

Friends & Farmers Cooperative Board Meeting
January, 6, 2016, 7-9pm, State College Friends School

Board: Becky Clawson, Catie Rasmussen, Grace Emmerling, Joshua Brock, Michele Marchetti, Sara Spock Carlson

Board absent: Jim, Michael

Guests: Elizabeth Crisfield, Tara Wyckoff, Chris Rand, Dan Meehan, Stephen Mainzer

Staff: Stacey Budd, Diana Griffith

Update on action items from minutes (Becky) – all reviewed, no concerns

Approval of minutes (Michele) - approved

Introduction of host

Lori Pacchioli, Friends School (FS) Director of Development, hosted the meeting at the school library. F&F is discussing a potential partnership with FS to form a food distribution hub for the OLM. The school houses 120 students in K-8 grade, which translates to roughly 98 families. The space is shared with other community organizations. Food-oriented activities include a student garden, meatless Mondays, First Friday luncheon for teachers, and more. FF may use the FS space (garden, kitchen, library, etc.) for meeting or activity space. The dream would be to someday distribute OLM orders to the FS 98 families. A first step might be to do a FF lunch and distribute flyers at soccer group (Tuesdays), open house, and winter play days. FF has shared our member/shopper list with FS and identified “a healthy share” of overlapping families.

Penn State Partnerships

Two upcoming Penn State classes involving partnerships with the cooperative:

Spring 2016: Thanks to a partnership with the Sustainable Communities Collaborative, which connects University faculty, students and staff to local community groups, Penn State seniors will be engaged in a **public relations** course that will work to promote the co-op to 3 distinct groups: the general community, PSU students, and the University. One half of the PR class will be focused on the co-op and the other half will be focused on the student farm.

Tara Wyckoff, Penn State PR professor, attended to present to the group.

The course is a capstone course, with roughly 25 seniors, centering around a team-based project. Likely three teams will emerge and divide based on co-op audience groups (faculty/staff, students, community members). Students are required to identify the problem, conduct background analysis and research, and create a strategy that includes message points and deliverables (tactics, content, story telling). Students may create an event, perhaps on/around Earth Day. This process is malleable, based on their findings and knowledge. Students will be in contact with FF for background information, benchmarking data, previous studies, and

institutional knowledge. They will present the final project at the Campus and Community Sustainability Expo and to FF board, the client. Benefits to FF include a potentially helpful PR strategy and positive opportunity for press coverage (students working on local food projects), with minimal effort/inputs required.

Becky will create Dropbox folder for board to contribute information to share with Tara and students: benchmarking, examples, feasibility studies, membership research, etc.

Fall 2016: A new studio course for **Landscape Architecture** students, mostly upperclassmen, will be structured around a 2-part problem: 1.) the identification of a suitable site for the co-op and 2.) the design of the physical space—not just the store, but the entire property. These designs are a great opportunity to get the community excited about what a store could look like.

Attending the meeting: Stephen Mainzer, landscape architecture professor and Dan Meehan, Project Manager for the e-Learning Institute in the College of Arts & Architecture

In Stephen's previous student projects, "We learned that people define and value local food in complex ways, but it's something everyone can relate to. Local food is low-hanging fruit, because everyone eats. We want to get students engaged in a way that's mutually beneficial."

Students will create designs based on local people and places, using interviews, focus groups, and surveys. They will identify a site for the store or, if a site has already been identified by FF, evaluate the store and its design/property. Site suitability: group projects. Site design: individual project. This will culminate with a public presentation.

Benefits to FF include fostering community bonds resulting from being involved in the project (members could voice what they want the space to be), public would get a greater sense of what it means to see the co-op come to life (which may lead to increased buy-in), boosting excitement among members about the future, press coverage, and documentation to support preparedness should FF seek a loan, among others.

FF Inputs: 2-3 meetings with students, midway evaluation, providing access to F&F members (carefully managed by Stephen), final presentation, help form community partnerships (outreach on behalf of the student team). Financial contributions would not be required but would make a stronger proposal. In-kind contributions would be helpful, including space rental at New Leaf.

Next step: Stephen would write a proposal to gain department approval to proceed. FF should let him know by end of December. Proposal will likely be due by end of February.

Sara wants to remain involved in the project. Elizabeth and others voiced concerns about going public with a hypothetical (or actual) site location for fear that public perception of that being *the site* would be difficult to move past later. Or if not hypothetical, that competitors might scoop it up. After much discussion, the board generally agreed that people will speculate about site location anyway, and perhaps “no press is bad press.” There’s a lot of benefit, as long as we can manage the PR. **Sara will talk to Stephen about our reservations and work on moving forward.**

Student Membership (Grace)

Grace is working on a student membership level, based on concerns that students do not understand where they fit into the plan options. The \$30/year for 10 years plan was originally designed for students, but board members expressed concerns that the co-op will likely not collect full dues from most of these members, since many students will move away after school, and payments will be too taxing on staff to track down. **Grace will further develop proposal.**

BRIEF Committee/finance updates

- Communications: Becky

The committee met on Monday, Jan 4. It was agreed that the greater Strategic Planning will help inform further communication strategies. The group acknowledged that confusion still exists among the community regarding who we are and what we do (online market vs. growing membership for brick & mortar), so it will be essential to be clear in our messages. Catie recommended an infographic flowchart that explains our structure and our work; she’s reaching out to a designer to help. Two promotional videos are in the works – one on membership, one on the OLM. The committee also agreed to focus for now on these two groups: members who are not shopping the OLM and OLM shoppers who are not members.

- Outreach, including Friends School partnership: Stacey

Stacey is working with Lori of Friends School to build an OLM pick-up hub and on other ways to build membership and awareness among those who share our community space. Trying to figure out how to get more community members involved in what we’re doing. Events bring people together well, but she wants to identify how we can get folks involved in the planning process. Strategic outreach is important: go to the receptive audiences to intentionally build community.

- OLM: Grace

Organizationally, things are panning out well. Relationships and energy are good. Market days are going smoothly. Jessie felt comfortable on her first market day in charge. Jenn put together a new budget proposal to conceptualize a self-sustaining market (its own entity); includes markup (excluding meat, fish), vendor fees, increased employee hours, and other changes. Next year, we’d have to double sales (sustain the highest week we’ve achieved). Report will be delivered to board soon,

and once we've developed our strategic plan, we can decide on it.

- Other committee updates and deadlines for next meetings: **Michele stated all other committees should have met by next board meeting. (Outreach, Fundraising...)**

- Finance: Catie

Catie reviewed the financial reports included in the meeting folder.

- Income excludes membership
- Checking: negative number indicates "if every check was cashed right now, that would be balance." We have more than \$33k in the account. Maria keeps an eye on it and moves money from savings (member equity) as needed.
- Michele: we need to figure out as a board if we are ok with Jenn spending money allocated by the grant. Should we set a dollar amount? Categorical? *Result: Aside from marketing, Grace will review/approve anything below \$250. Marketing expenses will come to the board.*
- Michele: Annual membership meeting expenses: We spent too much money at the meeting. With too much food, much went to waste. We need to be better about reflection. **Becky will create a post-event report template, to report money, attendance, press, recap.**

Strategic Planning

Update on meeting with SBDC (Michele)

Business Plan & Strategic Plan: two separate initiatives that work hand in hand. The representative at SBDC was trying to steer us toward a plan that doesn't include a brick and mortar store. There may have been a disconnect between "supporting the local food economy" and community development/engagement (which can't be done without brick and mortar store). She (SBDC rep) may be able to work with us a few hours at a time, as part of her official work.

Next steps: Becky

Becky recommends hosting a half-day retreat during which the board identifies the following:

- **Core values:** the principles that are essential to our work and at the core of our identity. They will help inform our mission and vision statements.
- **Mission statement:** a one-sentence statement describing why we exist. "The F&F Co-op's mission is to..." This should be included in all official promotion, proposals, press releases, etc. and should guide all decisions. (Does this action help us fulfill our mission?) "Good mission statements serve as a bright lighthouse that will be looked to for guidance again and again as the organization makes decisions aligned with its purpose." (Iowa Toolkit)
- **Vision statement:** describes the long-term vision we hope to make in the

world. 10 years from now, what will our headline be?

- **Stakeholder analysis:** we should identify the communities, people, and organizations that are impacted by or inform our work and figure out a) how they can assist us (now or in the future) and b) how our work benefits them. Spelling this out will help us be strategic about our partnerships and give us speaking points to use in outreach.

We should also ask ourselves how they can *participate* in our development. “An ounce of reaching out and engaging stakeholders at the outset is worth a pound of trying to include the later, especially if they *feel* they’ve been excluded. This can be particularly true of farmers and local public officials.”

- **Goals:** we should identify 3-5 specific, achievable goals to work toward over the following year (or by a specific deadline).
 - Identify our immediate needs
 - Identify our assets, both on the board and in the community
 - = NEXT STEPS
- We could also do a **SWOT analysis** – identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This would help us more clearly identify the places we need work and chart a plan (set some goals) for pursuing our opportunities.

Other considerations:

- Approaches may vary, but generally speaking, one way to go about these activities is to have each person brainstorm the assignment on their own, then each person shares. Participants can identify parts of others’ suggestions that resonate, and the most popular components are saved. The group can work together to draft a reconstructed version, featuring the most popular parts.
- Community members and other stakeholders should be invited into the process.
- A third-party facilitator will be helpful to keep the conversation moving and constructive, without a “dog in the fight,” so to speak.

Michele: We’ve done mission and vision statements, need to dig them up and revisit. Community inclusion is important. Michele outlined RE Farm community mapping exercise. (We should call it something other than Strategic Planning.)

Next steps: Sara will ask Jeremy Bean about facilitation (at his convenience).

Becky will share examples from other organizations.

Michele will stay in touch with Maria about business planning.

Board Changes: Vote on appointing Chris Rand

Chris made brief remarks during his introduction. He has a history of working with companies going through transition and feels he would be an asset to development and data management endeavors, for existing and potential customers.

Grace seconded, all voted in favor.

Brief Tour of Space (Stacey) – did not happen, due to time

Other:

- Need more warm and fuzzy at the OLM pickup. Warm welcome for new members to encourage returns.
 - Mention of having a greeter.
 - Having volunteers wear buttons.
 - “Welcome, check in here” sign at greeting counter.
- We also need vendors to honor their commitment to deliver.
 - Consolation gift for customers missing an item (example: we order extra cookies from Eden View and charge the vendor who didn’t deliver).
 - Grace: send a message from the board to vendors outlining our expectations. Policies are in revision.
 - Sara: The original vendor policy stated that vendors who sold more than \$1,000 need to join as members or pay a fee. Some vendors will not join, such as Way Fruit Farm, who see themselves as our direct competitor.
 - Grace: Perhaps we shouldn’t be concerned if a vendor doesn’t want to be a member. If they’re paying a vendor fee, “so what?”
 - Michele, Stacey, Grace will meet next week to discuss.