

Co-op Stays Put

Vision Statement

Buffalo Mountain Co-op retains the reputation we have earned for being one of the few remaining “real” coops. We are committed to remaining in and improving the space we currently inhabit. Since we own this building outright, we are provided with a level of financial security that enables us to expand our activities – rather than our physical scale – in support of the Hardwick area local food system. Among other things we encourage and offer help to nearby communities to establish similar food coops of their own.

Key Characteristics

Once we are committed to remaining in our current space on Main Street, we can invest in addressing some of the shortcomings of that space. We will likely need to make some changes to the physical plant, possibly including a dumbwaiter, additional storage or office space in the rear, sliding doors to the street, etc. We may also consider renting office and/or storage space nearby. We rely on working members to address some of the building’s shortcomings (e.g. shopping for and delivering to elderly and handicapped members).

Risks and Benefits

Benefits

- Retains BMC’s intimate scale.
- Retains BMC’s role as anchor of the downtown.
- Limited shelf space imposes discipline about the quality of the products we carry.
- By encouraging nearby communities to establish their own coops, we reduce the energy/pollution costs of people driving long distances to shop here.
- Avoids the risks inherent in borrowing large sums of money in an uncertain economic and financial climate.

Risks

- May alienate some members of the co-op who prefer wide aisles, greater product choice.
- Costs of retro-fitting building to accommodate extra storage and ease of moving products may be high.
- Other communities fail to establish their own coops, and sales growth greatly expands, making it difficult to accommodate additional shoppers, additional food storage.

Back to our Roots

Vision Statement

Since our founding 40 years ago, the organic food movement has become a global multi-national business. The “Back to Our Roots” vision doesn’t believe this is a sustainable model and, in many ways, buying into this system is antithetical to our mission. This vision of the co-op strives to support our local food systems by unplugging ourselves from the corporate food business. By setting an example of supporting local food systems, we can lead the way to a more sustainable and healthy local economy.

Key Characteristics

In this vision, we will focus on selling local, organic, bulk and non-GMO food products. This means we will not carry food products from large corporations, over-packaged food, or food that is shipped from across the country or across the world. We can partner with other local retailers to sell the non-food items that are currently in the co-op. Because we will likely carry less products, the need to expand the physical space is no longer an issue. We can therefore stay where we are.

Risks and Benefits

Benefits

- Retains BMC’s intimate scale.
- Retains BMC’s role as anchor of the downtown.
- Carrying less product, so there is more space in the store. No need to expand the physical space.
- By encouraging nearby communities to establish their own coops, we reduce the energy/pollution costs of people driving long distances to shop here.
- Supports our local food systems by providing an economic outlet for local producers. This would also result in a lower carbon foot print for our food.
- A focus on increasing working members and the feeling of member ownership.
- Avoids the risks inherent in borrowing large sums of money in an uncertain economic and financial climate (to expand physical space)

Risks

- May alienate some members of the co-op who prefer greater product choice and this may result in losing membership.
- By not carrying some products, some people may drive further (Montpelier) to get what they want thereby increasing energy/pollution.
- Loss of sales from carrying less products may result in financial instability.

Co-op Expansion

Vision Statement

A Buffalo Mountain Co-op which exists in an expanded space is a place that stays true to our vision and goals while providing access to more products, lower prices and a more spacious, pleasant shopping experience for our members and a more efficient work space for our staff.

Key Characteristics

A larger, more spacious store in downtown Hardwick. Ideally, this space would provide parking, be handicapped accessible, and provide ample retail and work space for our members and staff.

Risks and Benefits

Benefits

- A larger store would provide
 - less cramped retail space
 - better accessibility
 - better flow at check-out
 - improvements to energy efficiency
 - more storage area for products
 - better work environment for staff
- Ability to offer wider range of products
- Potential for increasing membership (growth) is greater than in other two scenarios (more buying power and ultimately lower prices)
- Increase in growth would allow for greater ability to fulfil our mission regarding local food support, community outreach, environmental sustainability etc.
- Potential for expanding customer base to wider section of local community

Risks

- Alienate some members of the co-op who like the small (funky) nature of our current store
- If capital outlay and loan payments are too high, prices would have to increase in order to stay solvent (going against our mission)
- The biggest risks are financial. A new facility would require a significant down payment as well as monthly payments on a loan. If membership or sales decrease significantly (or don't increase enough), this could lead to the dissolution of the co-op