

# Responding to some skepticism about the Bethlehem Food Co-op's commitment to lower and middle income families

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 *The latest in a series of posts on City government* 

*Kathy Fox is a member of the Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council, a co-chair of the Northampton County Council of Democratic Women's Environmental Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Bethlehem Food Co-op. Kathy involves herself in positive organizations and activities that foster community, environmental awareness, education, and good health.*

## **Bethlehem Food Co-Op**

### **Food is Our First Medicine**

For me, attending the Community Development Committee meeting was an opportunity to thank the City of Bethlehem and the Community Development Committee for supporting many organizations which submitted applications for Community Development Block Grants. The Bethlehem Food Co-op appreciates being included as one of the recommended recipients of grant monies.

I'd like to expand upon the phrase "Food is Our First Medicine," mentioned by me last evening [Monday] at the Community Development Committee meeting. You can look at this phrase from many angles. I

like “Food is our First Medicine” because it speaks to many levels. For our personal health, eating foods produced locally and by environmentally friendlier methods give you much more nutritionally dense foods and improves physical and mental health. For our surrounding environment, cleaner growing methods mean cleaner water, air, and soil. For the community, “Food is our First Medicine” is about building a healthy, diverse, and inclusive community through healthy, communal meals for all and commonality of needing and enjoying food, through a grocery store which is committed to our local people, not distant shareholders, through education by the Bethlehem Food Co-op in our elementary schools via our Community Hubs Program and other courses taught by our members.

In response to some skepticism about the Food Co-op’s commitment to lower and middle income families (note that the BFC will be open to ALL to shop, not just members), it is a fact that some of BFC board members and volunteers were unable to attend last night’s meeting because they were facilitating our Community Hubs program at one of Bethlehem City’s elementary schools. For the program, the Co-op works with the principal to find lower income families who are interested in healthier eating and lifestyles, and involvement in their community. We meet with the families quarterly, provide them with healthy dinners graciously donated by some of our local restaurants, discuss nutrition, community, and what their families would like to see at the co-op. After completing the year-long course, we have generous benefactors who provide household memberships to the Co-op to the families who attended all the sessions. Additionally, we have a scholarship program supported by other local families and businesses, which search for families on some type of assistance who also have an interest in healthier lifestyles and who participate/volunteer in their community. You can see involvement in community is a very important aspect of the Co-op. When the Co-op opens, we will have additional ways to include people from all economic backgrounds. Meanwhile, we depend on the vast majority of our members to pay their own way to support the Co-op’s mission. The co-

op is much more than just a grocery store, its goal is to be an integral, stable part of the community.

I'm very proud to be part of an all-volunteer organization which believes in giving their time, talent, and financial support to help the community as whole rather than for personal monetary gain. Everyone is invited to attend our events and join our BFC team to assist us in creating a safe place, third place, healthy place, community-oriented, and inclusive place for ALL. I encourage skeptics to make a positive investment in the Bethlehem community by becoming a member and volunteer for some of our committees, projects, classes, and events.

Kathy

*Now the specific examples in the core of Kathy's essay are precisely what Gadfly was looking for in the previous post on Councilman Reynolds' defense of the BFC. Those examples specifically address part of the objections by Grubb and Haines, showing the BFC operating within CDBG guidelines. Hurrah! But this conversation is not over.*

