TWISTS AND TURNS OF ROBERT'S RULES AT THE FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

April 9, 2024

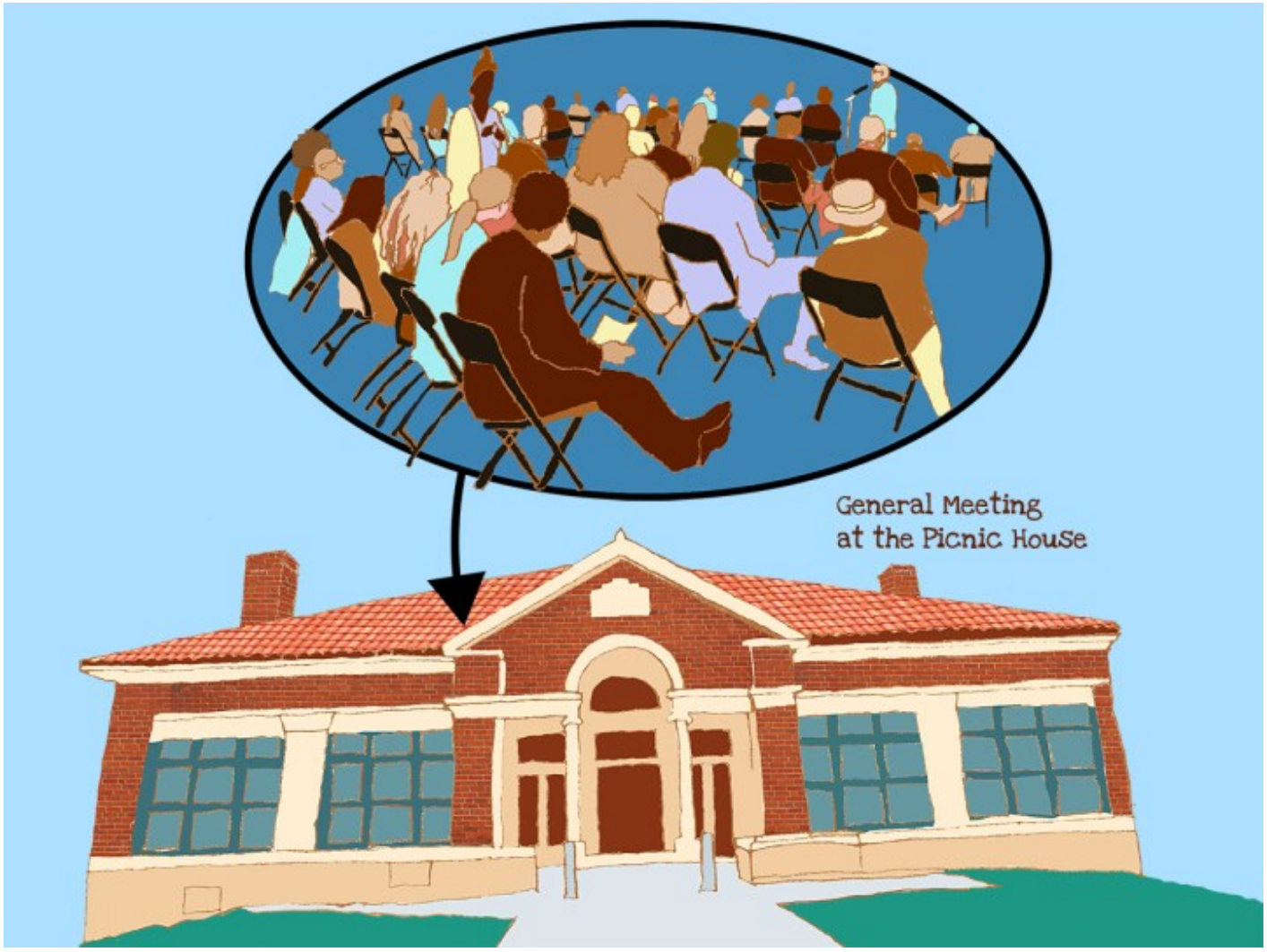


Illustration by Caty Bartholomew.

By Jess Powers

The General Meeting (GM) held its February 27 gathering in person at ShapeShifter Labs, a performance space diagonally across the street from the Park Slope Food Coop. Roughly 132 members attended that rainy evening.

OPEN FORUM POLITICALLY CHARGED BUT RESPECTFUL

The Open Forum began with questions about securing a larger meeting space, so the Coop can hold a vote on a proposal to boycott Israeli goods. Past votes drew large

crowds and led to a rules change requiring a supermajority for boycotts. The current venue doesn't have sufficient capacity to house the vote.

> FLEX WORKER CAROL WALD'S REMARKS ELICITED BOTH APPLAUSE AND A REMINDER FROM CHAIR COMMITTEE MEMBER IMANI Q'RYN THAT APPLAUSE AND BOOS ARE DISCOURAGED AT THE MEETING.

Carol Wald, a flex worker, acknowledged strong feelings on the subject as "a proud Jew, whose grandfather and uncle were killed in Auschwitz. The rage and grief and trauma that propels so many to work against the boycott," she said, "[is what] compels me to work with Palestinian people against genocide." She called for mutual respect as debate continues. Her remarks elicited both applause and a reminder from Chair Committee member Imani Q'ryn that applause and boos are discouraged at the meeting.

Coop member Sophie Glickman spoke of a strategic boycott as the civilian death toll in Gaza exceeds 30,000, many of the victims women and children. She continued that Israel is using starvation as a tactic—a war crime—and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has openly stated his opposition to Palestinian statehood. She did not wish to "[make] fellow Jewish Coop members uncomfortable" but inquired about the location for the vote.

Outspoken Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) critic, Jesse Rosenfeld said that Coop members who support Palestine support BDS, and that BDS supports violence. He stated that the BDS website itself describes "armed resistance" and "any action, whether one considers it legally or ethically justifiable." [Note: This reporter's review and fact check of the BDS website did not find these words; rather, "non-violence" and opposition to "discrimination, including anti-Semitism."]

Rosenfeld continued, "October 7, rape, infanticide… when will the Chair Committee

clamp down [against BDS]?" His comments were also met by applause—and another reminder from Chair Committee member Q'ryn about applause and boos.

Brian Shuman, a food processor, expressed appreciation for Carol Wald (who spoke earlier), even though he disagreed with her position. He supports Anera (American Near East Refugee Aid), which provides immediate emergency aid and he "opposes BDS, which does not acknowledge Israel's right to exist and is anti-Semitic."

In response, someone in the audience called a point of order, asking whether clarification can be made if a point made is based on fact or opinion.

GENERAL COORDINATOR UPDATES ON SPACE FOR BDS VOTE, CHILDCARE AND FLYERS IN THE STAIRWELL

Ann Herpel provided updates as one of five General Coordinators. Regarding the larger space for a BDS vote, "we are making progress," she said. The Coop is negotiating with a venue, and although an agreement isn't finalized, "it looks promising… hopeful," she continued.

> "CHILDCARE WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO THE COOP," ANN HERPEL ANNOUNCED. THOSE INVOLVED HAD BEEN WAITING TO HEAR BACK FROM A FINAL INSURANCE BROKER AND WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN SECURING COVERAGE.

"Childcare will not be returning to the Coop," Herpel announced. Those involved had been waiting to hear back from a final insurance broker and were unsuccessful in securing coverage. The "landscape around insurance has changed dramatically," she continued, and "would now require a license to operate [childcare]." The Coop will repurpose the room for operational needs.

In another shift from pre-pandemic times, the stairwell leading up to the office used

to be covered in flyers announcing things like shows, rooms for rent and kombucha SCOBYs to share. That practice is not going to return, Herpel declared. The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) and New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF—which the Coop gets inspected by) declared that fire exits have to be "unobstructed."

Herpel is working with the staff liaison to the *Gazette* to create a digital listing for community events, things for sale or trade, etc.

TREASURER'S REPORT

General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented the preliminary 52-week Financial Statement, provided online with the agenda for the GM. He explained that the financial statement needs to be audited, and there are usually not many changes.

> ONE OF THE "EXTRAORDINARY THINGS" ABOUT THE COOP, GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ EFFUSED, IS THAT WE HAD A COMPLETE INVENTORY TURNOVER OF 62 TIMES THIS YEAR. PLENTY OF STORES HAVE TURNS OF 14 TIMES A YEAR.

One of the "extraordinary things" about the Coop, Holtz effused, is that we had a complete inventory turnover of 62 times this year, exceeding the year prior. Plenty of stores, he continued, have turns of 14 times a year. "Our dried mangos are less hard," he mused.

REPORT ON NEW LABELS AND FUTURE NCG SAVINGS

General Coordinator Joe Szladek explained that new electronic shelf labels appearing in the produce aisles (and soon to spread throughout the store) will provide more accuracy in pricing, as prices change often. This is due to purchasing from a vendor at a different wholesale price or when United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) has a deal on some items.

Szladek continued that he hopes the electronic shelf labels will save a few hours a day of staff time daily by not having to reprint and post new labels. He also expects the Coop to implement a National Cooperative Grocer program called Coop Deals after the deployment of electronic shelf labels is complete throughout the store. With Coop Deals, members will see savings on particular items of 20–30% off every two weeks, from Kettle brand potato chips to yogurt. Currently, staff are "too busy to handle all the labels" in order to comply with requirements NCG has set, but electronic shelf labels will solve some of those issues. Additionally, utilizing NCG resources would save staff time previously spent negotiating prices.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE PRESENTS REVISED RULES

Deb Magocsi, Helen Koh, and Grace Protos from the Dispute Resolution Committee presented the sole proposal on the agenda, "Revisions to the Procedures that Govern the Coop's Disciplinary Process."

Magocsi explained that the original rules were written in 2005, revised in 2012, and again in 2018. The nature of disputes has changed and committee members have "seen many opportunities to make the process better," she continued. She described the process as unnecessarily adversarial and legalistic, and the intent of the new rules to be "more reflective of a cooperative institution."

> DEB MAGOCSI FROM THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE DESCRIBED THE HEARING PROCESS AS LONG, "ARDUOUS AND PAINFUL FOR EVERYONE," "HUMILIATING FOR THE ACCUSED," AND SHARED THAT THE "HEARING GROUP FELT IT WAS A WASTE OF TIME AND ENERGY."

The disciplinary process involves the Dispute Resolution Committee, which investigates complaints and recommends actions; the Hearing Administration Committee, which organizes and administers hearings; and the Hearing Officer Committee, which

runs hearings. In summary, when the DRC receives a report of member misconduct, it assigns a member to investigate, and the full committee decides by consensus how to respond, typically a warning letter—but potentially the maximum penalty: being asked to resign. See also: How the Dispute Resolution Process at the Coop Works; Inside the Coop Hearing Process; and Coop Member Expelled After Repeated Mask Wearing Violations.

The goal, Magocsi explained, is to use "more accessible language," to have a "clearer definition of member misconduct," and to recommend "mediation as the first option" thereby "[avoiding] hearings and judicial style process." Hearings would still be available to members wishing to appeal serious DRC decisions, but the rule change would mean instead of the hearing group, three members of the HOC would determine whether the misconduct took place, rather than Coop members selected at random.

Magocsi described the hearing process as long (up to five hours), "arduous and painful for everyone," "humiliating for the accused," and shared that the "hearing group felt it was a waste of time and energy."

Jesse Rosenfeld then proposed an amendment to "various '-isms'" in Article III sec D Part 6, which reads: "Racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, discriminatory, or other harmful conduct." He said that "harmful conduct is a good start" but urged the members to "add to it" after the "Trump administration normalized a lot of hatred." Specifically, he asked to add: "xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia."

Member Abdi, who is Muslim and Somali, countered that he "[feels] protected by the amendment as is." Others chimed in for or against. A vote on the amendment was held and the "nays" had it.

The meeting then returned to discussion of the proposal of the Committee. George, a floor monitor, argued that we "need a process that allows more informed, deliberative decision-making."

There was a move to table the vote, followed by a Robert's Rules check. (Robert's Rules of Order are the parliamentary procedures used by many voluntary organizations for governance of meetings.)

A point of information was made and Koh explained that the agenda item was presented for discussion at the previous meeting. A vote to table was held, and the "nays" had it again. Discussion continued on the proposal.

David Moss of the Chair Committee argued that it's a "good proposal and there's no f—ing way to get a group of people to read 20-page documents before they come to the meeting." Member Jim concurred that there are "a lot of holes in the democratic process overall," but he believed that it's important to be fair to those who invested time in the agenda item. "In a democracy," he continued, "it's on us to be informed and to come to the meeting prepared. As we move forward, there are a lot of discussions to be had about procedures." Dan agreed and reminded the room of the process already in place: Vote on the item tonight, propose an amendment if there are any issues, and resolve those later.

In the end, 115 voted in favor of the new guidelines and five opposed. The Coop board accepted the advice of the members and the meeting was adjourned.

Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and cooking. She's on IG @foodandfury.