

MINUTES

FBFC Board of Directors Meeting 10-21-21 This meeting was held online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Meeting started at 5:34 pm and ended at 7:37 pm.

Board members present: Paul Schulman (President), Adam Bowers (Vice-President), Josh (Peyton) O’Conner (Treasurer), Jennifer Heeder (Secretary), Pauline Heyne, Danielle (RaMa) Goldstein, Christa Hamilton, Andrea Burkins, Scott Campbell, Kylie Hulver, Terra Marshall

Board members absent: none

Others present: Bobby Sullivan, General Manager (GM); Jean Karpen, Board assistant; Owner and employee – Erica Gomes

Meeting Summary:

- Prep for Annual Meeting
- Monitoring Report B9 GM Succession – reviewed and approved
- Executive Session

Calendar Dates:

- Oct. 28, 2021 – Annual Owners’ Meeting via Zoom – 6:00 pm

Approve agenda: Approved as presented.

Approve minutes: Minutes of 9-23-21 approved as presented.

Owner Comments: Erica Gomes read a statement which was signed by several staff members. See attached.

Annual Meeting prep:

- One application for Board position has been received and will be reviewed.
- Agenda for the meeting was finalized.
- Scott will manage tech for the meeting.
- Kylie will prepare the slide show.
- Bobby will ask Sage to give a presentation on the expansion project.
- Suggestion to have an on-going Board recruitment process. To that end, Christa will take the lead in planning a spring recruitment event.

Monitoring Report: B9 GM Succession report was reviewed. Motion to approve by Pauline, seconded by Scott, motion carried. Dyllan Simmons, produce manager, will act as interim designated general manager should Bobby be unable to perform his duties.

GM FYI report:

- Pandemic-related supply chain disruption is starting to hit us but is not yet a major problem.

Agenda items not covered or unfinished:

- Committee check-ins

Additional items for next month’s agenda:

- Subtle Acts of Exclusion – chapters 3 & 4

Next meeting will be 11-18-21 at 5:30 pm.

Jean Karpen, Board Assistant

To the Board of directors,

Due to a series of experiences regarding poor working conditions at the co-op, a group of workers has decided to write this letter to you. We, the undersigned, have taken this action knowing that it steps outside the established chain of communication at our business because the nature of our situation is untenable and the general manager consistently appears unwilling or unable to remedy our concerns. It is our earnest hope that you will be able to take the necessary steps to direct the general manager to improve the status of our workplace for our sake and for customers sake.

Our key concerns that must be addressed are as follows.

Staffing levels are currently inadequate and have been for too long. What this means in a practical day-to-day sense is that one worker must take on the tasks of multiple workers in order to compensate for missing staff. The result is a toxic work environment in which workers are stretched thin and unable to perform jobs completely or adequately. Break times can be missed entirely due to the demand of work. Customers experience staff that are exhausted and often don't have the capacity to perform the exceptional customer service that they deserve. In the case of someone missing a shift - if they call out or have time off scheduled - there is often no one to take their place, making the workload that is already tremendous due to understaffing even more unwieldy. This is simply unsustainable.

Wages are too low to attract new workers and maintain current ones. Our staff has lost 14 workers since January of this year. Although it is true that grocery/retail has high turnover, this trend has accelerated since the pandemic. Staff that have quit have either done so to take a better paying job with/without benefits or because they could no longer bear the dysfunctional work environment at the co-op. Meanwhile, it has been more than usually difficult to fill these vacant positions. Contrary to the established national narrative, there is not a labor shortage - there is a shortage of good paying jobs. A major factor for why the co-op is unable to hire new workers (or any workers with experience) is because our wage is too low. It is below the living wage.

Management practices a pattern of making unilateral decisions without consulting workers and then inadequately communicates the outcomes of these decisions. The peak of this pattern occurred when the decision was made to change our mask policies for the store: first, no longer requiring customers to be masked and no longer limiting occupancy. Then, no longer requiring employees to be masked. Since these policies were such a fundamental part of store operations, it was a dramatic shift to have them removed overnight. Of course change happens fast and that's acceptable. The issue is that management failed to inform all workers before making these changes. This is a pattern that occurs so often that workers are quite frustrated and, in many cases, completely resigned to never have any say in what store changes may occur. It is the prerogative of management to make changes in the store, but when this is done without consulting the workers who will have to live out the results of those changes or when decisions are made and not communicated properly to those affected - workers feel slighted and ignored.

Accounting is not being done properly and cannot be depended on. The most obvious expression of this problem is when invoices go unpaid and vendors complain. This may or may not be resolved. In some cases, resolution never occurs and vendors will stop supplying their product altogether. In all cases, our store appears unreliable and incompetent to the vendor. When an accounting issue comes up, the accountant is too difficult to find due to erratic attendance at work. There is no schedule posted for the accountant or the general manager. Earlier this year, an audit of staff PTO was conducted and it was revealed that accounting had not been allocating the proper amount for an unknown length of time, perhaps years. This is another issue for which no answers could be found and further eroded the trust between the accountant and workers.

There are no means for holding management accountable for poor decision making. Concerns about the workplace that are brought to the general manager are often dismissed or met with placation. Even when the workers offer solutions, they are met with similar responses. Part of our intention in writing this letter to you is to discover whether or not a means of accountability does exist. Creating accountability would greatly benefit the overall work environment. Workers politely suggest that there be an annual review with the managers regarding the general manager.

Communication between managers and staff is inadequate and leads to breakdowns in efficiency and basic functions of the workplace.

Usually workers come into work not knowing what is going on and who has called out. An example of this is when last week the bulk room went back to self serve without workers being asked their opinions on it. Workers showed up to work to see that the bulk room was back open. Workers do not have an email or group text in place to keep up to date on what's going on for the day or week. The general manager has stated that he is against group emails. The dry erase board that was put up a few weeks ago is ineffective for people that are only here part-time.

Again, we sincerely hope you will be able to take action on these matters to improve our workplace for our and our customers' sakes. Thank you for your time today and your dedication to the co-op. Please let us know if you have questions or concerns. We look forward to hearing from you.