APRIL GENERAL MEETING: DECORATIVE AND EDIBLE FLOWERS, A SUNNY FISCAL OUTLOOK, AND A CLARION CALL FOR INCLUSION

May 17, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

By Zoe Singer

To open the Coop's April General Meeting (GM), Maribeth Batcha of the Chair Committee introduced herself as Meeting Chair. She welcomed around 100 members to the virtual meeting room and acknowledged that the Coop sits on the ancestral territory of the Leni Lenape.

Before proceeding to the agenda, Batcha mentioned that the Chair Committee is looking for one to two additional members who reflect the diversity of the Coop and are comfortable running meetings. Ideal candidates would be "big-hearted and comfortable speaking and saying no to people." If this is you, please email psfcchair@gmail.com.

OPEN FORUM: COVID VACCINE MANDATES, APPEALS, TESTING

Members were invited to ask brief questions regarding the operation of the Coop. These questions included: the criteria used to issue exemptions to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for members, the progress of reviewing appeals to denied exemptions, and the justification for requiring COVID testing for those with exemptions. Ann Herpel explained that mandatory testing is in the City Guidelines, and that these questions would be forwarded to Joe Holtz, General Coordinator, since he was not in attendance.

TREASURER'S REPORT: A BRIGHTER FISCAL OUTLOOK

General Coordinator Joe Szladek stood in for Joe Holtz to share the Coop's financial statement. Normal operations are no longer resulting in a significant weekly deficit (which had peaked above $100,000 during the pandemic) thanks to the return of member labor, as well as the ongoing, crucial work of staff. According to Szladek, "While we're not quite breaking even, we're closing in on this goal, with nearly $4.3 million in the bank. We're adding about 100 members a week, which is far greater than attrition, and anticipate reaching 14,000 members by summer, at which point, continuing the current 25% markup (4% of which is the "pandemic special"), we should approach breaking even. This is very good news, especially considering where we were in 2020."

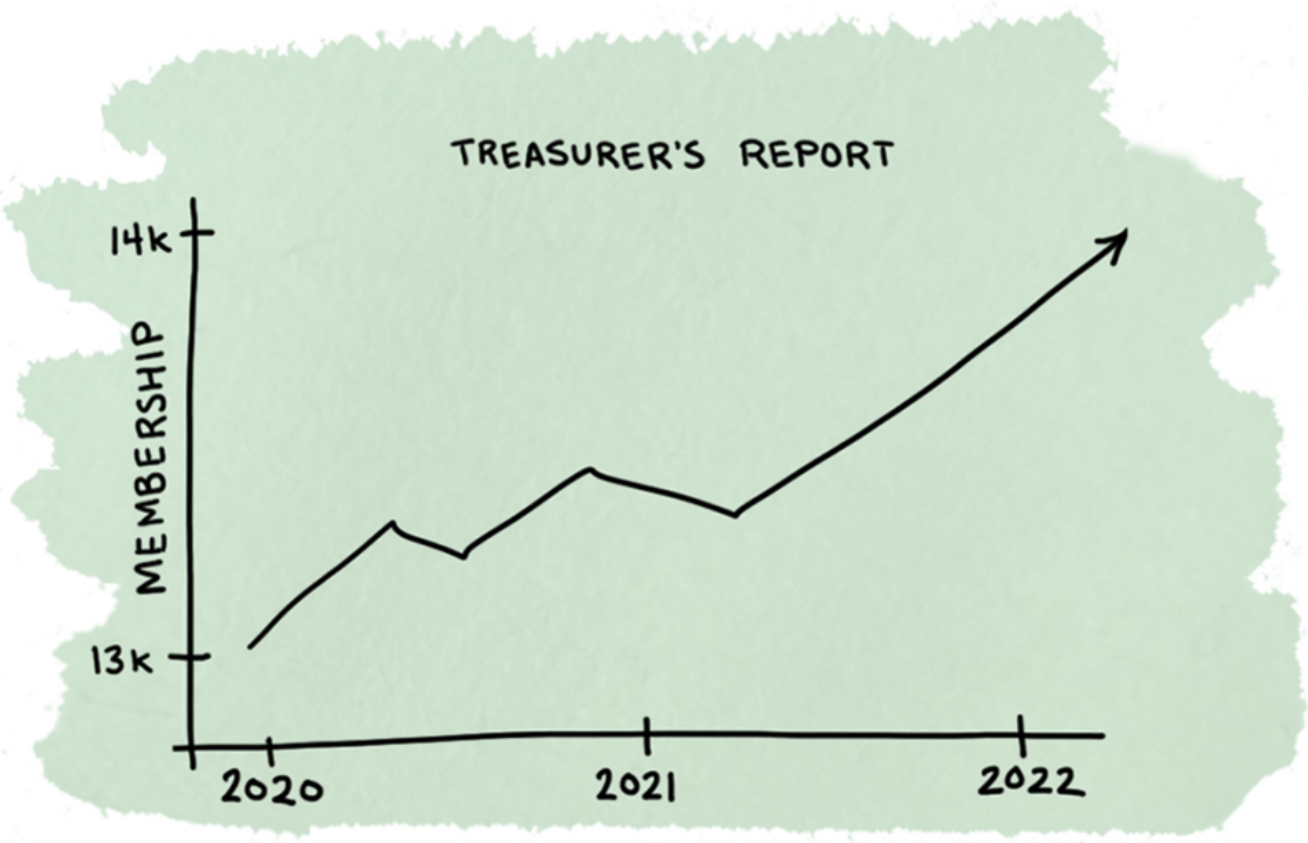


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Szladek also pointed to the Coop's increased efficiency as a contributing factor to the promising financial outlook, particularly the online member services system which has dramatically lessened demands on staff time. Other improvements include: a new inventory system that has been tested on Coop produce and seems significantly faster; scanners for inventory; and a reduction of redundant paperwork. Such developments add up to meaningful savings of time and expense, and the staff continues working to develop and consider further efficiencies including the possibility of online ordering (which we would likely pilot then bring to a GM for approval, if we get to that point). A lot is changing in the grocery business and these changes help us compete.

GENERAL COORDINATORS' REPORTS

Comings and Goings Report

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky gave thanks to some of those who have provided service to the Coop over many years and are now moving on: Lewanika Forde-Sengor, a Membership Coordinator; Marvin Pique, a Receiving Coordinator; Carline Aure-

lus, a Receiving Coordinator/Buyer; Kamila Nuritova, a Membership Coordinator; and Talia Protos, of the pandemic support staff. Astrinsky also congratulated new hires John Lloyd, formerly part of the pandemic support staff, who joins the Maintenance staff, and Ben Callicott, also formerly on the pandemic support team, who is moving into a full-time role as a Receiving Coordinator focused on produce.

Food Report

Astrinsky, having returned from one of our distributor's food shows earlier that day, shared feedback she receives often about how meaningful the Coop is to the vendors—especially the small farmers—it supports.

In the produce aisle, in addition to plant seeds, our produce buyers have ventured beyond fresh herbs, adding decorative plants and pesticide-free or minimally treated flowers. We also have compost from BK ROT. BK ROT was founded to provide positive, meaningful jobs for young people in Bushwick. Their staff pick up some of the Coop's food waste using e-bikes, compost it in Bushwick, and bring it back to sell.



Lastly, Astrinsky thanked members for sharing requests for special foods we encounter elsewhere via the digital “product suggestion box” found inside each member’s Member Services account by clicking on “Contact Us” and then on “Product Suggestion.” That is how we came to offer some lovely goat cheeses with edible flowers, among the 100-plus choices currently available in the cheese case.


WOODSIDE
CHEESE WRIGHTS
12.30
Monet
120g/4oz.
WOODSIDE
CHEESE WRIGHTS
Monet
120g/4oz.
PHOTO BY CHRISTHIAN DIAZ



Fun Report

General Coordinator Ann Herpel filled in since no members of the Fun Committee could attend to announce plans to gather with other Coop members at the LeFrak Center at Lakeside in Prospect Park for roller skating on April 30th. The committee aims to convene more events and include more people, and can be followed on Instagram @psfc_fun_committee.

General Coordinator's Report: Members Now Work Once Every Six Weeks

Herpel encouraged members to review the board candidates presented at the last GM on the Coop website under announcements. Their board statements are also in the last issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

The new member labor cycle started on April 18th. Every working member is now required to work once within six weeks or to use a banked shift. We've been able to ex-

tend the cycle to six weeks because we're growing. Staff analyzed the number of working members (more than 10,000) and shifts available and found that there were fewer shifts available than people needing them. We also continue to prioritize meaningful labor—versus busy work and standing around—to ensure member time is well spent and contributing to an operationally efficient Coop.

The online Member Services calendar now exposes six weeks at a time, and members can sign up for up to two shifts at any given time. This is a change (from four, previously) made with an eye to equity: 12% of members had been scheduling 21% of shifts available, effectively squeezing others out. Recurring shifts are also coming back, targeted for early July, for those who prefer a regular assignment.

Lastly, Herpel called attention to the new sign at the entrance that flashes green and says "Next Member." This has been successful in further streamlining entry. Members should look up from their phones and pay attention when approaching the first three line positions out front.



Opening the floor to questions, Herpel responded to a request for expanded hours by sharing that we are indeed planning to open earlier on weekends eventually, and at some point will stay open later as well. Unfortunately for those who miss their old work squads, these cannot be reconstituted. We are also unlikely to bring back Terracycle since we no longer have the space in our meeting room to store pallets of plastic.

AGENDA ITEM 1: INTERIM AGENDA COMMITTEE ELECTION

Agenda Committee member Allie Esslinger introduced Dominque Bravo as a member with a passion for the Coop, and an ability to understand “the multiple sides, perspectives, and parties to issues, in line with efforts to bring thoughtful, impartial agendas.” Dominique spoke, saying she’s been a Coop member for more than 20 years, has been dedicated to social justice throughout her life, and loves “working in groups to make organizations work.” Attendees voted 69-3 to appoint Dominique, who was uncontested.

AGENDA ITEM 2: DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) presented three members for re-election to serve three-year terms on the DRC. DRC Committee member Helen Koh opened by sharing a brief description of the DRC's role in member and staff complaints. "We field and investigate, we're not here to police anyone, we follow up with procedures approved by the GM. We resolve many disputes each year. Most resolve amicably. Those who are dissatisfied sometimes politicize those disputes, and since we're not able to talk about them, we can't defend ourselves. We welcome new members. We all enjoy being on the committee. Let us know if you're interested: foodcoopdrc@gmail.com." Koh introduced the three members up for re-election, who each spoke briefly. Grace Protos, Melinda Daniels, and Deb Magocsi were all reinstated to the DRC by votes of 66-2.

AGENDA ITEM 3: COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

The PSFC approved a proposal to create a Committee Oversight Committee on January 25th, 2022. In keeping with Coop regulations (Structure and Reporting Requirements for New Coop Committees), item sponsor Rachel Porter gave a presentation on the new committee's scope, composition, governance, and reporting to membership. Her purpose was to share with attendees her answers to the stipulated questions, which are intended to provide basic structure and principles when a committee is created. Her responses can be viewed here: Answers to Structure and Reporting Requirements for New Coop Committees. Porter explained that attendees would vote on whether she had sufficiently answered the questions.

When the floor was opened for questions, these focused on Porter's affirming that "racial/ethnic diversity within the members on the committee would be addressed." Porter responded by describing various types of diversity: "societal, cultural, age, intellectual, age, racial…." She then said, "In some ways, I think that's philosophical… some committees have noted their priority. It's routinely noted. One could argue the path to diversity is by active recruitment. I can't commit to active recruitment. One obvious way is to include the [Equity, Access and Community Committee], to give ad-

vice about how to recruit, and I intend to do that." Others asked why Porter had indicated that committee decisions would require a supermajority, and Porter responded that this method has precedent in the GM and "feels more cooperative."

Some members dissented, pointing out that in a committee of three proposed members, a required supermajority and closed-door voting seem "less progressive." An important question was raised: "Is there a way to make space for non-cis white people for this committee?" The questioner went on to say that "supermajorities are good for preventing random bad things from happening but also prevent people in a minority from being able to put forth diverging ideas." Porter's response and ensuing conversation pointed to a critical need for fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion more systematically in Coop practices and systems, including committee formation. Porter resolved to consult with the Equity, Access and Community Committee. The need for further dialogue and attention to these tensions was palpable even over Zoom.

Voting ensued for the official filing of paperwork to form the Committee Oversight Committee, which was accepted 36-27.

WRAP-UP

The standard Board of Directors vote was held, resulting in approval of the prior GM minutes and of this GM's elections, all by votes of 5-0. The meeting adjourned with the click of a mouse.

Zoe Singer is a former food writer and recipe developer turned grant writer. She is a lifelong Brooklynite and longtime Coop member.