

PAPER BALLOTS, POST-HOLTZ PLANNING, AND PEANUT ALLERGIES: NOTES FROM THE OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

November 26, 2024

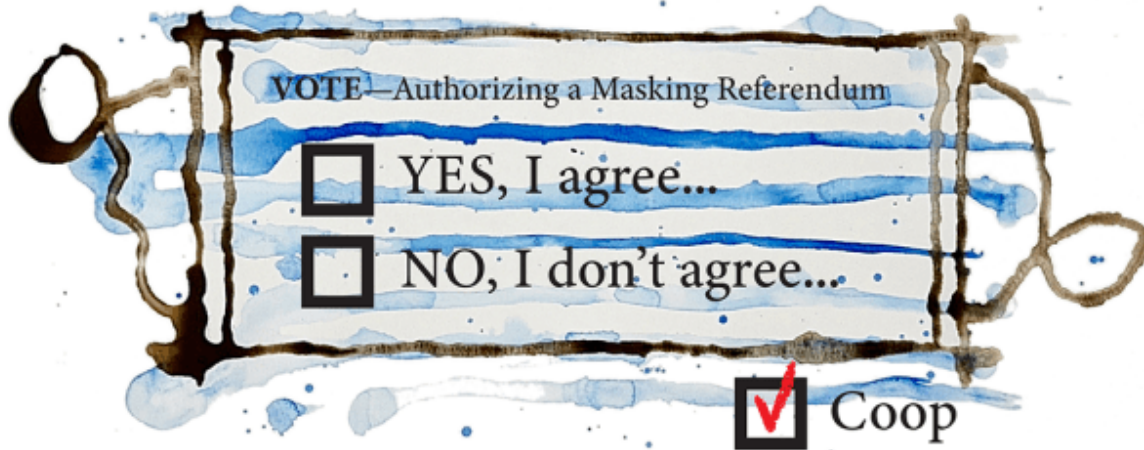


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Anita Bushell

November 26, 2024

The October 2024 General Meeting focused on Personnel Committee and Agenda Committee elections, as well as a vote on a proposed mask referendum. General coordinators and the treasurer gave updates to the more than 300 attendees who assembled in the Prospect Park Picnic House.

OPEN FORUM

During the Open Forum portion, members brought up several concerns. These included petitioning the Coop to stop selling Israeli products as a protest of the war in Gaza,

asking the Coop to do more to protect members with allergies that might be triggered by products in the bulk aisle, protocol for lodging a complaint regarding member behavior during GMs and whether the Coop will begin a home delivery service in the near future.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz began his report by answering the question about food allergens, reminding members who would be affected by such allergens to not shop in the bulk aisle because of the airborne nature of items such as peanuts.

Holtz also addressed the issue of home delivery. The Coop is working on a pilot project, hoping to use a cooperative delivery service, which it would like to have in place if there is another pandemic.

Holtz shared the financial summary for the 36-week period ending October 6, 2024.

- Sales were \$39,617,000.
- The gross margin was \$7,620,000.
- Cash on hand was \$7,944,000.
- Net income went from \$201,000 last year to negative \$234,000 this year over the same 36 week period.
- This downward swing of \$435,000 is primarily due to our lower base mark-up this year (24%) versus last year's (25%).

Holtz discussed the annual report on the base mark-up percentage for the next fiscal year, which had been distributed to members prior to the meeting. The report states that the mark-up will return to 25% for the fiscal year of 2026 to "allow for a gain before taxes."

THE COOP IS WORKING ON A PILOT HOME DELIVERY PROJECT, WHICH IT WOULD LIKE TO HAVE IN PLACE IF THERE IS ANOTHER PANDEMIC.

During the Q&A period, members asked: Is raising the markup being brought to the GM for a vote; what is holding up expanding member shopping hours; will members have input on home delivery services; and whether a recent drop in sales is related to some members shopping less because of political disputes at the Coop, and whether such disputes are lowering new member applications? Holtz answered these issues, stating that the Coop was aware of members who were shopping less or not shopping due to such disputes, but that at this point the general coordinators could not quantify the effects. He said, however, that the Coop tries to take everything into account when making financial decisions such as the decision on the mark-up in order to keep the Coop on a prudent financial path.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Lisa Moore opened her report by announcing the retirement of Holtz, who will leave, after serving the Coop for 50 years, in June 2025. Moore paid tribute to Holtz and announced that there would be a Coop party in his honor on June 1, 2025. Moore also stated that the Coop has, through recommendations from members of National Coop Grocers, hired The Carlisle Group, an executive search and recruitment firm, and is also using a consultant from Columinate, who has consulted for food cooperators for years. The replacement search will take place from November 2024 through March 2025. The search committee will include two Personnel Committee members, two staff area coordinators, and two general coordinators. A member asked how much the costs of hiring these firms will cost; Moore answered that she will obtain the exact figure, which is under \$50,000.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE ELECTION

Members of the Personnel Committee presented three candidates for three openings:

Sonjia Hyon, Steve Jenkins and Valerie Vadala. Each candidate spoke about their qualifications for serving on the personnel committee and asked members to vote for them.

Voting results: Sonjia Hyon (yes: 195, no: 67); Steve Jenkins (yes: 252, no: 27); and Valerie Vadala (yes: 163, no: 98). All three were winners.

AFTER THE PRESENTATIONS, A DISCUSSION ENSUED REGARDING CONFUSION ABOUT THE LANGUAGE USED ON THE PAPER BALLOTS.

AGENDA COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Agenda Committee presented one candidate for re-election: David Warren.

187 attendees voted in favor of David Warren's re-election and 73 voted against. He was re-elected to a new two-year term with no break in his service.

MASKING REFERENDUM

Member David Bartner presented his proposal to authorize a Coop mask policy referendum. After the presentation, members spoke for the need to protect those who are immunocompromised as well as against making members wear masks. When the ballots were distributed, a lively discussion ensued as many members did not feel the ballot language was clear, in terms of what it was asking members to vote for. After clarification of the language by the meeting chairs, members voted using the ballots.

The masking proposal did not pass, with only 92 votes in its favor. 215 people voted against it.

PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

Coop-elected Secretary Elizabeth Tobier presented the minutes of the September 24,

2024 GM; no corrections were made. There were no recommendations from the members at the meeting. Therefore, the minutes were approved with the same contents that were sent to all members the Friday before the meeting.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Brandon West chaired the meeting and all members of the board who were present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the members on the minutes of the September 24, 2024 GM. The Board approved the Personnel Committee election by a vote of 5 to zero; the Agenda Committee election by 4 yeses, zero nos and one abstention; and the masking decision by 5 to zero. This was the first time in the last 25 years that a board member has abstained from voting to approve the will of the membership.

The meeting adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. Her novel, One Way to Whitefish, will be published in December.