



Store Design Manifests Co-op Community Vision

BY PATRICIA CUMBIE

On a continuum of design complexity, grocery stores top the list. Unlike an office where the flow of work is usually very specific to certain functions, the activities of a grocery store are fast-paced and multifaceted. Staff prep food, checkout customers and bag groceries, accept deliveries, stock and clean. Customers park their cars, walk in, browse the aisles, pick and choose, and ask questions. All of these things occur simultaneously and repeatedly through the course of a day.

"The most important thing about a store is its function," said store planner and designer PJ Hoffman, who has 20 years experience as a grocery store designer. Prior to designing stores, he also spent 18 years in retail food co-op management. Hoffman now works with CDS designing food co-ops through a collaborative agreement with United Natural Foods Inc. (UNFI). He knows store design from virtually every possible perspective.

"Of course you want the store to look right, but the store also has to achieve its goals in terms of sales, labor and efficiency. Good store design is based on how a shopper shops and a worker works," Hoffman said. "The rhythm of work and shopping in a grocery store is different than for any other building."

A store's design can make shopping your store a pleasure, attracting higher sales, or an awkward experience that hurts the bottom line. During expansion planning, it's



Neighborhood Co-op's new store interior. Photo by Lisa Smith

important to give early priority to store layout and design if you're considering a specific site.

Of all the primary activities of food co-op expansion planning, one of the most critical roles is the store planner and designer. The store planner has many insights into retail work space use and consumer shopping habits that will inform whether or not a given site can be considered doable or could operate efficiently.

What does a store designer assess about a potential site? For an existing building the planner looks at such things like load-bearing support walls and posts, floors (are they even) and flooring materials, door locations, windows, receiving areas, staircases, bathrooms—things that could potentially be changed, or not, that may or may not hinder the flow of retail activity. For a teardown or empty space, a planner will look at the con-

The Help You Need to Turn Your Visions into Reality

A dictionary or thesaurus is a wonderful tool for understanding word usage and building vocabulary. Choosing the right word in a given situation is often a matter of education, intuition and experience. The dictionary can help, but it won't be at your shoulder prompting you to use one word over another.

Likewise, a store planner and designer is a similar resource you bring to your organization to help you manifest a tangible community service or vision for a new food co-op. A store designer's knowledge about buildings, construction, layout and design function, and food industry practicalities all go into putting that vision down on paper. How you choose the configuration that helps you reach your larger goals is ultimately up to you.

If you're beginning an expansion process, it's never too early to have a discussion with a store designer. CDS is pleased to be working with one of the best store planners in the country. If you have not met PJ Hoffman, we hope you get an opportunity to work with him soon.

—Patricia Cumbie



Our Mission

CDS is dedicated to building and strengthening cooperative businesses by providing consulting, training and development services.

CDS includes a network of independent consulting professionals experienced in all aspects of developing food cooperatives. CDS consultants have worked on over 500 projects and will tailor their services to fit your needs and deliver results.

Board Leadership Development

- CBLD—Cooperative Board Leadership Development
- Board training and facilitation
- Strengthen board/manager relations
- Accountability and Policy Governance™
- Member owner linkage

Expansion and Relocation

- Expansion planning
- Financial pro forma
- Capitalization and member loans
- Business strategy
- Market, location and site analysis
- Trade area and market penetration analysis
- Project management
- Store planning and design services

Improving Operational Performance

- Business planning, goal setting and monitoring
- Audit and strengthen operational systems
- CoCoFiSt and CoCoFiSt workshops
- Margin enhancement
- Labor controls
- Merchandising
- Financial system design and assessment
- Management training, coaching, and support

Store Design *continued from page 1*

figuration of the property and land, and consider traffic patterns to and from the site.

If Hoffman is able to look at the building in person that's a plus, but it's usually not necessary or cost-effective to make an in-person evaluation. Most store designers can look at photos, a floor plan or blue print to get a sense of the space. "A year ago I worked with a co-op that was very excited about a space, they saw something big and beautiful, but I saw it as a disaster. The site had no parking, the wood floors were a problem and the building wasn't up to code," Hoffman said. Sure, it was disappointing that it wouldn't work out, but that analysis helped save them from wasting time or money on an unworkable site.

Hoffman said that bringing in a store planner sooner than later will also help things go that much more smoothly in later stages of a project's execution because a dialogue about the co-op's needs has begun. It's not unusual for a co-op's project to go through 3-5 design iterations before it's complete, and that takes time. Once a store planner creates the basic floor plan, other members of the design team—architects, engineers, and other designers—can get busy with their part.

"An expansion is not just more space," he said. "What programs do you want to expand, improve or create? You can always change your mind about the salad bar, but it's important to know what it is you want to achieve and what services you want to offer to your customers." At the beginning of the expansion process, Hoffman suggested general managers get any and all input they can from customers and staff, and balance that feedback with practical experience running the business.

Francis Murphy, general manager of Neighborhood Co-op Grocery, in Carbondale, Ill. said that their newly expanded co-op is the result of a visioning process begun four years ago. The board's expansion relocation policies were part of the outcome of a meeting with members and the community. In turn, Murphy's work with store planner Hoffman

was to set about making their expanded co-op vision a reality.

The co-op grew from a 1,800 square foot store to 7,300 square feet, and every department got bigger. In particular they added more depth to their food service departments like produce, and added new departments like meat and an expanded deli with a bakery. In addition to working with Hoffman, the co-op also worked with Chris Ryding, national prepared

foods manager with NCGA. "They worked well together. I told them the programs I wanted and they sourced the equipment and planned the kitchen in order to build the capacity we wanted," Murphy said. "We ended up with a totally outstanding design."

Murphy said dollar-for-dollar working with Hoffman was also good financial benefit. "He saved me a lot of money on equipment, and the store planning fee was the best money I spent on the whole project."

Ultimately a co-op's expansion plans are all about what the members require, and before your store designer can be most effective, those desires need to be prioritized. At Viroqua Food

Co-op in Viroqua, Wisc., general manager Jan Rasikas said her co-op held a stakeholders meeting to get an understanding of what people wanted. "The stakeholder meeting was a huge part of the process," Rasikas said. At the meeting they did the following:

- Identified common values and beliefs
- Envisioned the future of the co-op
- Asked how they could better serve the community
- Determined how to measure success when it was completed

A committee worked with all the specific feedback and balanced the needs and wants with what they had for their budget. Then Viroqua Food Co-op worked with Hoffman to create the store plan and design that was the result of their vision. "Before pencil hits paper you want your community and staff to have a chance to say what they want the store to be," said Hoffman. "Then it's up to me to distill it into a workable program."



"An expansion is not just more space. What programs do you want to expand, improve or create?"

—PJ Hoffman

CASE STUDY

Store Design from the (Uneven) Ground Up

In the chronicles of co-op expansion features, perhaps no co-op worked longer (eight years) or harder (rejecting multiple locations) to locate just the right site than Whole Foods Community Co-op in Duluth, Minn. During those years, retail food store planner and designer PJ Hoffman assisted from the very beginning, helping general manager Sharon Murphy sort the good from the bad in proposed locations. There were many things to consider to make an expansion site a go for Whole Foods Co-op, and Murphy relied on Hoffman's expertise to help her make good evaluations.

The co-op's neighborhood in Duluth, aptly named "Hillside," features an attractive customer base living on San Francisco-style hills that offer stunning views of Lake Superior. But just try bringing a semi truck loaded with food into the area. The co-op seemed to need the impossible: a bigger store and a way to bring deliveries to the co-op that didn't block resident traffic or the co-op's customer entrance.

"Right away we wanted the store designer's opinion," Murphy said about locations she considered in the expansion process. "To be able to define your shoppers' traffic patterns in a given place is significant." She needed that advice to know if a proposed site would be workable.

The challenges of Whole Foods' expansion were numerous. Available properties were often odd shaped with a steep grade, and some posed too many challenges to their building criteria. The board and members wanted the co-op to do all it could to build "green."

"We ended up with a two-level site and we had to build a huge retaining wall," Murphy said. "Semi trucks going to our loading dock are on a steeper grade than a basic forklift could handle." Hoffman's design took every delivery scenario into consideration, down to delivery trucks' turning radius and size, in order to make it all work.

Whole Foods Co-op is also a certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building, the first in Duluth. The guidelines for construction include reuse,



Whole Foods Community Co-op

Duluth, Minn.

Founded: 1970

Number of members: 3,800

Equity investment: \$100 per member

Number of staff: 115

Retail square feet: 7,500

conservation, and use and recycling of building materials. "What LEED is trying to do is create total health for a building and work environment," said Murphy, and the store designer was a critical part of that process. "PJ worked very closely with the architect and design team...it was amazing the amount of coordination that went into that."

Not only were green building features important, but the layouts for store departments were equally coordinated and thought out. In 2005, Whole Foods Co-op got the delivery dock, the wider aisles, adjacent parking, more checkouts, seating area and an expanded deli.

The potential on-site butcher, bakery and juice bar fell by the wayside when they looked at labor, costs and space. For example, they decided that a juice bar was much more labor and space intensive than the payback they could get if they used the space for their grocery department instead. Hoffman's design experience with how retail work spaces function for staff and customers helped Murphy make those decisions.

From the beginning, Murphy believed that the store planner had to be an integral part of their expansion plan. That role played a big part in a satisfactory outcome for the Hillside community when the co-op opened the doors to their new, level store.

CBLD Enrollment Now Under Way

In the fall of 2004, 24 co-ops in the Eastern Corridor agreed that ongoing board support and system-wide board development were worth pursuing and joined a pilot program for 2005. In 2006, Co-op Board Leadership Development (CBLD) continued with 42 co-ops from the Eastern and Central Corridors. In 2007, CBLD is open to all co-ops in the NCGA, with space for up to 60 co-ops.

Services will be provided by the Cooperative Development Services' CBLD Leadership Team, a growing group of experienced board consultants that includes Mark Goehring, coordinator, Michael Healy, Bentley Lein, Marshall Kovitz, Marilyn Scholl, and Linda Stier. The CDS Team works closely together on the program. Please see the CDS website (www.cdsfood.coop) for more information.

Welcome Marshall Kovitz

The CDS Leadership Team also continues to grow! We welcome



Marshall Kovitz as a new CDS consultant working in board development. Marshall has a long history in the co-op movement, having joined the board of La Montanita Co-op a few years after it opened in 1976. He served for a total of about 20 years. He spent several years as president, including periods encompassing two expansions. Marshall has a deep ideological commitment to economic democracy and to cooperatives. His good listening, collaboration, and other communication skills are applied to his work with boards and policy governance.

CDS

Cooperative Development Services
consulting services for food cooperatives



131 West Wilson, Suite 400
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

www.cdsfood.coop

US Postage
PAID
Madison, WI
Permit #2783

CDS Administrative Office

131 West Wilson #400 • Madison, WI 53703 • **phone:** 651-265-3678 • **email:** info@cdsfood.coop • **website:** www.cdsfood.coop

CDS Consultants

Mel Braverman

Operational and Financial
Improvement
(608) 243-3255
MelBraverman@cdsfood.coop

Denise Chevalier

Project Management and
New Co-op Development
(319) 337-3452
DeniseChevalier@cdsfood.coop

Peter C. Davis

Location and Site Analysis
Expansion Strategy Study
(360) 344-4104
Cell Phone: (360) 531-1995
PeteDavis@cdsfood.coop

Bill Gessner

Expansion Planning and
Business Development
(612) 823-4509
BillGessner@cdsfood.coop

Mark Goehring

Board Leadership Development
(802) 380-3824
MarkGoehring@cdsfood.coop

Michael Healy

Board Trainer (802) 864-9724
MichaelHealy@cdsfood.coop

P.J. Hoffman

Store Planning and Design
(763) 780-1058 ext. 62128
PJHoffman@cdsfood.coop

Marshall Kovitz

Board Leadership Development
(505) 256-1241
MarshallKovitz@cdsfood.coop

Bentley Lein

Board Leadership Development
(608) 784-0249
BentleyLein@cdsfood.coop

Loretta Norris

Produce Specialist (608) 250-6494
LorettaNorris@cdsfood.coop

Marilyn Scholl

Board Leadership Development and
Cooperative Development
(802) 387-6013
MarilynScholl@cdsfood.coop

Linda Stier

Board Leadership Development
(919) 387-9325
LindaStier@cdsfood.coop

Kate Sumberg

CoCoFiSt and CoCoFiSt
Workshops
(919) 968-8799
KateSumberg@cdsfood.coop

Walden Swanson

CoCoFiSt and CoCoFiSt
Workshops
(919) 968-8799
WaldenSwanson@cdsfood.coop

You may contact individual consultants at their home office address and phone numbers.