

RIVERWEST COOPERATIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING 11.27.23 5:30pm

Board Members in Attendance: Quinn, Jill, Ned, Mark, Tommasina, Karen, Debbie

Others in Attendance: Mimi, Wendy, Juniper, Lisa

Note Taker: Tommasina

Facilitator:

Timekeeper:

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89571192043?pwd=U21BS2hNUDZQRHRvblpzV0JmdUVGQT09>

NOTE: WE WILL START CHECK INS AT 5:30 SHARP

- Introductions, pronouns, check-ins, and firestarter (10 minutes)
 - Review facilitation style and hand signals
 - Take pause and speak up – accountability and inclusion- we're all on Zoom
- Communication check-in (5 minutes):
 - Mimi: thinking about stepping down from coordinator position. The board will follow up afterwards.
- Coordinator reports / strategy / 30/60/90 Day Plans (20 minutes)
 - Grocery Coordinator: it's not clear why some days are better than others. Other events nearby help. The cafe being open helps. Advertisements are lacking. We need to get our name out there. Radio and newspaper spots would be great (once we get the loan). Yard signs have been really exciting for customers. Our prices are not too far off other stores. Want to introduce dairy milk as a loss leader.
 - Café Coordinator (Shannon is out, so questions for later):
 - Tommasina: are Friday Phillies less popular than brunches? I'd like to see numbers.
 - Wendy: yes, that seems true. We are getting better at advertising it, but sometimes it just takes time to build the buzz. For labor cost, we've had a lot of staff so we've had good prep time in that too. Shannon did announce a New Years brunch today. Probably can't do brunches on Sundays because we have events and Shannon will be out of town.
 - Juniper: we've been talking at the WC meeting every week about the cafe numbers so we can get those numbers from that.
 - Admin Coordinator:
 - Tommasina: should we prioritize switching to Educators Credit Union re: Finance Report?
 - Juniper: I can coordinate with Jill
 - Jill: we'll need to discuss timing because it won't happen over night.
 - Mark: how are you feeling about cash flow? it's the end of November. you're balancing expenses here, so day-to-day how are you feeling about paying bills?
 - Juniper: not great. that's where the impact of missing the mark of our historical averages, it's difficult to keep transferring money over. I'm hoping the margin switch, the ordering tweaks, having two coordinators, having the data will help. Definitely not great right now.
 - Karen: I'd like to know the COGS budget, and it wasn't in the Coordinator minutes. I'm really concerned. I feel like we don't know that much information. It's not clear where we're at. Let's keep in mind if we need to, we can consider having another meeting?
 - Wendy: to switch over banks is a little tricky because we have bills paid out of each so we need to track and change things carefully to avoid losing things.
 - Volunteer Coordinator:
 - Wendy: Krampus is coming up and we'll probably sell a lot. We'll need some more volunteers so email to follow. 3 new data volunteers to help us look at margins. I'm looking at volunteer management software in the first quarter. I don't need help researching it.

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- o Mark: has anyone talked to the folks from Outpost Co-op (Eric and Diana)? Wendy: we have a meeting with them on Wednesday (Mimi and Juniper)
- Committee reports (10 minutes)
 - o Finance:
 - Jill: our balance was 37k. We're close to the danger zone of 20-35k. I'm collecting another 1k member loan on Thursday, but we're fluctuating a lot.
 - Ned: in the fact that our gross profit percentage decreased from September – I found that surprising because we had hoped that with the margin shift that that would increase. Why do you think that is? Another question: in regards to the member loans, do we want to put those loans to use as soon as possible? Jill: we're already using those from a cash flow. There's no way we can do an assessment of why the margin shift affected the Gross Profit percentage because right now there's no way to clarify it until we have more data. Generically, we can say we did worse in October this year than last year. Our budget for COGS was 37k, we spent 44k. We spent more, and then we sold much less than we thought we'd sell. It's not really fair to ask why October is worse than September, we need to focus on how to do better in November. Let's see what happens now and if we are trending positive. We also didn't do inventory in September, which meant that that our gross profit percentage for September was a bit focus, but it ended up not being a significant margin adjustment in October (\$571).
 - Mark: So we have 37k in cash, inclusive of member loans, deep into the decision making, we'll be at 24k if all holds at that level of loss, from a board level discussion, –
 - Jill: to simplify, if we don't get the loan, if we find out in early December, I think that's the decision point, we'll be within the threshold of needing to close.
 - Mark: more to my question- have we made commitments about returning loans? are there are range of expectations to repay?
 - Jill: on the contrary - I've been trying to be brutally honest with people, and people have understood and still been generous with an additional \$1k in loans. They were surprised that we were planning on returning 30% of loans in our closing plan.
 - Karen: are we waiting too long to review November numbers?
 - Wendy: we need to make another 1k a day.
 - Karen: do we need to order less? (Meaning we spent 4,400 last month and sold less than we thought so can that make orders minus the stuff we didn't sell so less money in the order.
 - Juniper: we need to keep ordering based on advice from Columinate, because we need to have things to sell. We need things to sell faster. We clearly have a lto of work to do to get the parts together. The [Actual Margins spreadsheet](#) that I shared is an attempt to build a framework for that, but we could really use some guidance from the Outpost folks on how to interpret it, and we're learning from the Columinate class on how to track. It's complicated
 - Mimi: we're going to talk to the Outpost to see what reports they pull to see how items are moving and other questions we have. We do have an agenda for that for our meeting.
 - Debbie: I echo that we will have trouble evaluating since we just finished the switchover and we don't often have the finance numbers before halfway through the next month, so we might not be able to meet meaningfully sooner.
 - Jill: if we find out in early December that we're not getting the loan, we need to have an emergency meeting and triage the next step.
 - Mark: Just want to make sure we have a full consensus that we're going to keep spending and going as we need to until we know.
 - Jill: about advertising, we might have a small opportunity to get on 88.9 or something. the idea of spending a little bit of money to raise awareness to remind people that the co-op is still open and we have food on Fridays.

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- o Communications:
 - Karen: Flyering could be helpful. I definitely want to get a letter out to membership.
 - Wendy: Jessica's gotten the last two newsletters out, Haley has been helping onboard some new social media volunteers.
 - Karen: I still need to step down, but Wendy has been leading the call for a meeting but I hate for Wendy to have to spend her time doing this.
 - Wendy: It's not forever but yes, we need to get more volunteers from that marketing world if we're going to spend real money on advertising.
- o Membership: Quinn: only 10 new memberships and 13 renewed, but 5 sponsored memberships which is cool because we hadn't really done much in a while.
 - Karen: that seems really low. Are the renewal reminders going out?
 - Quinn: That's part of what Amy's doing
 - Wendy: I can double-check with her. As far as future things, we'd kick off a membership drive in the New Year. and we'll start switching over the data entry at the counter so we can get people in the system quicker, but she needs more people on the committee.
 - Karen: when we have a GMM, we send out emails to everyone whose membership has not been renewed in the last year we usually get a lot of people in to renew their memberships.
- Break (10 minutes)
 - Schedule January Board meeting (5 minutes): Monday the 22nd at 5:30pm
- [SKIP unless anyone has anything] Retreat action item check in (10 minutes)
 - o Report tracking & margins performance
 - o Strong café vision
 - o Fundraising
 - o Role clarity
- "Board Buddies" check in (10 minutes):
 - o Wendy: I enjoyed my meeting with Ned!
 - o Mimi: I liked sipping tea with Debbie and think we need to keep doing it to see results.
 - o Debbie: the first meeting was introductory, so we can establish a cadence. hopefully we can all meet again before the December board meeting
 - o Ned: It's a new, ongoing collaboration ... in my view
- Shared Capital loan check in (25 minutes)
 - o Review questions from Roderick
 - o Mark: should I join?
 - o Wendy: it'll be pretty high-level so any board member who can join should join.
 - o Mark: I'll join then.
 - o Karen: I'll try to join then, too.
- Reflection time (5 minutes)
 - o Recap major topics and action items
 - Karen: I'm worried and having trouble articulating all of it.
 - Wendy: the newsletter is best to share complicated things. I'll make a note and make sure they get printed out tomorrow. We need more engagement. We have multiple board members not on a committee. Engagement matters.
 - Karen: I'll add some things to comms comm later.
 - Mark: Shared Capital wants to know the risk of volunteerism vs. staffing. How we mitigate. I don't know when we talk about this, but there are two things we really struggle with. A strong point of contact like a store manager, at what point do we really talk about a go-to person? making on-site decisions? and the other thing: we talk about the cafe, like what is it outside of groceries? That seems like a strength that we're trying to play to but we haven't had enough time in the game. We

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can't just pop-up without consistency. Equipment, staff, marketing, but as we get into the Shared Capital discussion, if we get the money and we don't solve those things, I'm not sure margins or better flyers will solve the problem. We need to evolve, we can't just do things the same. The pandemic changed a lot of people's behaviors. We've never really reestablished a successful model, and we're missing those key elements in terms of the store flow (someone being in charge day-to-day) and cafe. As a board, how do we drive towards that? How do I push and engage as a board member to that?

- Debbie: in 2021, when we reflected as a board what we needed to survive without a hierarchy, we filled in the structure with a coordinator. we've been working towards a thing with a coordinator team, it would require two coordinators in cafe and grocery, each. We worked for 11 months with Rachel with the small but mighty team to develop this, but those who have been there a while feel like we need to try it. There's been a struggle between this structure and a more conventional structure. I imagine having hot food service without the labor could be really good for us. Sell our vegan pastries and things efficiently out in the community, that could be really good.
- Tommasina: pivot, is the coordinator design working?
- Juniper: I don't think it'd help us to have a GM unless we want stricter goals or disciplining. We know the things we need to do.
- Wendy: we are asking for money to hire up to this structure. Ned and I talked about this and maybe we need a project manager perhaps when we receive this money.
- Karen: I want us to discuss what Mimi has said about needing a second grocery coordinator to be able to do all of the work.
- Mark: I'm trying to dig into the topics that we only have a few minutes for. I think we need to stay flexible to understand the context that we're operating in. I'm not proposing today that we have a GM, I've noticed the tension between money and staffing. If we had more staff, we'd have more sales and then we could afford more staff. I don't think that that will hold up. I'm wondering at a board governance. Debbie, thanks for sharing how long you've worked on that design. As a board, the bigger part of our task is to be sustainable and adhere to our ethics. So, sometimes in these conversations we're stringing on a lot of hope, but I need more substantial ways to contribute. Just throwing some partial opinions and observations since we have some time.
- Mimi: I wouldn't be opposed to a project manager to help us keep us accountable once we get the loan. I don't know everything people are wanting me to do. I don't have a problem with someone giving me tasks or things to do.
- Wendy: the job descriptions were rewritten in 2021 and we couldn't reopen the way we want to, so good thought went into it. we haven't had a HR person to help do our reviews, or tighten up the workers collective. we've ramped up a few times and then crises have hit, let alone the hiring. if we are hiring up and buying equipment, we're going to see losses. hopefully not net, but still. it would help me. if you have a specific thought on the volunteer risks and mitigation, please share them; that would help me.
- Karen: keep in mind that when we're training new people, that adds to labor hours.
- Debbie: our expectations of the board are substantially higher than other boards. seeing the work of the board as what happens during the last two hours, it's so much more than that. the work for Shared Capital and Columinate, brainstorming our future, our retreat, roles, accountability. board buddies as a solution to the project manager role, and there's been fires to put out since June of 2019. we unfortunately get pulled into the fires. we can't really have bigger picture discussions, but the surface levelness, the getting the money part is the strategic next step for us. We can't take any of those things on until we have money. the coordinators have done a ton of work to get us here, there's a lot of deep level work to get us to this point.
- Mark: Thanks for that, I wanted to join this board because I knew we'd all be able to discuss hard things without offending each other. I take my responsibility to be able to speak my mind and expand the discussion without taking away from anyone else. I just want to be a part of the conversation and the work that it takes to evolve it to survive and thrive. I want us to think it through, we need to figure it out or else we're done.
 - What surprised us?
 - What still puzzles us?
 - What questions are not yet answered?

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- Action items / future discussion
 - **Volunteer Liaison Positions / Volunteer Committee**
 - ❖ Events / Networking / Sports
 - ❖ Board & Committee Recruitment
 - ❖ Volunteer Appreciation
 - **Communications Policy**
 - **Board role in staff and coordinator on-boarding**
 - ❖ Draft talking points including:
 - State of the Co-Op
 - Role of Board /Coordinators/Staff
 - How to communicate with the board
 - ❖ All new staff meets with a board member within first 2-3 weeks
 - ❖ What is the process for assigning a board member to the new staff member
- Community Contacts List
- Retreat Garden Plot Items

Next Board Meeting: December 19th at 5:30pm

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