

DECEMBER GENERAL MEETING REPORT

January 7, 2025



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By Kim Velsey

The crowd at the Picnic House was somewhat light on December 3, a cold and blustery night. Though members who showed up engaged in a vigorous discussion about bringing back the print edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. While many members were enthusiastic about the idea, others raised concerns about the cost, labor and equipment that would be needed to return to a print *Gazette*, which went fully digital during the pandemic. At the end of the night, members approved a proposal to conduct a feasibility study on bringing it back.

Open Forum

Several members posed questions during the Open Forum segment. One, who has an agenda item up requiring mediation between those for and against Israeli boycotts before any votes are taken, asked about expediting agenda items. Another noted how unique the Coop is and how important it is to keep that in mind when having heated discussions. A third spoke about her experiences joining the Coop in 1978, praising the economic diversity at that time, and asked what could be done to return the Coop to its really strong roots in economic justice and taking care of people in the broader community.

Coop Finances



Joe Holtz wearing his treasurer's hat, shared the Coop's financial position. General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz gave the financial report. There was a net loss of \$312,626 for the 40 weeks ending in November, in contrast to last year's net positive of \$189,683, a difference of a little more than \$500,000, but Holtz noted that there are 13 weeks left in the financial year, which ends February 2, 2025. Last year,

during the last 12 weeks of the year, the Coop's cash increased by more than \$600,000. "I can't promise the same bump this year, but if you're worried about the financial sustainability of the Coop, don't worry," Holtz said.

In response to a question about whether extended shopping hours will help the bottom line—the Coop will stay open one hour later from Mondays to Saturdays, starting in February—Holtz shared that sales might go up but only modestly, by two or three percent. He also noted that the flat markup, which dropped from 25 to 24 percent last year, but is going back up to 25 percent on February 3, should help. The Coop, Holtz added, charges additional markups on vitamins and supplements (ten percent), cheese (three percent), bulk items (six percent), organic produce (\$1.10 per case) and bananas (\$2.50 per case), not as a way of making money, but as a way of countering against losses.

Other Income				
Membership Fees	30,630	.07%	49,449	.12%
Events & Gifts	0	.00%	0	.00%
Cash Discounts & Rebates	23,299	.05%	52,769	.13%
Other Discounts	0	.00%	0	.00%
Patronage Refund Income	3,671	.01%	3,591	.01%
Income Tax Refund	0	.00%	0	.00%
Other Income	27,942	.06%	(4,302)	(.01%)
Total Other Income	<u>85,541</u>	<u>.19%</u>	<u>101,506</u>	<u>.25%</u>
Income Before Interest & Taxes	(574,280)	(1.30%)	77,015	.19%
Interest Expense-Loans	0	.00%	0	.00%
Interest Expense-Other	0	.00%	0	.00%
Dividend/Interest Income	261,653	.59%	112,668	.27%
Net interest	<u>261,653</u>	<u>.59%</u>	<u>112,668</u>	<u>.25%</u>
Income (Loss) Before Income Taxes	(312,626)	(.71%)	189,683	.46%
Provision for Taxes	0		0	
Net Income (Loss)	<u>(312,626)</u>		<u>189,683</u>	
Other Comprehensive Income-pension Plan Related	0		0	
Total Comprehensive Income (Loss)	<u>TBD</u>		<u>TBD</u>	

The Coop's balance sheet projected on the PowerPoint screen

Another member asked if adding more members would help. Holtz thought it might,

and shared that the Coop is adding some new members, but that new membership must be balanced against other factors, such as our capacity limits.

General Coordinators Report

Holtz brought up the Agenda Committee election at last month's meeting, where a Coop board member abstained from voting—something that is allowed by the Coop's by-laws but is very rare. Holtz said it has not been done for 23.5 years and felt that other Coop members should ask why the board member abstained or the board member should explain it, neither of which had happened.

Tim Hospodar identified himself as the board member who abstained and said he did so because he believed it was an unfair election—that the proper notice and nomination protocol had not been followed.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel disagreed and said it was standard operating procedure that a person who has a position can put themselves up for re-election, that the move was seconded and that the committee is understaffed and the person was not taking a position from someone else. She also noted that the Agenda Committee had placed a notice about the election in the *Gazette*, on FoodCoop.com and on the Coop Corner bulletin board, as required.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Director of Purchasing and General Coordinator Joe Szladek said 651 turkeys were ordered prior to Thanksgiving.

General Coordinator and Coop Director of Purchasing and Operations, Joe Szladek, talked about Thanksgiving sales. The Coop ordered 651 turkeys this year and 1,400 pounds of turkey parts. Only six turkeys and 150 pounds of parts were left over, a margin of error of only about two percent. The Coop also ordered 1,200 pies.

Szladek also talked about the Coop deals program, run by the National Co+op Grocers, which the Coop participated in last month. About 100 Field Day products were marked down ten to 28 percent. The Coop may participate again in the future, but is going to pause the program at the moment, he said, because it needs to finish building Clover, the inventory system that uses electronic labels. For the deals trial, new prices had to be entered manually, and the process is too much to manage as the staff works to roll out Clover.

Committee Reports



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

The Fun Committee's past, current, and future plans were heralded by committee member Rob Price.

Rob Price talked about some of the Fun Committee's plans for next year: a square dancing event, possibly a singles night, a happy hour at Bierwax in Prospect Heights. Previous events have included a puzzle swap and a picnic.

Personnel Committee



Newly elected Personal Committee member, Jerome Barth, demonstrating his leadership skills.

Jerome Barth was elected to the Personnel Committee, which is involved in hiring Coop personnel, including selecting Joe Holtz's successor. Ninety-seven members voted in favor of his election and 10 voted against.

Print *Linewaiters' Gazette* Feasibility Study



Advocating for a return to the newsprint *Linewaiters' Gazette*, Alex Godin introduced his idea with passion and some success.

Member Alex Godin brought forth a proposal to conduct a feasibility study on the return to a print *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Godin, who joined the Coop six years ago, said that since the pandemic, which brought the end of many community traditions including the print *Gazette*, childcare and the bulletin board, he has felt out of touch; in his view, the Coop has become “more sterile and more like a Whole Foods.”

Godin said he's talked to new members who are amazed to learn that the Coop had a newspaper and older members who say they haven't read it since they could pick it up. “It feels to me important, feels like we can do it, if we're able to sell 600 turkeys and hit the number within six, I think we should be able to publish a newspaper,” he said.

After Holtz suggested adding a deadline and pointed out that the *Gazette* staff may be too overtaxed to conduct the study themselves, the proposal was changed to read that a committee, including but not limited to Godin and *Gazette* staff, would report back on options, logistics and constraints to bring back the print edition, within one

year.

Rod Morrison, a *Gazette* photographer who joined in 1983, held up a few old print *Gazettes*, eliciting a little chorus of appreciative sighs. But Morrison recommended against reinstating it. “The horse is out of the barn. Members don’t consume media in hardcopy any more. Right now, the *Gazette* is put together virtually. To produce the old *Gazette* before the pandemic, a team went in on Sunday, five of them, including a proofreader,” he said. “I think what we need to do is build on what we have, make it more personal. Do a better job of publicizing the fact that we have a newspaper, rather than looking back to a media that is sort of dead, unlike the Food Coop.”

General Coordinator Herpel said that it cost about \$23,000 per year to print the *Gazette*, that the Coop doesn’t have the infrastructure to do it again, that the digital readership is probably 10 times the print readership, and that the Coop recycled probably half of the print *Gazettes*.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

General Coordinator Ann Herpel returned to the podium to argue against switching back to the old way of publishing the *Gazette*.

A number of members spoke in favor of the proposal, which passed 88 to 25, and expressed delight at the idea of a print edition. "My house is filled with books, magazines, zines of all sorts. I would love to read a *Linewaiters' Gazette* on the subway," one said. Another suggested that if printing every issue was too onerous, the Coop might do a more limited print edition, a special issue, for example, few times a year.

Kim Velsey has been a Coop member since 2020. When she's not writing for the Gazette, she's a staff writer at New York magazine.