

HOSTILE MEMBER TAKES OVER THE MARCH GENERAL MEETING TO PURSUE "URGENT" ISSUE

April 1, 2025



Illustration by Valeria Trucchia

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By Sally Cremini

The March General Meeting started out in typical Coop fashion: members lining up outside the Prospect Park Picnic House one by one, scanning their membership cards for entry, then scrambling to find a seat in the crowded venue. When the Chair finally called the meeting to order at 7:15pm a man walked up to the podium and grabbed the microphone. “My name is Nico Stein-Diaz, and I’m the Squad Leader of the Environmental Committee,” he began. “I move that the Chair recognize a motion to override tonight’s published agenda and substitute a new one as a matter of urgency to the Coop.”

Before the Chair could react, a member from the audience stood up and shouted, “I second that emotion!” At this point the Chair grabbed back the mike. “While I don’t condone this action, according to Robert’s Rules of Order, it’s technically within the code of conduct and the motion will be granted. The former agenda—which included a vote to extend the Coop’s mask requirement to eight days a week—will be postponed until next month.”

Stein-Diaz took the podium and began an impassioned plea: “In 2020 many of you will recall that the Coop started using a carrot-tag system to allow shoppers into the store.” Stein-Diaz referred to the laminated carrot tags that members are given upon checking in at the entrance desk. “What started out as a way to encourage social distancing during Covid,” he continued, “became a tool to control crowds on the busiest shopping days. The fact that Coop leadership has allowed this to go on for so long, and that the membership has accepted it, should be deeply troubling to all of you.”

After a rambling introduction, Stein-Diaz finally unveiled his proposal: Put the kibosh on laminated carrot tags and give out real carrots instead. “I understand the need to limit the number of people in the store but this is a more sustainable way to do it,” he said. “We can support our vegetable farmers as well as the environment. It’s time for the Coop to be the change we want to see,” added Stein-Diaz.

Using the overhead projector, Stein-Diaz took the confused audience through the lifespan of a carrot tag, explaining that the non-biodegradable plastic used in the laminat-

ing process cannot be recycled. Traditional laminate is a thin plastic film that is applied to printed materials—in this case orange copy paper—to protect them from scratches, moisture and trips to the bathroom. Because it's a plastic, laminate film is not biodegradable, so it can take hundreds of years to break down in a landfill. This can contribute to the growing problem of plastic pollution in our oceans and around the globe. He then showed a video of one of our carrot tags being used to patch a roof in a small village in the Philippines. "The Coop is not fulfilling its mission to be a good steward of the environment," Stein-Diaz insisted.



According to the recently closed Environmental Protection Agency, lamination cannot be recycled nor is it biodegradable.

The first person to speak out against the proposal was General Manager Joe Holtz. "We have 6,000 square feet of shopping space compared to 68,000 at Whole Foods, but we have more foot traffic and more sales per volume. On a typical Sunday, about 4,500 shoppers come through and spend close to \$800,000," he explained excitedly.

“I think we should do away with limiting capacity all together! I know some members don’t like it but, for me, a borderline fire hazard situation is a mark of my personal success.”

Long-time member Dong Darcy spoke up next, recalling the Coop before Covid: “The regular line used to twist and turn all the way to the produce aisle,” she said. “I prefer to wait outside in the fresh air for a couple of hours and then shop in a less crowded store. A lot of members use natural deodorant. Between that and the narrow aisles, shopping can be unpleasant. I don’t care what we use to count people — real carrots or plastic ones — we need to keep doing it!”

Many more members continued to weigh in on the proposal. Comments ranged from “ridiculous!” to “genius,” and the questions flowed: “Organic or conventional?” “Baby carrots or full grown?” “Orange or purple?” “What do we do with the carrots at the end of day?” “Compost or soup kitchen?”

One member suggested we feed them to the horses in Central Park, at which point Joe Holtz shouted out, “Liberate the horses!”

After a lively discussion that went on for over nine hours, members voted to pass the proposal by a narrow margin: 540 yeses and 432 noes. Two Board members abstained from voting because they are partial to cucumbers.

Once it was decided that at the end of each day the carrots would be thoroughly scrubbed and used to make a dinner salad for staff, the meeting was adjourned.



Salad made from real carrots at the end of the day.

Sally Cremini is a long-time Coop member and host of the podcast Fungi Amungi. Writing satire for the Gazette is one of her favorite pastimes.