# COOP FINANCES IMPROVE, GM OVERHAULS COMMITTEES

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*Joe Holtz stated that the overall picture of the Coop's finances is good.*

*By Hayley Gorenberg*




ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

The January General Meeting learned that Coop finances have taken a significant turn to the positive—no thanks, unfortunately, to some members snatching pricey coffee. The GM also passed significant new transparency and accountability requirements for committees.

## OPEN FORUM

The Coop's compliance with New York City's vaccine mandate for workers (including Coop members who work without pay) drew enthusiasm and curiosity during the free-form Open Forum that opened the GM. "I feel super positive about working and going into the Coop knowing we are doing this, and I'd love to know some more of the details," said a member seeking information on any exemptions the Coop is considering.

## VACCINATIONS

About 275 members have requested exemptions and accommodations, according to General Manager Joe Holtz, working with a handful of experienced Coop members to assess the requests, their bases, potential grants, and the possibility of any appeals of denials. Holtz predicted decisions within the next few weeks, and forecasted a requirement that anyone granted an exception from the vaccine requirements would have to present a negative PCR result from a test completed no more than 48 hours before each shift. "That's the basic plan, the way the Coop is complying with this basic safety initiative from New York City," Holtz said.

## BAGS & COFFEE

Exchanges about plastic bags occupied the remainder of the open forum, after a member raised concern about proliferating plastic bags, particularly in the bulk aisle, which had previously included far less plastic packaging. In particular, she noted an expanding selection of pre-bagged coffee beans.

The Coop started pre-bagging items in the bulk aisle early in the pandemic to speed shopping in the aisle, which can get quite crowded, explained General Coordinator Joe

Szladek. With regard to coffee in particular, Szladek noted that the Coop had increased stocks of pre-packaged pricier coffees, leaving less expensive coffees in bulk dispensers, after noting that members were mismarking bulk bags filled with expensive beans, tagging them with PLUs from cheaper options—to the tune of the Coop "losing hundreds and hundreds of dollars a week."

> MEMBERS ARE MISMARKING BULK BAGS FILLED WITH EXPENSIVE BEANS, TAGGING THEM WITH PLUS FROM CHEAPER OPTIONS – TO THE TUNE OF THE COOP'S "LOSING HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS A WEEK," SAID GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE SZLADEK

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Credits, loan forgiveness, and increased sales buoyed recent Coop finances, according to Holtz. The Coop recently received over $850,000 from the IRS for 2020 Employee Retention Credits, and Holtz predicted that the Coop's $1,677,000 Paycheck Protection Program loan forgiveness application would succeed. Additionally, Coop supplier United National Foods made a dent in $36,000 of credit that accrued over the course of five months for goods the Coop paid for and never received.

The company was hit hard by labor difficulties during the pandemic and didn't have staff to process returns and paperwork for routine misdeliveries, Holtz said, giving an example where the Coop might order "10 cases of a certain tomato sauce, but instead you delivered to us a cereal we have no interest in carrying." These mixups averaged around $7,000 each month and with months of credits stacking up the Coop contacted National Cooperative Grocers, which "put lots of pressure on them…so they started paying attention and started devoting labor to it," Holtz said. "Essentially they were out of labor, they were overwhelmed. It wasn't malicious, but it was bad."

THE RECENT BOTTOM LINE SHOWED THE COOP FINALLY CLOSE TO STAUNCHING ITS OPERATING LOSS, WHICH DROPPED TO ABOUT $1,000 A WEEK

The recent bottom line showed the Coop finally close to staunching its operating loss, which dropped to about $1,000 per week. That said, Holtz warned that the pandemic price increase, from the previous 21% markup to the current 25%, helped to close the operating loss short-term by bringing in an additional $25,000 per week. At the same time, the price increase might undermine Coop growth and sales long-term, in an increasingly competitive grocery world. Holtz said, “Nevertheless, the overall picture I’m trying to paint is, the good news overwhelms the potential bad ‘newses’—significantly!”

## MORE MEMBERS

For the first time since the pandemic hit, the Coop in early December started admitting new members with a new process. Membership is “finally approaching 13,000” Holtz said, with about 100 people per week self-certifying their reviews of a video and materials, followed by enrollment sessions several times per week. Meanwhile, about 40–50 members are leaving each week, and staff are working to devise ways to add members faster.

## SOMETHING SWEET


jaffa
PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Jaffa clementines are amazing!
Szladek promoted in-season citrus “that is really quite amazing,” including “Jaffa clementines with a floral flavor,” tasty Algerian clementines, heirloom navel oranges, and complicated tangerine crosses.

Szladek also drew attention to Vanessa’s Dumplings in the freezer case, which he called “quite excellent, nice quick dinner—taste quite good.”

With supply chain issues improving, Szladek said any existing, temporary “holes” were filled with trial items, to see if they gain popularity.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

Paul Warren, of the Equity, Access and Community Committee (formerly the Diversity and Equality Committee), previewed that the members were looking to develop online complaint forms, working to improve language access “so people can actually become members in their primary language,” and planning a demographic survey.

## COMMITTEE REQUIREMENTS




ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

By a 68–38 vote, the GM passed a measure authored by member Rachel Porter to revamp committee selection in several ways. Porter proposed listing all committees and names of members (behind a firewall) on the PSFC website, with a brief description of the purpose and activities of the committee, updated at least annually. For any committees deemed "non-essential," the new rule generally limits credits for committee work to a maximum of 13 shifts per year, unless more shifts are approved by a staff liason.

The new policy did not specifically identify the "non-essential" committees that will be affected, and an amendment removed the requirement of elections and terms for such committees.

Additional requirements include having all committees report to the GM annually—and at least twice each year, for committees deemed essential to PSFC functioning. Committees also must provide updates on their activities in the *Linewaiters' Gazette* at least twice each year. Members at the GM modified the proposal to remove a requirement that committee elections occur at the GM, after many participants expressed concern that elections would consume too much GM bandwidth—e-

specially given a new three-year term for committee membership. (No term limits were specified.)

In her initial presentation, Porter discussed the impetus for her proposal, which she said stemmed from her “alarm” at the lack of centralized tracking for committee work or reporting, with unlimited banked shifts permitted. She pressed for accountability and oversight, asserting, “The Coop shouldn’t be in the business of making work, when we have a lot of work we need to get done.”

At the close of the GM, the Board voted to ratify the GM decision-making.




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