

KARMA CO-OPERATIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes for meeting of Monday, December 6, 2009, 7:05 – 10:05 p.m.

Arthur Jacobs' home, 90 Olive Ave.

Directors present: Arel Agnew, Corey Berman, Hilary Gibson-Wood, Arthur Jacobs, Howard Kaplan, Angela Lee, Reg McQuaid, Sarah Pretty, Benjamin Watts

Regrets: Danielle Thibodeau

Staff Present: Justin McNabb (General Manager)

Chair: Sarah Pretty

Note-taker: Ryan Fobel

Minutes editor: Reg McQuaid

1) Call to order.

Meeting was called to order at 7:05pm.

2) Approval of minutes from previous meetings

- Nov. 2nd: Add a note for who wrote the minutes.

Sarah moved that the amended minutes from the Nov. 2nd meeting be accepted. All in favour. Motion passed.

Nov. 16th: Howard moves that the minutes from the Nov. 16th be accepted. All in favour. Motion passed.

- Oct. 24th: Howard pointed out that the resolutions appointing the officer were incorrectly worded, and he supplied the correct wording.

Howard moved that the amended minutes from the Oct. 24th meeting be accepted. All in favour. Motion passed.

3) Report from GM

- a. The membership count at the end of November was 903. There was a slight increase in the number of working members.
- b. The orientation team continues to report difficulties in performing orientations without a members' room. They have also found it difficult to sign up couples/families due to the combination of initial fees (starting fees, building fee, etc.) which make joining Karma prohibitively expensive for these groups. There was a brief discussion on the possibility of restructuring these fees as a way to increase membership.
- c. Regarding the members' room: Art emailed Joerg from the building committee twice this month requesting a list of the projects remaining and the electrical plan. He had not heard back at the time of the meeting. If we knew the electrical plan, we could hire an electrician and get it done.
- d. Regarding the new cash registers: the staff are working on product database with the help of some members (on schedule). We still need to physically set up the registers and get a training manual in place. Howard has made a spreadsheet for entering products into database and will work on backend integration with the Scantalk software (with the help of Andrea). 50% of the system cost has been paid. Justin has asked for the second invoice multiple times, but has been unsuccessful.

4) Negotiations update (*in camera*)

5) Planning session

- a. The remainder of the meeting consisted of a brainstorming session trying to sort out the priorities of the board and decide where this board can have the greatest impact. Some initially suggested topics:
 - Financial
 - Efficiency
 - Membership structure
 - Communication
 - Governance
 - Member labour
 - Committees
 - Building issues (mold prevention)
 - Neighbours? (noise complaints about compressor equipment)
- b. There was a discussion initiated by Corey about Karma operations/structure (4 players: owners, customers, management, board), and the communication between them:

- we don't operate like a normal business (inefficiencies arising from lines of communication)
 - management is bogged down with communications from members
 - the board gets bogged down with lots of little issues, takes away time from working on important problems; some of these decisions should be left to management
 - what are appropriate issues for members to bring to management? (e.g. problems with one of the employees)
 - a communications secretary could act as a point of contact, filter questions/concerns to the appropriate person
 - membership doesn't know who their board is, how to get in contact with them
 - The Chronicle is becoming active again. The first new issue will go out early in the new year. They want regular reports from the board and committees
 - do we need a committee secretary to address the lack of reporting by committees?
 - just because we delegate decisions/problem solving to committees, doesn't mean that we shouldn't retain some kind of supervision over work of committees
 - how should we structure our committees?
 - how can we listen to and involve members?
- c. Increasing membership:
- can be delegated to a members' committee
 - building committee (members' room is a bottleneck)
- d. Restructuring membership (i.e. lower working member discounts, sell to non-members)
- should we have a family fee?
 - who should be involved in this discussion? The board, finance committee, feedback from the outreach and orientation committees.
 - we need a better record of why people leave Karma and what stops people from joining
- e. Communicating with committees:
- should we invite one of the committees to each of the board meetings?
 - this happened before, but the board spent too much time on small details
 - maybe we should put the onus on committees to report to the Committee secretary. The Committee Secretary can filter important issues to the board, and archive the rest.
- f. Increasing sales per member: delegate to management, outreach, food issues and finance committees.
- g. Can we increase margins?
- better pricing (management issue)
 - negotiate bulk buys from farmers
 - increase selling price
 - lower waste (management)

- h. Can we decrease costs by becoming more efficient? The idea was presented to make sure that staff aren't at the store longer than they need to be (i.e. don't allow as much time for setup, make sure that store closes on time, etc.).
- i. Should Karma apply for grants? The London co-op got \$30,000.
- j. Justin left the meeting at 9:20. The board asked him for any parting words, paraphrased below:
- *Karma's existing structure has evolved over time through compromises that have shaped our membership. Other co-ops have structures that are planned.*
 - *A common alternative allows anyone to shop, but working members get a discount. In this case, non-members are seen as supporting the co-op whereas at Karma, they are seen as ripping-off the store.*
 - *Other co-ops have producers as members.*
 - *The current system functions fine when there are enough people, but it is also limiting because it is closed to the community and the bar for joining is high.*
 - Corey and Justin offered to summarize these ideas formally in writing.
- k. Improving Karma's communication practices:
- can we make better use of the bulletin board in the store?
 - move pictures of the staff somewhere that is more visible
 - pictures of the board members and bios
 - we need a document summarizing the board's plans
 - The board must communicate the following to members: (1) members need to respect Justin's time (i.e. don't bring every issue to him). (2) we also need to give members alternative channels of communication, including the Chronicle, in-store bulletin board, and the Communications Secretary (by email).
- l. There was some discussion about organizing a member's forum (as promised at the AGM).

Arel moved that Hilary and Ben be appointed to organize a members' forum for some Sunday in February (to be determined). All in favor. Motion passed.

6) Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Next Meeting: Monday, January 4th at 7 pm, at Art Jacobs' house, 90 Olive Ave.