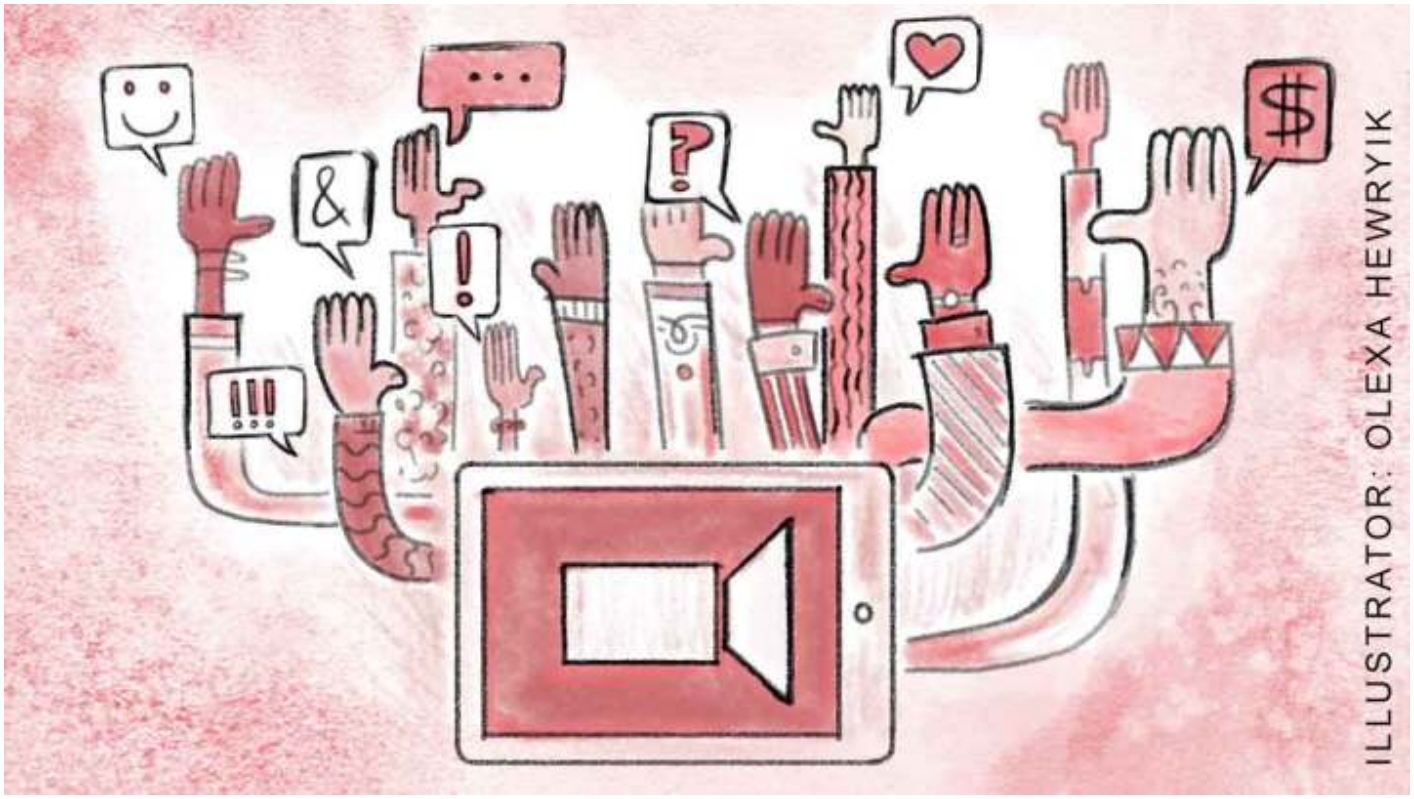
MEMBER VOICE, ZOOM PAINS AND JELLYBEANS: MARCH 29 GENERAL MEETING REPORT

April 19, 2022



By John B. Thomas

The Coop attempted to continue its tradition of virtual General Meetings on March 29, but cracks in the seams of this approach started to show. A meeting that was supposed to be about electing a new member to the Agenda Committee and three members to the Dispute Resolution Committee had to be tabled to the May GM due to an attendance limit of 100 on the Coop's Zoom account. This occurred because the Chair Committee made a Zoom scheduling error, and has been resolved for future GMs, with a limit raised to 500. At this meeting, however, the 100-person cap was reached and additional members were subsequently locked out.

DURING THE PANDEMIC, THE COOP'S MEMBERSHIP DROPPED FROM 17,000 TO 11,750. HOWEVER, IN RECENT MONTHS THE COOP'S MEMBERSHIP HAS INCHED BACK UP TO 13,000.

In spite of these challenges, there was a lively General Coordinator update from Elinoar Astrinsky, impassioned comments about the Coop's vaccine mandate from two members during the Open Forum, and an opportunity for candidates to the Coop Board of Directors to answer questions from members.

Open Forum

The GM kicked off with an Open Forum that touched on the process to evaluate accommodations to the Coop's Covid-19 vaccine mandate, as well as a request for more detail on the farming procedures used to raise and slaughter all live animals, a question about whether the Terracycle
program would return, and a request for videos of the Board Member discussions to be posted on the Coop website.

Vaccine Mandate

General Coordinator Joe Holtz explained the Coop's process for evaluating accommodations requests to the mandate, letting members know that he made decisions in accordance with New York City's Covid-19 guidelines. Of the approximately 300 people who have applied for accommodations, around 60 were granted. Holtz did not provide details pertaining to why certain members were approved and others not, other than referring to the New York City Department of Health guidelines. Those whose accommodation requests were denied have the opportunity to appeal, should they so desire. Holtz is still working through all of the requests.

Treasurer's Report

Holtz proceeded to present the Treasurer's Report, which included some bright spots for the Coop's finances. Although the Coop is still showing a loss on its income statement, the expectation is that the Coop will be back to break even within this fiscal year. The key factors in enabling this move back to breaking even are the continuation of the 25% markup (up from 21% pre-pandemic), increased shopping hours, rules

allowing more shoppers to be present in the store at once, and plans to reduce prices again (which will spur sales) and recover the Coop's size of membership.

On this last point, more good news. During the pandemic, the Coop's membership dropped from 17,000 to 11,750. However, in recent weeks the Coop's membership has inched back up to 13,000 and there is a backlog of 600 people who have completed orientation but who haven't yet joined due to limited new member enrollment appointments. While certainly not out of the woods yet, the Coop appears to be on the trajectory to return to some version of pre-pandemic normal.

General Coordinator Updates

Elinoar Astrinsky provided a lively update from the General Coordinators that touched on the Coop's masking policy and updates to recurring shifts as well as the Coop's food and non-food items in time for the arrival of spring.

Masking Policy

The Coop's masking policy requires all members, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a face covering at all times when working or shopping. This policy includes children ages 2 and up. More detail (including on Coop-approved face coverings) can be found here.

Food and Non-Food Report

Astrinsky provided a lighting-round introduction to new and seasonal products at the Coop. In terms of food items, the Coop has all of the items in stock to meet members' Passover and Easter needs. The Coop now stocks all kinds of matzoh—regular, organic, gluten-free, and egg. For Easter, the Coop is stocking chocolate bunnies that are Fair Trade, organic, and also vegan—and even some chocolate bunnies that have gummy bears inside. The Coop is also stocking egg-shaped candles for the season.



FOR EASTER, THE COOP IS STOCKING CHOCOLATE BUNNIES THAT ARE FAIR TRADE, ORGANIC, AND ALSO VEGAN—AND EVEN SOME CHOCOLATE BUNNIES THAT HAVE GUMMY BEARS INSIDE.

For a seasonal taste of New York, Astrinsky encouraged Coop members to try Raaka chocolate, which the Coop now stocks. Raaka has partnership with the New York Botanical Garden to use herbs from the NYBG in their locally-produced chocolate.

New non-food items include several cleaning products that use less plastic than other brands, as well as seeds, soil, and gardening needs for spring plantings. Astrinsky recommended that Coop members try out the Eco Next Detergent Sheets, True Earth, and Eco Egg for reduced-plastic laundry needs. The Coop now stocks seeds from the Hudson Valley Seed Company, a local source for heirloom and open-pollinated garden

seeds.

Agenda Items

The meeting then proceeded to the Agenda Items which included an Interim Agenda Committee election, a Dispute Resolution Committee election, and a Board candidates discussion. Due to a technical issue limiting the number of members who could participate via Zoom, a motion was raised to table the voting items until the May GM in order to make sure more Coop member voices could be heard. The Chair Committee also wished to note that there is an opening on the Chair Committee, and interested members are encouraged to apply by reaching out to psfcchair@gmail.com.

Member voice was the key item of discussion during the Board Candidate discussion. After each candidate gave a two-minute statement (candidate statements were printed in the prior issue of the *Gazette*), the Chair Committee opened the floor to discussion, which was the primary purpose of this Agenda Item. Board Candidates included George Sarah Olken, Brandon West, Amy Cao, Jesse Rosenfeld, Imani Q'Ryn, and Tim Hospodar. Questions immediately returned to the issue of member voice, specifically related to how the increase in centralized decision-making during the pandemic was limiting opportunities for participation and dialogue, and also how to increase participation in the GM given declining attendance.

On the Coop's Covid-19 rules, questions centered around how Board candidates would approach issues of perceived discrimination due to not being vaccinated against Covid-19. Board Candidates largely made similar statements, with Olken and Cao encouraging discussion of the Coop's Covid-19 rules and perhaps even a vote on them at the GM so that membership could voice opinions about what would be best for the most number of members. Q'Ryn made a point that was likely on most members' minds: that these are scary times, and that the Coop was set up to have discussions about big topics, and that forum is the GM.

As to improving participation in the GM, the main topics of discussion were around

the ways in which decision-making has become more centralized at the Coop during the pandemic (often by necessity) and also around the desire to bring back work slot credit for GM attendance. Board Candidates had differing views and interesting ideas on these points.

Rosenfeld made the point that for years members had been requesting online GMs to enable greater participation, and Olken brought up the point that the Coop was now in much more regular email communication with members. Brandon West made an astute observation that active outreach in the form of canvassing may help to bring more people back into the GMs. Hospodar suggested doing some brainstorming among members to explore hybrid GM models that could include in-person and video options.

Across both topics of conversation, it seems clear that the Coop's central governance mechanism—the GM—is not operating in a way that allows maximum participation and also gives adequate voice to Coop member concerns.

John B. Thomas is a consultant working on environmental policy. He has been a Coop member since 2012.