

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING REPORT: HIGH TENSIONS ON A COLD NIGHT AND A COOP DIVIDED

March 11, 2025



Jessica Roff discussing the creation of a plastics committee. Photography by Michael Berman

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By William Doran

Coop members warmed themselves around pots of soup outside the Prospect Park Picnic House, awaiting entry for the January General Meeting (GM).

Once everyone was settled inside, the evening's agenda hovered above gathered members on a large projection screen. While there were other topics discussed, three contentious issues took up most of the two-and-a-half-hour gathering: boycotts, hybrid general meetings and committee elections.

OPEN FORUM

Several members spoke in favor of boycotting Israeli products and expressed disappointment in two General Coordinators' articles published in the January *Gazette*.

Some members who spoke that night chose to only give their first names.

A Coop member, Jim, argued that, "When the Coop was founded in the '70s, we boycotted products from apartheid South Africa, despite the fact that the United States, under multiple presidents, had official policies protecting South Africa."

Another member, Judy, pushed for open discussion: "The Coop is a member-led organization dedicated to democracy and to making the world a better place. Members need to be able to have this discussion. It's been put off and refused to be discussed for over 10 years."

Aaron, a member, labeled the General Coordinators' stance in the *Gazette* as fear-mongering: "The place to mediate disagreements is at these general meetings. As a Jew, I'm pretty familiar with fear-mongering rhetoric around the non-violent protest movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS)."

A self-organized group, Coop 4 Unity, spoke against the boycott, calling for unity among members and extending an invitation to engage boycott supporters in dialogue. Another member, Barbara, directly criticized boycott supporters, saying: "You don't understand the movement you're promoting, or you are willfully lying to all of us. And to this group I'm going to ask you, do you value the Coop more than you hate Israel? And to everyone else I ask, if you value the Coop, then please, we have to do something to stop them."



Aaron



Hana



Hima

Boycott supporters have also self-organized as PSFC 4 Palestine, publishing a zine called *The Olive Press*, which they distributed outside before the meeting, along with the aforementioned soup.

Members criticized the 75% majority voting threshold for boycotts, citing important decisions regularly made via simple majority, such as board elections and markup increases. To applause and laughter, a Coop member, Hana, sardonically identified several other things that could become policy with a simple majority: “We could allow suspended members to shop, but only if they wear a scarlet ‘S’ around their neck. We [could] make all Coop general meetings black-tie only. We could even refrigerate beer.”

Another member, Hima, criticized the concept of in-person-only general meetings: “This group of people here, we represent 2% of the membership. Why should we be the only exclusive club that gets to vote on any issues?” Hima continued, “During

COVID, we saw that technology is definitely available and accessible. It's exploitative that 100% of us work, but only 2% of us can actually vote."

"I CAN'T MEASURE THE IMPACT. IT WOULD BREAK MY HEART FOR PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COOP JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T AGREE WITH A COOP POLICY," SAID JOE HOLTZ, REGARDING THE PROPOSED BOYCOTT.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Coop's net income dropped by about \$525,000 from the previous year, due largely to a 1% reduction in the base markup, which returned to 25% at the start of the 2026 fiscal year in February. In 2020, members voted to increase the markup from 21% to 25% to combat pandemic losses. It was later reduced to 24% to alleviate some of the pressure on members.

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz stressed of the decrease, "You can't eat the markup, but you can eat the food." He highlighted cost of goods sold (the value of goods prior to markup) as a better indicator of how the Coop performed which was up roughly \$3 million over last year. He noted that member equity—the value of what we all own together, minus debts—stayed consistent from 2023 to 2024 at \$8.73 million.

Member questions shifted the focus back to boycotts, requesting financials to support the General Coordinators' stance against the boycotts that were published in the January *Gazette*. The January 7, 2025, piece, with a byline from the "General Coordinator Team," titled, "Coordinator's Corner: Our Coop at Risk," warned, in part: "Financial fallout from a boycott could force tough decisions such as raising prices or laying off staff."

Holtz responded, "I can't measure the impact. It would break my heart for people to leave the Coop just because they don't agree with a Coop policy." Calling attention to

thousands of members on both sides of the issue, Holtz said that taking a stance is a risky prospect, and that the Coop cannot afford to lose members. “I believe that cooperators are precious, and I don’t want to lose any of you.”

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORTS

General Coordinator Lisa Moore validated member complaints about adherence to election protocols, citing that the Agenda Committee missed the deadline to publish an announcement in the *Gazette* prior to elections last year, and it did not announce the opening at the September 2024 GM.

She quieted doubts, however, about the legitimacy of the election in question, saying: “There’s no evidence suggesting that these committees intentionally omitted their announcements from the *Gazette*. Nor should the omission cast doubts on the validity of the elections.”

She called for an update to the Coop’s Guide for General Meetings and Annual Meetings to include guidelines on vacancy announcements and potential consequences for omitting the required steps mentioned. Moore noted, “All committees should be held to the same standard to ensure transparency, cultivate trust and encourage participation among all members.” She invited interested members to submit their information to psfcac@gmail.com, reiterating that there are still openings on the Agenda Committee.

Lastly, she indicated that the Coop has identified several 800-seat (or larger) venues for in-person voting on hybrid meetings. The Agenda Committee will reach out to the proposal’s presenters to select a date.



Lisa Moore



Joe Szladak

General Coordinator Joe Szladak closed the presentation of GC reports by reminding everyone of the Coop's early closing on February 1 for annual inventory.

EIGHT MEMBERS PROPOSED A NEW COMMITTEE TO SHRINK COOP RELIANCE ON PLASTIC. THE COMMITTEE WOULD SOLICIT COOP-MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND WORK WITH STAFF TO IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT CONCRETE CHANGES.

MEMBER COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Pension Education and Reporting Committee solicited members to submit questions for the Committee's upcoming annual report in the *Gazette*.

The Personnel Committee shared progress on its search for a new General Manager

to replace Joe Holtz, who will retire in June of 2025. The committee anticipates selection by late spring of this year. The job posting and salary are publicly available on the Coop's website.

The International Trade Education Committee highlighted potential impacts of Trump Administration tariffs and encouraged members to read "What New Trump Tariffs Would Mean for the Coop," published in the *Gazette* last December by *Gazette* reporter Leila Darabi.

PLASTIC REDUCTION

Eight members proposed a new committee to shrink Coop reliance on plastic. The committee would solicit Coop-member participation and work with staff to identify and implement concrete changes.

Fifteen-year-member Jessica Roff supported the need for such a committee by sharing some staggering statistics: "Of all the plastic produced [in the U.S.] since 1950, 91% has never been recycled." She continued, "Many of the things that make plastic problematic to recycle are the same things that harm our bodies and the environment. There are more than 16,000 chemicals in plastic."

Roff and many of the other presenters advocating for the committee's creation combat environmental hazards in their professional lives. They outlined opportunities and challenges while acknowledging the Coop's significant history of environmental advocacy and valuable insights that could come from Coop members and staff.

Members expressed gratitude for the group's work and posed questions about how to forge ahead. Things like reuseable, member-provided containers came up, as well as frustration over the lack of plastic-free options for some food items, like milk. Presenters emphasized that this must happen in community to be successful. Members can submit questions and ideas to reduce.plastic.psfc@gmail.com.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Meeting Chair Imani Q'Ryn announced that this may be her last meeting, after serving the Coop for 20 years. Many cheered and offered standing applause, expressing thanks for her service.

The Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of the general membership. Director Tim Hospodar addressed how the Coop's board of directors meets, acknowledging that this portion of the GM is the one time that the board is mandated to meet, however brief.



Imani Q'Ryn seated at left



Tim Hospodar

He suggested leveraging this time as an opportunity to more adeptly engage general membership and discuss important issues. Hospodar proposed, "...Perhaps we can maximize this chance to discuss topics that the board finds concerning or disconcerting. He continued, "The Board of Directors does not have a dedicated part of the meeting to report out or raise our concerns."

Ironically, the discussion was cut short for the sake of time, and the GM adjourned.

William Doran is a licensed architect, educator and food writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Though originally from New Orleans, LA, he has been a Coop member and New York City resident since 2022. He has taught cooking classes for the Coop (foodcoopcooks.org) and publishes a free quarterly newsletter at adventurouscooks.com.