

JUNE ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

July 23, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

By Rahima Nasa

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Coop members trickled into the Prospect Park Picnic House in the early evening on June 25 for the Coop's Annual Meeting. Unlike General Meetings, Annual Meetings include board elections and a presentation of the Coop's finances during the past fiscal year.

Tensions from recent discussions about potentially boycotting Israeli goods loomed over the meeting. Outside the entrance to the Picnic House, volunteers from the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine offered refreshments and Middle Eastern snacks as members made their way to the meeting. The group sought signatures in support of the Coop joining the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Discussions of whether the Coop should participate in the BDS movement, which seeks to pressure Israel to alter its policies toward Palestinians, have come up

in Letters to the Editor and in recent meetings, and members in support of and in opposition to BDS made their voices heard during the Annual Meeting.

Committee Updates and Officer Elections

Prior to the financial presentation, members heard an update from General Coordinator for Purchasing and Operations, Joseph Szladdek, about new produce at the Coop. “Aside from developing foreign policy, we got lots of great produce,” quipped Szladdek as he reached the podium. “Look out for Sycamore honeydew in a few weeks—they are amazing.” A full list of the produce currently in stock can be found [here](#).

Jill Dovale, a member of the Animal Welfare Committee, then gave a brief presentation about the committee and its work. Though the committee was formed a decade ago, most members present at the meeting were unfamiliar with it. The Animal Welfare Committee creates guides and reports about animal welfare conditions related to products like milk, eggs, meat, and pet food. The reports include extensive research on vendors, whom committee members reach out to for specific details about what conditions are like for animals in their facilities.

Though these reports do not influence buying decisions in any official way, buyers do take them into consideration: “We use these guides on the buying team because of the excellent information they supply for us,” Szladdek noted.

Though the information compiled by the committee should ideally be found near the products, Dovale acknowledged that it can be hard to locate, and the committee is therefore working on getting more visibility for its reports. QR codes linking to the welfare reports near certain products might be one possibility.

Board of Directors Elections

The meeting opened with a final opportunity for Board of Directors candidates to make their case for why they should win election to the board.

The Board of Directors plays a pivotal role in how the Coop operates by acting as the decision-making body for the Coop. There are five seats on the board and each carries a three-year term. The board is required to meet at least ten times a year and must give Coop membership enough advance notice before its meetings so that all members can voice their concerns before the board officially meets.

This year, there were two board seats up for election and nine candidates vying for the positions. More information about the candidates can be found [here](#). Four of the nine nominees—Tess Brown-Lavoie, Ramon Maislen, Sondra Shaievitz and Keyian Vafai—were present at the meeting. All had the opportunity to make one last appeal for votes before voting officially ended. Members at the meeting also had the chance to ask questions before they cast their vote.

All candidates were asked about their position on BDS and whether they personally supported the movement. Brown-Lavoie and Vafai stated that they personally support BDS but would uphold whatever the majority of members decided on the issue. - Maislen and Shaievitz stated that they did not support BDS but would also support the will of the membership. Maislen pointed to his Letter to the Editor in the *Gazette*, which was also signed by Shaievitz and over 60 other members. Maislen reiterated that he wanted the Coop to remain a place of unity.

“The Food Coop is not a political forum,” Shaievitz, a corporate lawyer turned energy healer, stated. “We’re not going to solve this Middle East issue at a little food coop in New York.” Shaievitz claimed that the recent push for BDS came from a contingent of new members joining in the last year. Members in the crowd booed the statement. One member who identified herself as Jewish shouted that she supported BDS and had been a member for over 30 years.

Several news outlets, including the *Gazette*, have documented discussions about the Coop’s potential involvement in the BDS movement for more than a decade. In 2012, the Coop voted against the motion to hold a referendum to join the international boycott of Israeli goods. There were 1,005 members who voted against the referendum

and 653 voted in favor.

Once the candidates were done speaking, members cast their final ballots. Members could vote by paper proxy before the meeting, online or by ballot at the meeting. If the member had already voted by the other methods, the ballot at the meeting would void the prior votes. The ballots had members' ID numbers to ensure that members didn't vote more than once.

The winning candidate had to garner more YES votes than NO votes. This means that if a candidate received more NO votes than YES votes, they were ineligible to win. Member workers diligently counted ballots throughout the meeting so the winners could be announced before the meeting ended.

Brown-Lavoie and Vafai, who had both been endorsed by PSFC Members for Palestine, won election to the Board.

Audited Financial Statement Report

The June meeting also offered an opportunity to review the financial health of the Coop with financial experts. Representatives from Cornick, Garber & Sandler, LLP (CGS), the Coop's auditing firm, presented the Coop's audited financial statement for the last fiscal year, ending on January 28, 2024.

The Coop's finances are in good health. Overall, total investments increased for the Coop, which allowed for increased investments in debt securities comprising U.S. Government Treasuries, U.S. Government Agency Bonds, and Bank CDs of less than \$250,000 each. All these securities are purchased through our account at Vanguard. The Coop's net sales increased from \$48,172,077 to \$54,969,951 this past year. After calculating losses and operating expenses, total net income was \$289,499.

Members received a full copy of the audited financial report, which can also be found [here](#).

Members were able to ask the auditors questions about the Coop's fiscal health, which several were keen to do. When asked about where Coop investments were made, the accountants explained that the investments were spread through a diverse portfolio and the particular industries could be found in the financial statement distributed to members. Another member wondered which banks the Coop used and one of the accountants responded that all were highly rated banks like Morgan Stanley.

Once the presentation ended, members voted to accept the audited financial statement as well as to continue to use the Coop's current auditing firm for the next fiscal year.

Officer Elections

The meeting concluded with officer elections for President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary. The Coop's President and Vice-President also sit on the Board of Directors. You can learn more about the difference between a Board Member and an officer [here](#).

The only contested position was treasurer, as board member Tim Hospodar attempted to unseat Joe Holtz. When he came to the podium to make his case, Hospodar highlighted his background working for a financial accounting firm and his commitment to the Coop's values over the years. At one point, he raised his fist and shouted "Down with the occupation!" Ultimately, Hospodar did not prevail.

Brandon West was elected president, Imani Q'ryn vice-president, Elizabeth Tobier secretary, and Holtz remained treasurer.

Rahima Nasa enjoys writing for the Gazette because of all the members she's gotten to meet and because it allows her to learn about how the Coop works. When she's not writing for the Gazette, Rahima likes to experiment with new ingredients and is on a never-ending quest to make the perfect pie crust.