

Middlebury Natural Foods Cooperative
Board of Directors Meeting
May 20, 2026

Board Members Present: Amanda Warren, Ed Blechner, Erin Buckwalter, Caroline Corrente, Barbara Hofer, Cody Mears, Kristin Hocker, Caryne Eskridge, Ollie Cultrara, Samantha Langevin, Sam Surks

Board Members Absent: none

Others Present: Greg Prescott (GM), Bonnie Hudspeth, Sara Granstrom

Call to order: 6:01 pm

Member-Owner Business

A member raised a question about if multiple people in the member's household can vote in elections; the answer is that each membership comes with one vote. If they each have separate memberships, they can each vote.

Minutes

A motion was made by Caryne, seconded by Erin, to accept the April minutes. All voted in favor, except Sam, Ollie, and Samantha who abstained.

Check in: BMR5: General Manager Compensation

100% of board members felt like we were meeting the full extent of the policy by voting a 4 or 5 out of 5.

JEDI

The Board signed a contract extension with Toni Brinegar, our JEDI consultant. Upcoming work for the committee includes revising the charter. The committee has been developing common definitions of words relating to JEDI work, with the goal of setting up a common language among the Board.

The committee proposes that the Board use our October mini-retreat to work in-person with Toni to focus on JEDI topics. Also, they shared that Toni has requested 4.5 hours together for the mini-retreat, which would mean starting earlier in the afternoon if we do the mini-retreat before a board meeting as we have in the past.

The JEDI committee and BDC are also working together to bring JEDI topics to Board onboarding and orientation for new members. Toni will meet with new Board members one-on-one like she did with each current board member at the start of our contract with her.

August & October Meetings

August is when the Co-op will be celebrating our 50th anniversary – there will be a celebration on August 22nd from 11-3, on the Town Green and at Town Hall Theater. We are hoping board members will be able to attend. Amanda made a motion to cancel the August board meeting and redistribute monitoring to other months, seconded by Ed. All voted in favor.

We discussed the timing of the October mini-retreat. Typically mini-retreats have started at 3 with a break between the retreat and board meeting for a shared meal. We had a discussion about starting the October mini-retreat earlier, at 1pm, to allow for 4.5 hours with Toni before the board meeting. Some members expressed concern about the long day this would make and the challenge of having to miss many hours of work for an early start. Amanda shared that she believes the October board meeting could be abbreviated with the focus primarily on monitoring. Ollie suggested that we could move the Board meeting portion to 1pm, then start the JEDI retreat at 3pm when more folks could arrive. The JEDI committee will investigate options and share recommendations back soon.

Work Plan Update & Communications Strategy Discussion

One of the Board priorities that came out of this year's retreat is to develop a communications strategy. Amanda and Samantha have been working to build this into our annual work plan, with a goal of having a strategy by May 2027, which aligns with the timeline for sharing information in the Co-op's Annual Report. Michael Healy suggested that we think about how we, the Board, fit into the broader Co-op's communications strategy and not think of ourselves as separate.

To help move this forward, we brainstormed ideas of what a successful communications strategy would look like:

- Engaged folks should be able to access information about the board and how to reach the board easily.
- Unified communication strategy for all parts of the Co-op (Board, GM, staff, member-owners, producers, etc.).
- Identify the different tools/outlets to engage with the Co-op community (in addition to written modes, including interpersonal).
- Continued success with election-related communications.
- Board continues to speak with one voice.

As we explore some of the key things about the board's work that we feel are important for us to share, it's good to remember that some are time bound, which will define some of the touchpoints throughout the year.

Amanda and Samantha will take this feedback back, talk with some experts/other Co-ops, and draft a work plan to discuss at a future meeting.

Youth Position

For the last several months, the Board Development Committee has been exploring the idea of having a dedicated youth position. BDC has met with our JEDI consultant about this and through committee discussion, are interested in exploring this more with the whole board. Erin commented that she sees this particularly connecting to our End that directs us to learn and educate about cooperative values, and sees this as a way to both nurture professional development and cooperation among younger folks who may not see a place for themselves in leadership at the co-op.

Sam shared that the demographic of people who are typically more engaged (e.g. attending the annual meeting) are not youth and strengthening the connection can increase local young people's awareness about the cooperative movement. There are many passionate young people in the area who are working to support better food systems and don't even know this opportunity exists. This is an opportunity to engage young people in cooperatives.

It was suggested that BDC connect with youth in the community to understand more about the barriers they'd face and how they'd like engagement with the Co-op to be structured/what would make it be more possible. Other ideas came up to consider some kind of mentoring structure to introduce even more young folks to cooperatives, and exploring a community advisory board. Another question is what other demographics might we want to engage more with? Some suggestions were producers and Food for All members.

GM Report

Greg shared highlights and answered questions about the report.

EL 2: Planning & Financial Budgeting

Barbara made a motion to monitor EL 2 and Amanda seconded. All voted in favor to accept it as on time, reasonable interpretation, data provided, and compliant.

FY2026 Q4 Board Budget Monitoring

Quarter 4 was the close of our annual board budget. We came in under budget overall.

EL 1: Financial Conditions

Amanda made a motion at 7:50pm to go into Executive Session for the purposes of examining the Co-op's financials, seconded by Cody. All voted in favor.

Amanda made a motion to end Executive Session at 7:53pm, seconded by Kristin. All voted in favor.

Amanda made a motion to monitor EL1 and Cody seconded. All voted in favor to accept it as on time, reasonable interpretation, data provided, and compliant.

Executive Session

Amanda made a motion at 7:54pm to go into Executive Session for the purposes of the general manager evaluation, seconded by Cody. All voted in favor.

Amanda made a motion to end Executive Session at 8:19pm, seconded by Kristin. All voted in favor.

Cody made a motion to end the meeting at 8:19 pm and Sam seconded. All voted in favor.