

Fare Share Co-op
Minutes: General Membership Meeting
Sunday, June 7, 2009, Fare Share Commons

Present: Steve Bies, Lee Holman, Rockie Graham, Nancy Wood, Julia Harrison, Lynne Billings, Han Libby, Julia Gonsalves, Lauren Ferreira, Chad Phillips, Michael VanWorth, Jeanne Jones, Zizi Vlaun, Scott Vlaun (and Jasper), Forrest Tinsley, Cyndy Tinsley, Claire Gelinas, Deborah Crump, Evangeline Polland, Ken Morse, Paul Brook, Liz Brook, Brendan Schaffler, Anna Schaffler (and Eowyn), Drexel Gordon, Julie Gordon (and Rosie and Silas), Saranne Taylor, and Lisa Moore. 19 households were represented; currently there are 94 members in good standing, so we had a quorum (10%).

Brendan welcomed everyone and asked that we introduce ourselves, mention how long we've been a member, and say what we want Fare Share to preserve (list of responses is below).

General Manager Report:

Claire read an eloquent statement about the history of Fare Share and how we've reinvented ourselves at least twice. It's time to crack open the shell of who we are. She calls for the "creation of something new" and suggests that we may need to rely on grants and loans as we move forward. The financial reports in the 2008 Annual Report show that we are still losing money monthly. There is a gap between the "tripling sales" that we projected when we moved in 2001 and our current realities. Claire reports that we have "nearly doubled" sales from our Tannery Street days.

Brendan, speaking on behalf of the Board, suggested that "maybe the hand doesn't fit the glove." Maybe the store is too much. What we are doing just isn't working . . . and hasn't really worked for the last eight years.

Someone asked "Are we paying our bills?" and Claire answered, "We are always behind." The enterprise is too vulnerable and lives "near the edge" all the time. We exist in "survival mode." We are not thriving.

A general discussion ensued and we brainstormed ideas. How can we reach more people? How can we ensure that everyone is welcome, not just members? How can we get the word out the general public?

Brendan reported on the work of a committee that Claire requested: the

"Crack Open the Egg" committee, the purpose of which is to address both short-term and long-term solutions to our financial dilemma. Short-term, we can improve marketing and change the product offerings in our store. Long-term we can engage our visionaries to think outside the box. The Board has not been able to creatively address our Ends because we spend so much time on working on budget and putting out fires. How can we make a profit?

Brendan opened the meeting up to brainstorming and the list of ideas follows.

Lisa Moore then offered a proposal that models how we can begin to re-envision our Coop. OWEE (One World Everybody Eats) model is one possibility. Let's try to come up with others. Lisa's proposal is also attached here.

We tabled soliciting two new Board members. Later, Lynne Billings stepped forward. Thank you, Lynne. We still need one more and desperately need a Treasurer.

We got a little sidetracked into a proposal that we add a tier of volunteer discounts for people who are willing to commit at least 8 hours per month to a regular project and receive a 20% discount. There was general consensus with some neutrals and an acknowledgment that (1) this is happening too quickly and (2) this is probably a Board decision, not a membership decision (See Bylaws IV.2).

Time was running short, so we moved to thanking staff members Julia Gonsalves, Mike VanWorth and Han Libby. We sang a song called "Row Our Boat" and then as a round: a lively ending to our meeting. Then, we enjoy the food by Molly King (two kinds of spiral sandwiches and a vegetarian chile) and Anna Schaufler (three desserts in honor of Mike, Han, and Julia: carrot cake, angel food cake, and raspberry rhubarb pies and tarts). So yummy. Thanks to all.

Stay tuned: there's change in the air and we must be diligent. Anticipate a special membership meeting sometime this fall.

Respectfully submitted
Lisa Moore, Secretary

What about Fare Share do we want to remain intact?

- People helping each other
- Community gathering place *
- Sense of community *****
- Little Lad's popcorn
- Connection between art and food
- Self-governance **
- Bulk spices ****
- Bulk purchases *****
- Local producers **
- Philosophy
- Food and nutrition education/ sharing information
- Volunteering **
- People who shop here
- Produce: sharing locally grown food
- Smiling, happy customers
- The way the store SMELLS
- Never elbowed out of the way
- Spirit of cooperation
- Keeping Coops going in Maine
- Hugs
- Children welcome(d)
- Avoid Hannaford
- Healthy people
- Passion about integrity of food
- Organic produce
- Model for children
- Non-toxic foods
- Familiarity
- Trustworthy supplements
- Keep building intact
- Keep finances solvent
- Keep store open
- Small business on Main Street
- OG local meat
- Best coffee in town
- Customers and staff know each other

How can we create CHANGE at Fare Share?

- Downsize store, keep "basics" and bulk.
- Each square foot needs to be evaluated and make money.
- Consider other ways to use building.
- More bulk orders; make bulk ordering more accessible: workshops called "bulking up."
- Community views prices as high: we need to correct this misperception.
 - People can save money: write to Sun Journal tips for saving \$.
- Become more of an integral part of local food networks (Farmers Mkt, CSAs, Ag Group, locavore networks).
- Need an "end" we are all working toward.
- REVOLUTION! Food cart, kiosks, get people fired up.
- Increase volunteerism: it's fun!
- Establish other preorder groups with Goat as model.
- Teach people how to cook this food.
- Energize volunteers: shopping service, call-in service, order prepared to pick up.
- Maybe our building is a failure?
- Sell the top floor? Rent out the space?
- Engage other Main Street businesses with a survey of their ideas.
- Rent Commons as an eating place (plus kitchen).
- Membership drive to increase membership.
- Move to all volunteer; no staff.
- Offer monthly dinners: a supper club.
- Levels of membership with different privileges.
- Educate: start young.
- Breakfast club
- Each member invite a new prospective member: ambassadors.
- Does our passion for community get in our way? We only serve .5% of our community.
- Overcome the "invisible barrier" with more flow and inclusion.
- We have the potential to become a distribution and education center: but how?
- Why don't we advertise? Increase marketing.
- Outreach to schools. Target children.
- Improve and select equipment.
- Reward volunteers.
- We're a co-op; we need to be a co-op (cut payroll, increase volunteers).

- Cut utilities and increase efficiency.
- Rent basement space or use for storage.

A Proposal for a New Fare Share

by Lisa Moore

For two years, I've been hoping for a new evolutionary stage for Fare Share, one that lives within our building that supports our mission in a new way. The numbers, and an honest young Board president, tell us that the old way, the grocery store way, is no longer working. It's time for change.

Last winter, I woke up with the vision of a café, but not your traditional restaurant. This restaurant is called The Sliding Scale. It was inspired by three realities: 1. Marty Elkin's suggestion of a sliding scale of equity, which has worked. 2. The sliding scale that we used at our 30th anniversary dinner, which also worked. 3. The coat rack in the stock room called "the sliding scale" which also works.

At this restaurant, meals are organic, mostly vegetarian, healthy, delicious, artfully presented, and made from local foods. They are served on mismatched real dishes and each one is beautiful. The people who come to this restaurant choose what they want to eat from a smorgasbord of salads, soup, breads, casseroles, and yes, desserts. There is no menu: each day depends on what is available, leftover, donated, or on sale—just like home. There is seating for a hundred folks, in both large tables and small. There is local art on the walls created by Commons Art Collective artists who don't pay to put it there. There are plants hanging and local flowers on the table. There is a well-paid chef and many volunteers. And the place is full of all kinds of people from all walks of life. Local musicians (or their CDs) play discreetly in the background. People choose their own portions in this restaurant. They also choose to pay what they can afford. Or they can volunteer for an hour in exchange for a meal voucher. There is always good strong fair trade coffee, hot tea, spring water and lively conversation.

And then, in April, I went to a breakfast meeting for Norway Downtown and sat across from Deb Anthony of The Progress Center. Currently, The Progress Center has a four-month pilot program called the Oxford Hills Community Table. They offer one meal per week at the UU Church and their numbers have risen from 40 meals to over 100. They hope to have a

three-meal-per-week program running by the end of 2009. But Deb talked about something more. She was searching for space on Main Street for a "community kitchen" that offers meals to everyone and that depends on local food sources. "It's not a soup kitchen," she said, "it's a community kitchen where everyone is welcome and engaged. Plus, it's a very comfortable and lovely place to have dinner."

Deb told me about One World Everybody Eats, a real-life business model for such a vision. Some patrons may pay \$10 per meal to support the local effort to eliminate both hunger and waste. Others may only be able to afford \$3 or \$2 or \$1 per meal. Still other may exchange an hour of work for a voucher. It was like my Sliding Scale. "Fare Share is what you are looking for!" I said. In our ensuing conversation, this proposal was born.

When I went to the website for *One World Everybody Eats*, I was jazzed. Healthy meals. No menus. Local food. Chosen portions. Job training and education. Sustainability. Volunteers. Use what is available. Integrate the community. This is what Fare Share could become, I thought. This is the next step in our evolution. Deb and I met in the Commons and began to imagine it. The Progress Center could provide labor. We could serve dinners from 4 until 7 that would not conflict with Nomad across the street. We could deliver meals with Progress Center vans in the winter. People could pick up meals on their way home, in recyclable containers. The seating area would be tasteful, simple, and lovely. There would be a balance of people who would pay to support this effort and those who need meals—and interaction—that they all can afford. Yes, this partnership of Fare Share and the Progress Center seemed right.

The OWEE website (www.oneworldeverybodyeats.com) offers a Guide to get us started, though we would not be starting from scratch. We have a kitchen, a freezer and a walk-in cooler. We have a chef. We have the Market. We know the farmers. We have the community network to make this work. Currently, there are five of these in the country: in Denver, CO; Spokane, WA; Charleston, SC; Durham, NC, and a new one is being created in New Jersey (and we already have their business plan!) We could be the sixth and the first in a rural community. We have been in touch with Denise Cerreta, the founder of the first one, and she generously offers her active support.

I envision this transition happening in three phases. Phase One is to bring the weekly dinners here while we plan and achieve funding for a major

renovation of our building. Phase Two is renovating our kitchen and downstairs to accommodate this radical shift in operations. In my vision, the Market operation grows much smaller. Phase Three is expanding to more evenings each week or and/or adding lunches and deliveries.

Since I was jazzed, I did what I do and started talking to people. Claire was supportive, so was Molly, so was Brendan, so was Ken, so was the Board. Ken Morse wrote a letter of support from Healthy Oxford Hills. Claire met with Deb Anthony to crunch some numbers. Things were moving. The next step is to take the idea to you, the membership. Just as we relied upon consensus in 2000 to move Fare Share to Main Street, we would need consensus to move our organization in this new direction.

So, if we crack open the Fare Share egg, this could be inside. It represents a shift in the method of achieving our goals, but not a shift in our goals. It's a move as dramatic as the move to Main Street, but it's a move within our building. It's a redefining of what we do, but not of who we are.

As members, please check out the OWEE website (www.oneworldeverybodyeats.com), think about the pros and cons of such a change, come up with other proposals, but, please, begin to imagine a new Fare Share. Thank you.