

# JANUARY GM: MEMBERS VOTE TO RAISE THE WORK REQUIREMENT AGE TO 22

February 28, 2024



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*By Walecia Konrad*

There was a lot of voting going on at the January Park Slope Food Coop General Meeting, held in person at the Picnic House in Prospect Park. Members voted to raise the work requirement age from 18 to 22, giving PSFC households with college students much sought-after clarity on how young adults should be represented.

In another vote, members voted yes to disband the Committee Oversight Committee,

a member committee designed to make sure other committees were meeting their work slot and reporting requirements. Going forward, Coop staff will provide that oversight.

## OPEN FORUM

Before the votes, the meeting kicked off with the Open Forum, a time reserved for members to ask questions or bring up concerns not included in the meeting's agenda. During this time, a group from the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine took turns voicing their concerns about the war in Gaza and asking Coop staffers to consider an online meeting to discuss a boycott of Israeli goods. This issue has come up during Open Forum in several recent GMs.

The speakers pointed out that more than 1,000 members had signed a petition in support of a boycott. Many asked for a status update on the General Coordinators' efforts to find a venue to discuss the matter that is large enough to accommodate the anticipated number of members expected to attend. Others reiterated their request to have an online meeting for discussion and voting, adding that the emergency in Gaza required this approach.

One Coop member for Palestine asked about fact-checking at the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, pointing to a recent letter that claimed—erroneously according to the speaker—that the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement promotes violence. Later, the letter's author, Jesse Rosenfeld, defended his submission, saying the included links proved his assertion.

AT THE MOST RECENT GENERAL MEETING, MEMBERS VOTED TO SAY GOODBYE TO THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

## THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' RESPONSE

General Coordinator Joe Holtz then took the mic for the Treasurer's report but began by answering some of the questions from the Open Forum.

Holtz said the General Coordinators were looking to rent a space large enough to accommodate a BDS discussion, which would likely include 2,500 members. So far coordinators have been turned down by places like the King's Theater, BAM, and many Brooklyn schools, Holtz said. In addition, Holtz reminded members that the Coop held a meeting at Brooklyn Tech High School in 2012 to discuss the referendum to join BDS, and voted no. At the end of the meeting, police asked Coop staff to inform them if the Coop ever had a meeting like that again, he said. Holtz also said that the police told the Coop to hire private security and that Brooklyn Tech said we should have alerted them in advance as to what we would be discussing.

Because of that 2012 event and the limited space, the coordinators took an "extraordinary action" shortly before the November General Meeting and removed the boycott discussion item from the meeting's agenda, Holtz said.

He added that in-person general meetings are mandated by the Coop's bylaws, which require the Board to meet in person at a time that members are invited to join them. As a result, having a Zoom meeting to discuss the boycott issue couldn't happen without a change in the bylaws.

During COVID, GMs were held on Zoom because of the emergency nature of the pandemic and the fact that public spaces were locked down. "We had guidance and rules on that from three governments," Holtz said.



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## COOP FINANCES

Holtz then moved to the Treasurer's report. The Coop's finances continue to recover nicely after the pandemic. Sales for the 48-week period ending Dec. 31, 2023 were \$50,533,000—a \$6.5 million increase from the same period last year. The Coop reported \$181,201 in operating income, a significant increase from the slightly more than \$266,000 loss reported last year. Holtz also reported that the Coop lowered its markup from 25% to 24% in late January, which was ahead of schedule.

Holtz also pointed out that the Coop's gross margin increased to 19.75% from 19.5%. The increase is great news, Holtz explained, because gross margin is crucial for the Coop's financial sustainability. He encouraged members to consult page two of the Jan. 30, 2024 financial summary for a detailed explanation of gross margin and its im-

portance to the Coop.

During the question and answer period after the Treasurer's report, a member asked if it would be possible to access current and past financial reports and GM agendas on the website. Holtz answered that he would discuss this with the other coordinators and look into this good suggestion.

## CHILDCARE UPDATE

Next, General Coordinator Lisa Moore updated members on the Coop's longstanding attempts to bring back childcare after last year's vote to restart the service. Coordinators have not been able to find an insurer that will cover childcare at the Coop because it is not a licensed New York State childcare facility. Licensing requirements are quite stringent and the Coop's childcare room does not meet requirements.



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After many frustrating attempts to find an insurer that will cover a non-licensed facility, Moore reported that the coordinators recently got a bid from an insurance company for \$3 million per year, nine times the \$335,000 the Coop is paying for business insurance now. Since then, the coordinators approached three insurance brokers look-

ing for help. One said no, another didn't reply and the third said they are working on it. Moore said she is hoping to hear more from that broker soon.

## COOKING CLASSES ARE IN FULL SWING—BUT STILL ON ZOOM

Jeff Bonar of the Food Coop Cooking Class squad reported that the committee has conducted six online cooking classes in the last six months. The next one, featuring "Personalized Chili" will be held on February 22. Bonar also announced that the committee is looking for guest chefs to lead future classes in return for work slot credit. For more information on guest chefs, future classes and links to past recipes, Bonar encouraged members to check out [foodcoopcooks.org](http://foodcoopcooks.org). He also said the committee is looking forward to holding classes in person soon.



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## DOES THE PSFC NEED A COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE COMMITTEES?

Coordinator Jana Cunningham presented the first agenda item up for a membership vote: her proposal to disband the Committee Oversight Committee (COC). As the proposal describes, the COC was started almost two years ago to reduce Coop staff time

spent overseeing member committees, to make sure committees post their mission statements on the Coop's website and to assist committees with reporting requirements and tracking work slot credit.

Cunningham explained that the COC oversees member-originated "initiative" committees, such as the Environmental or Food Safety committees, and not the operational or essential committees that make up the vast majority of work slots at the Coop. Only 80 members are part of an initiative Coop committee.

The COC is not meeting its objectives, Cunningham said, using a report card to make her point. While the COC has ensured that about 60% of committee mission statements are posted, in 2023 very few committees met the requirements to report to a General Meeting once a year (10%) or publish submissions in the Linewaiters' Gazette twice a year (1%), Cunningham reported. She also said that the Committee has not been effective in tracking work slots and thus was not saving staff time. As a result, Cunningham asked members to vote to disband the committee.

During the discussion period, the chairman of the COC vigorously defended the existence of the committee and expressed his surprise that the committee was "on the chopping block." There was also some discussion that disbanding the committee, which was started by longtime and extremely active member Rachel Porter, who has since passed away, would hurt her legacy at the Coop.

The vote was taken and the proposal passed 84 in favor, 34 against.

## A NEW MINIMUM AGE FOR COOP MEMBERSHIP

Holtz presented the final agenda item—a proposal to amend the age for working at the Coop, which would help clarify the definition of a Coop household. Holtz explained that after hearing from many members that the current household requirement for 18-year-olds to join the Coop could be confusing and cumbersome for families with college-age children who were living away from home, the general coordinators decid-

ed to propose some changes.

Holtz proposed defining an adult person as someone who has reached the age of 21, and that all adults in a household are required to join the Coop and fulfill membership requirements. In addition, any person between the ages of 18 and 21 who wants to join the Coop will be allowed to become a full Coop member, but they will be exempt from the work requirement.

Holtz explained that the work exemption would apply to all 18-to-21-year-olds, even if they were a household of young people who were, for example, working or attending Brooklyn College and wanting to join the Coop. "We wouldn't make some 18-year-olds work just because they're not living with their parents. That wouldn't be fair," said Holtz.

During the discussion period, several members took exception to the work exemption for all 18-to-21-year-olds, arguing that if someone lives in the community and is a Coop member, it isn't an unfair burden for them to work.

One member pointed out that many 21-year-olds are still in college, so 22 might be a better age for the upper limit. Holtz agreed and changed the proposal to age 22.

Members voted to amend the age to join the Coop from 18 to 22, with 69 in favor and 50 opposed.

The Board of Directors then voted to accept the advice of members and the meeting was adjourned.