

Bethlehem Food Co-Op on track

The Bethlehem Gadfly Environmental Advisory Council, Serious Issues January 26, 2019

Colleen Marsh is a member of the [Bethlehem Food Co-Op's](#) Board of Directors.

Had a great conversation with John [[John Marquette, see his January 22 post](#)] and wanted to summarize a few things here so that other readers can have the same info. What John posed is a great idea and a logical option to explore — In fact, it HAS been explored! A few years ago, Weavers Way found itself in a position to expand and worked with a national cooperative consulting firm to research options, including merging or partnering with existing start-ups.

They organized a meeting to explore feasibility with the numerous start-up cooperatives in the Philadelphia region. Bethlehem Food Co-Op representatives, including myself, attended that meeting, where it was mutually agreed upon that we were geographically too far away to pursue partnership at the time. Ambler Food Co-Op, which was founded around the same time as Bethlehem Food Co-Op, ultimately was approached, and their membership voted to become Weavers Way members and open a Weavers Way-Ambler location instead of their own separate business. You can read more about the merger here: <http://www.weaversway.coop/shuttle-online/2016/06/editors-note-everything-you-wanted-know-about-expansion>

The store is fantastic and an easy drive down route 309, so I highly recommend taking a trip to see what sort of operation we have in the works for Bethlehem!

While the Bethlehem Food Co-Op remains an autonomous cooperative, we are extremely fortunate to have the level of support and industry resources that we do, so we can avoid reinventing the wheel. As one of the cooperative principles is “Cooperation Among Cooperatives,” we’ve been able to obtain advice, data, and assistance from individual cooperatives, alliances, and organizations across the nation to help guide our development. Various Weavers Way employees and board members have mentored us since our earliest days of organizing, as well as representatives from other co-ops. We are also incredibly grateful to have the support of the Food Co-Op Initiative, Keystone Development Center, and the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance, all of

which have provided enormous resources for our co-op already. Our board members and volunteers have also had annual opportunities to attend conferences where they've gained information from a network of national cooperatives and experts. Bethlehem Food Co-Op has also secured expert consulting services in key areas so that we ensure our business is feasible and viable for the long haul in the competitive grocery industry.

The process of opening a food co-op typically takes between 5-8 years from incorporation. Bethlehem Food Co-Op incorporated in 2013, and all evidence shows that we are following the typical development timeline. We are incredibly grateful for the dedication and patience of our volunteers, and appreciate ideas, patience, and involvement from all of our members, like John! #strongertogether

Colleen

Information about membership in the Bethlehem Food Co-Op is [available here](#).