

TPSS Spring 2018 Member Meeting & Rally

Date: April 29, 2018

Time and Place: 2:00pm, TPSS Co-op

Board present: Robert Anderson (RA), Susan Cho (SC), Susanne Lowen (SL), Diane Curran (DC), Rachel Hardwick (RH), Fred Feinstein (FF), Melissa Schweisguth (MS)

Board absent: Mary Rooker (MR), Adam Frank (AF)

Minutes submitted by: Julia Eddy (JE)

Rally:

Board Chair, Rachel Hardwick (RH) provided remarks. The Co-op has been at the Junction location for 20 years. It is a community treasure. The Co-op has partnered with many groups, employs ~40 employees from the community. There are no distant shareholders or board members far away. Money is kept local. Why would the city want to turn over publicly owned land over to a private developer, a 99-year decision, that jeopardizes the Co-op?

RH highlighted the Co-op's main concerns in the current proposal:

- Deliveries
- Trash & recycling
- The shopper experience – parking and elevator
- Business continuity

Hussein Choteka (HC), Acting General Manager provided remarks. HC thanks the community for standing up and fighting for the Co-op. The Co-op is not only a grocery store, it is symbol of unification for the community. It is a place where young and old come. HC sees seniors coming every day to walk to the Co-op get some exercise and greet neighbors, and children meeting their friends to walk safely to school.

Karen Lovejoy (KL), member of Community Vision for the Junction group provided remarks. She rejects the rumor that the Community Vision group is an instrument of the Co-op. KL stands for herself and what she hopes to see for her community. Food co-ops were born out of a movement of farmers and community members responding to toxicity and manipulation in the food system. The Co-op is about taking back our food supply. Whole Foods and other natural food stores exist because of food co-ops like TPSS. But Whole Foods still represents profit over food; Whole Foods lobbied for not labelling GMOs.

Michael Tabor (MT), farmer and produce supplier for the Co-op provided remarks. MT was surprised that at least half of the people at a recent City Council meeting were for the development as it stands, and therefore against the Co-op. There is an organized resistance against the Co-op. MT urges everyone to talk to the Councilmembers, we must use our voices. Even with all his devotion to the Co-op, MT said the layby will make deliveries hard. He won't sit and wait to unload; he has stopped delivering to John's Hopkins for that reason. This

development is also about the soul of Takoma Park – the Co-op is a community grocery store that tries to provide reasonable prices and fair wages, no robots. MT used to deliver to the Bethesda Avenue Co-op. It was a thriving coop until for a number of reasons, including development, it moved. And it never recovered. What is the future of Takoma Park if we allow this gentrifying project to happen.

Rick Leonard, a community member shared his concerns about the proposed development. The proposed building takes up too much space on the lot. It is too tall and not consistent with other buildings at the Junction. He is concerned about the layby and lack of parking for people coming to the Co-op and the Junction. Mr. Leonard relayed that the Fire Department has expressed concern about navigating safely through the Junction and around big trucks. He would like to see a longer-term traffic study. The elevator is not helpful to Co-op shoppers. Greenspace might be a better use for the lot.

Member Meeting:

RH provided a report on the state of the Co-op. Despite some challenges, the Co-op is strong and has a positive net income. Many thanks to Yodit and Hussein for their leadership, thank you to all the Co-op staff, the hard-working Board, and the community.

The Co-op is separate from the Community Vision group and also the Board thanks the Community Vision group for all the work they are doing. The Board has as store to protect and maintain, but couldn't be where we are now if not for the community. Everyone is tired of the process regarding the Junction, but we all have to keep going. One more month, we need to keep talking with each other, hosting neighborhood conversations, speaking to the Council. We hope to have a good new story to tell in the Fall at the next Co-op Membership Meeting.

The Co-op's main areas of concern about the proposed development are:

- Deliveries
- Trash and recycling
- Business continuity
- Parking and customer experience

Question from the audience: What if I live in DC? Should I still talk to City Council?

RH: Yes! Everyone can tell their story, it's important for the Council to hear that the Co-op is part of many people's lives.

Q: Where and when are City Council meetings?

RH: Meetings are held at the Sammy Abbott Takoma Park Community Building, 7500 Maple Ave at 7:30pm. The vote on the development is now schedule for May 16th. The Council regularly meets every Wednesday night and there is time for Public Comments. People can speak for 3 minutes at the podium.

Q: What can we say to people who say the Co-op is anti-development/anti-progress?

RH: The Co-op is not anti-development; we are in favor of getting it right. Several years ago the Co-op submitted a proposal for the development that involved expansion of the Co-op and other small local businesses in the space. There are other people in the community suggesting alternative plans, and it's great to know that there are other possibilities.

Q: Would the Co-op consider mediation with NDC? Mediation can be helpful at equalizing power.

RH: The Co-op would be open to mediation. And in terms of power, we have 10,000 member households on our side, but the developer really seems to have the City Council on their side.

Q: A number of members are at City Council meetings advocating for the development. Is it fair to say Co-op members have a cohesive voice? It would be interesting to survey members of the Co-op to know where people stand.

RH: We know our members want to continue shopping at the Co-op. We see that support in the continued shopping and ~45 new memberships each month.

Q: What are the most effective ways to move the Councilmembers?

FF: Most effective 1) Meeting with a council member. 2) Writing to the Councilmembers. 3) Attending Council meetings.

The audience broke out into two smaller group discussions, led by 2-3 Co-op Board members.

Some comments from the small small group:

- Other organizations could help, make statements, mobilize more people – Manna Food Center, Montgomery County Food Council, CHEER?
- Joni Eisenberg of WPFW says radio can be helpful. WPFW has over 10,000 listeners. Could do an editorial, a live event closer to the vote.
- We must counter the “overpriced aging hippie” narrative and be aggressive about touting all the good the Co-op does for the community – a large employer in the city, keeps dollars local, etc...
- A fact sheet in shopping bags could be helpful.
- Need to counter the belief that some folks have that Co-op will be fine, they are just making a fuss.
- Co-op currently posts on the website, regular email blasts to members, a display and people at the front of the store
- More people to engage: folks in the fresh food/food access community, folks outside the county, ethnic advisory groups focused on food/health.
- Video in general is a great way to reach people. Perhaps one that clearly shows the challenges the Co-op would face.
- Create other spaces for discussion in a more neutral space to engage folks on the other side.