’s always been done. Discussion ensued enumerating the benefits of identifying what the expense is for to avoid confusion.

Carl mentioned the \$4400.00 expense for non-Council committee members inquiring if that should be considered when deciding the number of folks to staff a committee. Tom explained that the number of non-Council on committees and number of meetings per committee produces an estimate used to generate this number.

Catherine asked how the determination is made what quantity of non-Council committee members is unaffordable.

9. Revised Ends policies 6:36:08sPM (1:06:04):

Jeff moved to accept the Vision Committee Report, and update the Co-op’s Ends Policies with proposed language. Giles seconded.

Jeff described the proposal. Steven questioned policy #3: *Local Food Economy*, in particular, if Mary is to report compliance on these policies how are we to define a “comprehensive, sustainable food economy”? What indicates “control” of it? And how will we implement “trusted regional partnerships, fair pricing, and a stable market” to “support local ownership” of said “comprehensive, sustainable food economy”? Great to shoot for the moon, but how does Mary, with limited staff and resources, effectuate this policy, and what parameters will be used to measure compliance with it? Mary conceded having concerns about it.

Mark asked what is meant by a “stable market.” Carl responded that a need of local producers is to have a market for their product when they have product to sell.

Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 0. The motion passed unanimously.

10. Council Policy Email Security training and access 6:43:50PM (1:13:40):

Elly read the motion: "Whereas the General Manager's monitoring report for Policy L7.7 (Asset Protection) explicitly states, 'The Co-op uses Ninjio service to train employees in detection of email threats including required tests for all HMC email users,' and the Council has accepted this statement; and

Whereas, consistent with Policy M3 (Delegation), the General Manager may interpret L7.7 to include enforcement mechanisms for non-compliance;

The Council suggests that the General Manager implement an enforcement protocol for Council members consistent with that for employees: specifically, that any Council member who fails to complete the required Ninjio training and pass the associated tests within a certain time period shall be notified and restricted from Co-op email access after a reasonable grace period (e.g., end of month), with access restored when the Council member achieves compliance again."

Jeff so moved. Leesa seconded. Carl shared the backstory, explaining that there are some Council members who fall behind in their training, and this mechanism is needed to enforce compliance.

Steven asked if the place to deal with this is on the Statement of Ethics form each Council member signs at the beginning of the Council year, and what effect this policy has on Council members with non-HMC accounts. None.

Having numerous such accounts, T asked if there's a setting in Ninjio that allows taking the test, without watching the video. Jeff noted the videos are helpful and only 10 minutes per month.

Giles explained that the Co-op certifies to the insurance company that these security protocols are followed, so it's important to comply with them.

Carl moved to amend the motion to replace the second occurrence of "Ninjio" with "security training." Mark seconded.

Ayes: 7, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 1. The motion to amend passed.

Ayes: 6, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 2. The aforementioned motion related to security training passed.

11. Break 7:00:38PM (1:30:33):

12. Presentation: Kellogg-Hubbard Library 7:10:30PM (1:31:00):

Carl Introduced Dan Groberg, Executive Director of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, the second-busiest library in Vermont.

Dan stated two reasons he's often heard motivating folks move to Montpelier: Hunger Mountain Co-op, and Kellogg-Hubbard. He listed the various groups that visit the library, and programs offered, and that these programs are offered to 18,000 people in the six towns served by K-H: Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Montpelier, Middlesex, and Worcester.

There is the Basement Teen Center, Nest (Good Beginnings), and a Health Clinic (People's Health and Wellness).

K-H is a private non-profit, not part of the City, as libraries often are in other towns.

Jeff mentioned reading groups in Wallingford, and asked what programs are coordinated with Montpelier Senior Activity Center. One was about aging gracefully - half at K-H, and half at MSAC.

13. Rita Ricketson - Strategic Planning Committee Co-Chair Introduction and Update 7:26:50PM (1:47:21):

Rita explained that the core group has been meeting regularly, they're in the process of identifying additional staff, community members and member-owners to join the committee. She's very pleased with the individuals who have volunteered so far. She mentioned the RFP that was circulated to find a facilitator. Rita is very excited to begin the work, and asked if there are any questions related to the folks they'll be recommending to join the committee. Mark requested brief bios of the nominees. Carl characterised the group of available

candidates as “an embarrassment of riches.”

14. Revised Charter for Sustainability and Resilience Committee 7:36:08PM (1:56:38):

Carl introduced Amanda Sardonis of UVM’s Rubenstein School on the Environment, and Chair of HMC’s Sustainability Committee. Amanda acknowledged the other members of the committee, and explained that they’ve revised their charter, which is now brought to the full Council for approval.

Amanda drew attention to a change in the charter’s description of the committee’s purpose and function to encompass a broader objective - beyond carbon neutrality to resilience issues, natural hazard impact, supply chain, and 707 Stone Cutters Way, the former rk Miles property.

Carl moved to adopt the revised charter of the Sustainability and Resilience Committee. Leesa seconded. Catherine expressed concern about charter item 6, which addresses frequency of the Committee’s meetings. After discussion, it was determined to set a regular monthly time to meet, but that whether to meet on a given month would be decided at the end of the previous month’s meeting.

Ayes: 7, Nays: 1, Abstentions: 0. The motion passed.

15. Committee Reports 7:47:25PM (2:07:56):

There was no discussion on reports. Greg announced that Community Engagement will be activated soon.

16. Executive Session: GM Evaluation Update 7:49:40PM (2:10:10):

Carl moved, “Whereas knowledge by co-op members of the topics to be discussed in executive session could cause substantial harm to the co-op or a person involved, to enter executive session to discuss personnel issues involving a co-op employee.” Leesa seconded. Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 0. The motion passed unanimously.

The Council entered Executive Session at 7:50:55. The Council exited Executive Session at 8:01:00

Jeff moved to adopt the new surveys for evaluation of the General Manager. Mark seconded. Ayes: 7, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 1. The motion passed.

17. Denouement 8:05:15PM (2:14:14):
Elly read the action items:

What	Who	
Remove “emergency” from customer incident language in L1/L3 monitoring report	Mary	
Follow up on Steven’s suggestion (rounding up)	Mary/ Steven	
Discuss Catherine’s email access	Giles/ Catherine	
Evaluate council’s thoughts on where strategic planning is located in the governance budget	Tom/ Mary	
Save 4/28 for a council meeting	Council members	
Send out a poll for Council Engagement committee	Greg	

Council members rated the meeting between 7 and 9, adding these comments:

Get moving on Engagement Committee, Enjoyed hearing from Dan Groberg, Like the idea of a lending library in the café, Direct more attention to humans’ impact on the planet, Great to meet Rita in person, Accomplished a lot, Meeting included eight different presenters, Rated 8.1415926 because it was five units sweeter than π , and Really productive meeting.

18. Adjournment 8:12:42PM (2:21:41):

Jeff moved to adjourn. Greg seconded. Ayes: 8, Nays: 0, Abstentions: 0. The motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:12:59PM