**CHEA General Membership Meeting**

Saturday, March 28, 2015, 1:00 p.m.

Sasona Co-op, 2604 Paramount Ave., Austin, TX 78704

Donny Goff called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Agenda** | **Action** | **Comment** |
| Relationships among NASCO, CHEA, Sasona, and La Reunion | Discussion. | Meg explains the beginning of the cooperative movement, the beginning of NASCO, the relationship between NASCO and CHEA, and how NASCO can support our co-ops.  Donny explains how CHEA relates to Sasona and La Reunion. |
| Income polling of all members to maintain non-profit status. | Discussion. | Members fill out income disclosure forms, so that CHEA can maintain nonprofit status as providing affordable housing.  **All members need to fill out this form, so if you were not at the GMM, please see a CHEA board rep at your house to get an income disclosure form to fill out.** |
| Community board representative: election and discussion. | Discussion and election. | Abigail Tatkow elected 23 to 1 (None of the Above).  Another term!  Huzzah! |
| Discussion of CHEA part-time administrator and/or developer position. | Discussion. | Introduction to part-time admin position (Donny) :  CHEA exists to keep houses financially solvent and legal. Hard for the board to do that, meeting only every two weeks. Some things need more immediate response, and some need longer term work.  CHEA has enough members to warrant a part-time administrator position.  Position would go to house meetings, would go to board meetings, and would prepare quarterly reports.  Issues at house tend to have to do with membership and finances. Both of those require attention and expertise.  In addition to those admin tasks, the position could look into city funding and affordable housing streams. Too hard to do that work with volunteers.  Important points about this position:  - Covers our liabilities (membership and financial)  - Creates consistency in our enforcement of membership policies and deadlines  - Handles the ugly legal stuff  - Saves us money by handling the ugly legal stuff in a timely manner  - Better oversight of ongoing multi-month projects  - Provides a chance to get into City funding streams  Donny, Ryan, and Hannah of the North have been going to housing meetings and meeting with city council… Too hard to do that with volunteers.  Ruth: Sasona does not have months where there is no money coming into a room… Does that happen at La Re?  Donny: sometimes that happens at La Re, but I remember that happening for a little bit at Sasona.  Meg: La Re is still developing, getting that co-op culture.  Who would be this person’s boss? The Board. They would also report to houses, at least quarterly.  Ruth: how does this job description compare to, say, comparable ones at NASCO Properties? Like in Chicago and Lawrence?  Donny: has an email about that. Cumbia in Chicago, also have a paid part-time position. They said that the holes that a volunteer cannot cover should be in the job description.  Meg: NASCO supports co-op jobs.  Donny: funding for this position would come from vacancy fund overages. Also, Daniel said NP might be interested in funding.  Nicole: two part-time staffers?  Donny: eventually, we want two, but first we want an admin position, who could do a bit of development. Then, developer position could be funded outside of CHEA, to help start new co-ops.  Tom: who sets the salary?  Donny: the board would set it.  Phil: who is ultimately going to decide whether we go with this or not?    Donny: makes sense that it would be the board deciding. And the board is accountable to the houses.    Phil: concerned if it is a CHEA member, then there is a conflict of interest, worried about having one person able to post an eviction notice...    Donny: would only be enforcing rules at the request of house members.    Meg: NASCO recommended that we talk to Cumbia, co-op system in Chicago that is about our size, about this, because they have part-time positions that can be held by either members or non members... It is up to us. Also, not a great job for a non-cooper, challenging to keep this job tempting as a part-time job...    Phil: disagrees that we would have a hard time finding someone to do this job at the pay with competency.    Paul: what's the budget that we're thinking for this?    Donny: ~$750/mo    Ryan: that number comes from the rate at which the vacancy fund grows. Initial funding could come from that pool. NP could also be a good funding source in the future.    Oliver: have you checked with Daniel Miller about this?    Donny: asked Daniel our thoughts about this, who put us in touch with co-ops around the country with this same situation happening. He likes the idea...    Meg: Daniel has given mixed answers about this...Could see that since we don't have that many members, we might not need a position.... But, on the other hand, creating co-ops jobs is good.    Clayton: as treasurer of CHEA, realizes that houses have not been really good at keeping up with data input tasks, for accounting, and we are paying an accountant now, to get books up to speed. So, the accountant currently hired can help train co-opers, to help us from having this same trouble next year... Getting books up to speed in general. Point being, we are going to start paying people to do some of this stuff anyway.    Donny: additionally, we have discovered at the board level that we have a deficit in training in-coming membership coordinators.    Ruth: important, if the board decides to go through with this, to have a house member from each house on the hiring committee.    Seconded by Paul.    Corey: maybe we could have some house officers, too?    Meg: have people raise their hands if they have vested interest in applying for this job: (I counted Donny, Ryan, Sam... not sure if I missed anyone).    Gatlin: really thinks it is important that this person is not a member of CHEA, because there is a conflict of interest. The member could be evicted, raising an ethical concern. Other co-ops have administrators who don't live there, and it works just fine for them. There is a need for someone who could be objective, even in emotional situations. There is no need to introduce this conflict of interest. In five years, this current dynamic, ,that we know and trust, could change, opening the organization to risk. For example, at college houses, there was an embezzling scheme by an employee/resident member. In conclusion, there is a need for us to protect the organization from this risk, planning ahead for the future.    Meg: did anyone from the Cumbia houses in Chicago write about the difference between the co-oper employee and the non-co-oper employee?    Donny: conflicts of interest would include setting pay and voting for position.    Nicole: worried about keeping objective perspective with house members in this employment position, since people tend to be biased toward their own houses. Also, last year, we paid accountant to help get books up to date, and that way would be cheaper than hiring a staff person , at least for the financial side of things.    Tom: with Gatlin and Nicole, it would be worth hiring someone outside the system. Also likes the idea of not doing this at all. So, funding through NASCO? Through vacancy fund?    Meg: NASCO could also help find funding in the future.    Tom: is there any way this funding could ever come from houses general budgets?    Corey: it would be money that we are getting back from NASCO, once the vacancy fund is full (which it currently is not, but it is close).    Tom: if we didn't do this, then it would go where?    Clayton: it would go to the CHEA account.    Tom: so, we are not talking about taking money from what we already have, we are talking about an overflow of money. Agrees with following what Nicole says, just hire people to do accounting. Or, if we do it, then we should have an outside person.    Hannah of the North: disagrees with Tom and Nicole, because we need to build capacity to expand affordable housing in Austin. Got lucky in La Re, had motivated all-volunteer labor. Need to make more co-ops, and solidify current co-ops. In her experience, memco's have not had the best watertight track record. Our co-ops have been relying on luck, but it only takes one slip up to have a big mess, due to legal sloppiness. Has not heard any substantial reasons to validate conflicts of interest. Would like to invest in our own people as workforce.    RIchard: speaking about conflict of interest, in La Re's own manual, there is a line of discouragement for fixer, which does ten hours of labor per week in exchange for free rent, that says to be wary of officer reviewing this person, because that could make that person have to move out. There is a definite conflict of interest in evicting a worker... Also, there is a scenario in which someone creates a position and is interested in applying for the position.    Meg: talked with Daniel at NASCO, and he said that we should probably be paying a staff person at ACBA to hold our interest, and that, additionally, NASCO would like to be involved in any city talks, having experience in this matter. La Re has been talking with HACA... ACBA does business stuff, but if we let them know our interests, they could help out with housing... So, it is a lot of coordination to connect all these dots. One thing that we could do is to get HACA to tell us what it is like dealing with city hall... In some cities, there are laws that give nonprofits the first dibs on buying affordable housing properties. Could see the benefit of having a staff person, maybe even throwing labor at it, to help coordinator? NASCO does not see the member-employee situation as a conflict of interest. NASCO also trains staff, could come do a training at co-ops if we ask. Also, Madison, WI is looking for new co-op staff, since their staff picketed and got fired! Anyway...  There are a lot of different routes we could take to do this position.    Ryan: has been talking to ACBA, and the ED, Brian Donovan, is here! The impetus for this position was meeting with Dr. Mueller, Brian Donovan, and Ruby (didn't catch this last name), and they said that, although they like what we are doing, there is no way that volunteers can do this kind of advocacy and development work without committing more time. The kind of work that we need to do requires at least a part-time position. About conflict of interest, although he is biased, and interested in this job, it would be a conflict for CHEA to completely disregard its own members, like organizational knowledge, so that would be six months that an outside person would need to train... Case example of La Re: have a member who is month to month on rent, has eviction notices posted, then Ryan has to go to courthouse, which is only open during business hours, and it is a challenge to get to the courthouse in a timely manner, so should Ryan be member reviewed for being late on carrying out house policy?    Oliver: convinced of the rightness of the position. Wondering, Hannah of the North said that MemCo's can let things slip through the cracks, so what will this person have as oversight?    Donny: reports to board and houses.    Meg: would they be reviewed once a year?    Donny: something to still figure out...    Dusana: one year seems like a long time, maybe we could do 6 months...    Oliver: need more timely review of performance.    Donny: they would be at every board meeting, and the board would be reviewing performance. Reporting to houses once every three months.    Dusana: doesn't really know how other co-ops are running, so this is based on La Re experience: there are several positions that are run by people in the house, and she have been impressed with their work. Sees the point about conflict of interest, and Gatlin's risk-aversion. Could we have a higher-percentage vote for houses? Can we write something so that voting members can decide whether or not it is a conflict of interest? We would have to spend a lot of time training an external person... That would also take member time.    Cass: was unconvinced for the need for this position, at all, read through job responsibilities in email, and it seems nebulous, not very clearly defined. As we've been talking, some people have been talking about the lobbying position, but the written admin position has tasks that are about finance and membership, so can we find enough part-time work? That person might be twiddling their thumbs. Disagrees that it would take 6 months to train a person. If we were wanting people familiar with co-ops, there are a lot of co-ops in this town, could reach out to other co-ops... Nicole summed it up very well, no matter what you think about your objectivity, house members are biased toward their own houses, and that affects our performance. That person needs to be completely unbiased and separated from the two houses. If we decide to move forward, the job description needs to be way more defined, performance review is important, and evaluating how hours are being spent. Also, if it is hard for you to do your job as an officer, maybe you need to do a different job, or the job needs to be redistributed.    Phil: Nicole said that we are already paying an accountant. So does that mean it would be more cost effective to hire an accountant, and would that take care of the needs of this position?    Nicole: for the financial section only, yes, it would be more cost effective to hire an accountant.    Donny: has written down some very important concerns and new ideas. Recommends closing stack. Hears concerns about house bias, but this person would be the board employee, not someone making house policy. Would be doing things that the board says needs to be done, but would have a lot of power. Need to keep polishing this job description. Has been circulating, and this will keep being fleshed out as we move forward. Don't know if we can get it as fully defined as, say Sasona labor descriptions, as it takes time to know what the position should entail, it will only be so solid when we start, but the general responsibilities will be there. Good idea for other co-opers to be filling... Sees position starting off administering CHEA 80%, 20% doing outreach, looking for funding streams, etc... It will be in flux, will depend on the given month. Their focus would be administering CHEA, first and foremost.    Hannah of the North: administration tasks are labor that comes and goes, like time-consuming evictions, but there is a lot of work to be done in the mean time. There is a danger in having an all-volunteer workforce, because if those volunteers get full-time jobs, then their responsibilities change. If we want to see more co-ops in Austin, and if we want to tighten up our organization, we need this position. We can always try it, experiment, and vote it down if it sucks. And, we have the money, that won't even raise rents. A lot of activities take place in business hours, so there are a lot of affordable housing meet and greets that lead to money and support, but they happen during business hours. So, it would be best to remove some of that chanciness, to make growth and progress more of a sure thing. About conflict of interest, have not heard a lot of evidence, thinks it would be worth to have it an open invite interview, see who shows up, and take it from there.    Daphne: a lot of people for and against it. Wants to know, from Donny, do we need to keep this vote at the board level?    Donny: need to have hiring committee like Ruth said, with reps from each houses... Should the board not decide this?    Daphne: has the feeling that a lot of people want to be involved on this vote?    Donny: come to board meetings, we will continue to talk about this for weeks.    Daphne: are you saying that only people on the board have a final say on this position?    Donny: this is why we have a board, to make decisions like this?    Daphne: how can we overturn this thing, if board makes this decision?    Gatlin: point of information, can have a house vote, across houses, a referendum, to overturn whatever the board ends up deciding. There is a way to have this be a member vote. And, this decision can be overturned.    Donny: there is grassroots democracy in our bylaws.    Daphne: wants to hear more voices about approving or disapproving this position... Also, used to live at Arrakis, wants to know from Brian, how many houses and members did ICC have? At what point was there staff?? 9    Brian: there was a 1/3 of a position, and that started in the 70s, with only a few houses. Around 60 people or so, fairly close to the number of members in CHEA. And there was a decision to have a paid staff person. Similar scale, similar problem: not enough money for a full time person, and yet work that needs to be done.    Daphne: was that person, Jim Jones, a co-oper?    Brian: don't think so...    Ryan: also lived at Arrakis with Daphne, ICC and College Houses ratio is about 1 full time staff person for 60 members, and ours would be 1/2 time person for 60 people. Thinks CHEA can be more efficient as an adult co-op, but still thinks that it is time to hire a person.    Brian: has an interest in this question, City asking for RFP on how to better support cooperatives. La Re is an example of the kind of properties and kind of coops that should be happening in Austin. Some of the idea for this grew out of the housing working group meeting. Not advocating for or against position, but, he does see the opportunity for CHEA to be the organization to train people on how to buy and operate their coops. After all, expansion has been in the mission, though dormant, from the beginning. Expansion. You don't have to hire someone, Ryan is doing a good job of advocacy with out being hired, however, if CHEA is going to expand, it is a different thing than just teaming up with ACBA, because there is opportunity for ACBA to win this RFP, which would tell city what to do to help coops. One of the questions is who is going to train people on how to start coops? In some ways, this proposal spurs on CHEA to have staff position. Maybe that staff position could make money, working with other coops, doing both admin and development. Brian wants to see more housing coops in Austin. By the by, CHEA is a member of ACBA, joined last summer, at a $1,000 membership, and our normal renewal is first quarter, so asking board to renew now... Looking to get ACBA membership onto a cycle, so that everyone is renewing on first quarter.    Cnythia: thinks this person can mess things up, if they don'y have 4 horus of work per day, what is the use in hiring them? Has see boo boos happen, and if we are jumping into this, we neeed to think about this really hard first. Co-op officers should train someone to do what Ryan is doing. If we have a mess up, we need to know what we are doing. Get some officers trained to do this. Someone can mess up our everything! Treasury is tricky business.    Gatlin: reiterating that 6 months is too long to expect for training, but can think of a number of people who would want part-time work for co-ops. Has a large pool of people in mind who could want this job. Good idea for both houses to have a referendum vote, to make sure we hear everyone's voice. There have been demonstrated cases of conflict of interest. Should be considered and weighed carefully. Ways of mitigating it, but we need to take into account the conflict risks. We should all be deciding this.  Nicole: her understanding was that we would be deciding this together, right now, all voting together. Disappointed that we are not. Can we change this to a referendum, and have both houses vote?    Gatlin: we can have a referendum decision. Could actually just make it a popular vote.  (not sure who said this): If La Re wanted to hire a part-time admin, but Sasona did not, maybe La Re could find it in their own budget, to fund this.    Ruth: likes the big idea of the position, but the practical benefits to both houses need to be explicating stated, for her to be in favor of position. Like the ideas of coop goals, but wants to know, solidly, what contribution would be to my house, what would contribution to CHEA be, then, what would contribution be to greater co-op movement. Feels like this is a situation to have whole co-op system, all of CHEA voting, to decide to have the position, or not.    **Straw poll, for member-level vote to have the position versus board-level vote.**    **9 members present voted for member-level vote.** |

**New Business**

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Hannah Wright, Board Secretary