

JULY GENERAL MEETING: THE COOP'S FINANCES ARE LOOKING "ENCOURAGING" AND IN-PERSON GM'S ARE COMING BACK

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ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

By Walecia Konrad

At July's General Meeting, roughly eighty members of the Park Slope Food Coop voted to limit the number of work slots given for attendance at in-person General Meetings, which will start in September. In addition, the latest financial report is looking good. Members also discussed the idea of a DJ work slot, to play a variety of music during various shifts.

BULK ITEMS



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The meeting started with the open forum, the time allotted for meeting attendees to bring up questions or concerns not specifically noted on the agenda. Lois Wilcken asked the only open forum question for the evening. It concerned bulk items. “Where are we on beans and other things that you have to take home in plastic?” she asked. “I used to put them in cloth bags,” she said.

General Coordinator Joe Szladek explained that packaging bulk items in plastic bags was instituted during the pandemic, using a bulk package machine now housed in the childcare room. The change was made to streamline shopping in the bulk aisle, to reduce congestion and possible COVID transmission. “We plan on keeping that process,” said Szladek. “As the Coop gets busier, we want to keep congestion down in

that aisle,” he added, explaining that even before the pandemic, the bulk aisle could get incredibly congested. “While nothing is set in stone,” he added, “we are set up to keep that process for a while.”

COOP FINANCES



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Next up was the Coop’s financial report, which General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented. He reported that Coop sales for the 20-week period ending June 18, 2023, were \$21 million, a \$3 million increase over the same time period last year.

The Coop also reported having over \$7 million in cash and cash equivalents. “That’s very encouraging,” said Holtz. “That puts us in a better position, should the second pandemic start.”

“SALES FOR THE 20-WEEK PERIOD ENDING IN MID-JUNE OF THIS YEAR WERE \$21 MILLION. THAT’S A \$3 MILLION INCREASE OVER THE SAME TIME LAST YEAR.”

—GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ

Holtz then took a few minutes to point out a special section of this month’s financial report, focused on payroll. The section looks back four years, and shows how many staff hours are worked, and how much is paid. It also looks at the percentage that sales personnel costs account for each year. Holtz and other coordinators generated the report in response to members who had voiced concern about payroll at previous GMs, and who had said there should be more information on this subject, Holtz explained.

Over the four-year period, staff hours have decreased about 4%, but the dollar amount paid has increased a little more than 12%, largely due to cost-of-living increases. For the 20-week period ended June 18 of this year, personnel costs accounted for about 15% of sales, compared to almost 13% during the same period four years ago. Holtz then pointed out that overall expenses account for almost a fifth of sales, and personnel costs are a growing part of overall expenses.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS



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Joe Szladek discussed the state of member labor during the summer months. He explained that members may have had trouble finding open work slot shifts during the summer months, and are having to look several weeks ahead.

WANT TO GET CREDIT FOR GOING TO A GM? THE COOP WILL ISSUE UP TO 75 WORK SLOT CREDITS A MONTH.

The reason? Demand for shifts goes up in the summer when many people have vacation days and are trying to get their shifts in. At the same time, shopping slows during the summer, so not as many shifts are needed. Szladek reminded members that demand increases substantially in late August and September, when shopping returns to normal and many holidays are around the corner, so shifts will open up again. “We’ll need as much help as we can get,” he said.

GENERAL MEETING WORK SLOT PROPOSAL



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The meeting then moved to the first agenda item. General Coordinator Ann Herpel presented the following proposal, concerning General Meeting work credit, for questions, discussion and ultimately a vote. The following General Meeting work credit policy for in-person meetings will replace all prior decisions. The policy will be in effect when the next in-person meeting convenes. This policy does not apply to members whose work shifts occur at the General Meeting—including, but not limited to the Board, Chair Committee, Agenda Committee, and the Corporate Secretary.

General Meeting work credit policy:

1. The Coop will issue up to 75 work slot credits per General Meeting.
2. Advance sign-up is required, and is on a first-come, first-served basis.
3. Members can earn only one credit per calendar year.
4. Sign-up for GM work slot credit will be available in Member Services, on the Wednesday after the General Meeting.
5. Members will be allowed to cancel according to regular cancelation policies.
6. The General Coordinators (GCs) will have the authority to increase the number of work credits issued, if operationally feasible.

In presenting the proposal, Herpel pointed out that the item was presented earlier in the year, but the discussion veered into a discussion about hybrid meetings.

This time, explained Herpel, the proposal is focused only on work slot credit when the PSFC returns to in-person General Meetings. She announced that the Coop will start in-person meetings in September at the Prospect Park Picnic House. She then discussed some history behind GM work slot credits. The policy that was in effect before the pandemic allowed an unlimited amount of members to sign up for meeting credit, two times a year. “We had over 17,000 members, and that was when we didn’t have the nimbleness to tailor the size of our shifts to our needs. Consequently, there were a lot of makeups and the GM was a way to earn a makeup or FTOP,” Herpel said.

Now, however, with the new shift sign-up process, the Coop has fine-tuned shifts to better match Coop operation needs according to the days of the week, times of day, and seasons of the year. That means the Coop “doesn’t have excess labor built into every day,” said Herpel.

If the Coop were to go back to granting GM work slot credits to an unlimited number of members (as opposed to the proposed 75-member limit) the coordinators feel

strongly that other shifts might not be filled as much as needed, and operations would suffer, Herpel explained.

“In general,” Herpel concluded, “this is so we can bring back in-person meetings, and have a reasonable work slot credit, so members can earn credit and not have a negative impact on Coop operations.”

Questions and debate followed. Coop member Amita Rodman asked about testing a no-limit policy—then instituting a limit if the coordinators find too many members are signing up for the GM, and possibly cannibalizing other shifts.

Another member, Mehdi Heris, wondered if signing up counts as one of the two shifts that members are allowed to sign up for at one time. Under the new work slot sign-up system, members may only sign up for two shifts at a time. Herpel answered that the GM slot would be outside the two allowed.

Many attendees voiced concerns about doing anything that discourages attendance at GMs. They worried that major decisions are being voted on by only a small percentage of members and believe everything should be done to encourage GM attendance. Suggestions included a range of incentives, ranging from allowing more work credit than proposed, to offering walker services after in-person meetings, to help members who live across the park get home safely.

Members also wondered if there was a way to ensure that the policy would be adjusted, if it becomes clear that more credits wouldn't necessarily hurt operations.

Joe Holtz answered the latter concern by pointing out that item number 6 in the proposal says, “The General Coordinators (GCs) will have the authority to increase the number of work credits issued, if operationally feasible,” and thus allows for any future adjustments. “This is a starting point, so we can start transitioning back to in-person meetings,” he explained.

The debate period also included much discussion about when, and how, a hybrid meeting might take place, and how that would affect work slot credit. Herpel strongly encouraged members to submit a separate proposal, concerning hybrid meetings, to the Agenda Committee, for discussion at a future GM.

The proposal was put to an electronic vote and passed with 65 in favor, 5 opposed.

DJ WORK SLOT



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Coop member Paul Blachar then presented the next agenda item, the discussion of a new DJ shift that would allow a member to curate and play music. This item was for discussion only, no vote would be taken.

Blachar explained that he envisions a work slot—possibly combined with an existing slot—that puts a person in charge of the music played at the Coop. “I love music, and I love sharing that music with people in my life. At the Coop we’re blessed with hav-

ing a great community. I'm always looking for ways to strengthen community in my life."

The proposal was met with lots of suggestions on the best, most accessible, and most inclusive ways to curate playlists and take music suggestions from member shoppers. Ideas included creating a small committee to curate playlists that include a variety of music genres, and setting up a QR code, or iPads and other electronic devices, on the shopping floor, to take member suggestions for playlists.

Some members expressed skepticism that this would be a meaningful shift or wondered what problem this new work slot would solve. Other members suggested making the DJ position volunteer only, with no work credit given.

Herpel described that currently the Coop uses about 120 playlists from Spotify, including all types of genres, which are cycled through the day. She also cautioned that music of a certain volume impedes members with hearing issues from checking out or doing their shifts.

Member Steven Rosen agreed with Herpel and described how, as a member with age-related hearing loss, music makes it harder to do his job.

Blachar thanked attendees for all of the input and the discussion period ended.

The Board of Directors then voted to accept the advice of membership in reference to the GM work credit proposal vote, and the meeting was adjourned.

Walecia Konrad is a freelance writer, editor and content producer specializing in personal finance. She has been a PSFC member since 2001 and on-and-off contributor to the Gazette for almost as long.