

APRIL 22, 2025

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Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Editor's note: The April 29 General Meeting (GM) was to be held at the Theatre at City Tech University, a location the General Coordinators (GCs) chose to accommodate a large turnout expected in response to agenda items including a vote to establish hybrid GMs. On April 10, officials at City Tech notified the GCs that they were cancelling the

Coop's rental reservation; they offered no explanation for this decision. In its wake, the GCs moved the coming April GM to the Picnic House in Prospect Park and removed the hybrid vote from the agenda until further notice. The letters below were written before the cancellation at City Tech was known. Those members who wrote submissions regarding hybrid voting were given the opportunity to pull their letters from the Gazette. Members who opted to proceed with publication of their letters notwithstanding the late venue change appear below.

ONLINE, ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION AND VOTING

To Coop members interested in more inclusive decision-making,

If the Coop wants members to “participat[e] in the Coop’s decision-making process,” it should make the process easy and convenient. General Meetings are neither.

I propose to create an online forum and virtual polling place where members can discuss and vote on agenda items ahead of GMs.

Online forums have been around since the 1970s. As a format for discussion, they have the following advantages over live meetings:

- **They are scalable.** One hundred people speaking for one minute each would take up almost the entire two hours of a GM. Online forums let more people participate, and people can contribute more considered responses.
- **They are more convenient.** Any reasonable time for the GM is also a time when the Coop is typically open, so at minimum, GMs exclude employees and other members working at the Coop during the meeting. Online forums would let everyone par-

ticipate in the governance of the Coop, regardless of their schedules.

- **They are accessible to more people.** As a neurodivergent person, I have difficulty processing information in real-time, including during live meetings. Online forums would make it easier for me to fully understand and make informed decisions on agenda items. They are also easier to make accessible for people with visual and auditory disabilities.

Online, asynchronous voting is also more scalable, convenient, and accessible than in-person, live voting. Around 4,000 people voted in the last Board of Directors elections, compared to the 240 that can fit in the Picnic House. Let's do that for all votes.

For details on how this could work, cost estimates and a comment form, please visit **tinyurl.com/psfc-online-forum**. I would greatly appreciate people's thoughts on this proposal!

*Thank you,
Yejia Chen*

RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

Dear Gazette Editors,

"Well, ya got trouble . . . right here in River City."

– The Music Man

A great deal of time and energy has gone into the ongoing debate of whether or not to boycott a few products—in an official way—rather than letting Coop members make their own decisions. So much time and so much energy.

But now we have serious problems in our own country, problems that threaten our livelihoods, our health, our economy, our ability to make choices and many of the freedoms we have taken for granted all of our lives. We need everyone to focus on this, using individual and collective efforts. Right here, right now.

*In Cooperation,
Cynthia Blayer*

EQUITY, ACCESS AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE (EACC) LWG STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HYBRID MEETINGS AND HYBRID VOTING AT PSFC GENERAL MEETING (GM)

Dear Coop members:

The Equity, Access and Community Committee works to help ensure the Coop meets its mission, which states, “We are committed to diversity and equality. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store.”

In line with this mission, we observe that the in-person only attendance requirement for General Meetings is a barrier that dramatically reduces member participation. This unnecessary requirement, made obsolete by technology the Coop drew upon during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates inequities including: wealth, gender, race, geography, ability, family composition and others.

The upcoming April 29 vote on an agenda item to expand General Meetings from in-person only to hybrid is a crucial step toward the Park Slope Food Coop’s mission to maximize participation in policy-making and make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all. Decisions about the Coop are made at General Meetings. We should and

must include as many members as possible so that they can attend, be heard and vote at General Meetings.

In-person only meetings make participation difficult—or impossible—for a wide swath of Coop members. Parents, caregivers, disabled and immunocompromised members, folks who live far from Prospect Park (where GMs are usually held), members employed in night work and other Coop members unable to attend a Tuesday evening meeting in Park Slope are essentially prohibited from the democratic governance of our Coop.

Hybrid meetings are one way to expand participation in shaping our Coop to folks for whom attending an in-person meeting is not possible. The Equity, Access and Community Committee strongly supports the measure to make General Meeting attendance and voting hybrid.

In solidarity,

Jordan Dunn and Dory Kornfeld

MORE COMPASSION AND RESPECT, PLEASE

To the Editors,

I love General Meetings. To me, coming together as a community to consider enhancements to the place where we buy our food is the Rockwellian ideal of civic engagement. Certainly, Coop members' passion for doing the right thing is an essential ingredient in the vibrancy of our cooperative grocery store.

But lately, one issue has turbo-charged moral striving, and allowed bitter factionalism to tarnish the utopian sheen of my family's primary source of nourishment. It's understandable that so much of our attention has turned to a conflict that has killed,

maimed and displaced the relatives of many of our fellow members. Their anguish is not to be dismissed, nor should it matter “which side” they’re on. But I can hold compassion for victims of this horrible conflict and still wonder:

How did so many members become convinced that adopting a singular stance on a complex and deeply fractious issue should be the Coop’s highest priority?

How does aligning the Coop with an organization that does not recognize Israel’s right to exist promote peace, or improve conditions in Gaza?

How do legal actions brought by members of Coop 4 Unity achieve anything resembling unity?

It is deeply unfortunate that so many members would rather attribute disagreement to moral failure than tolerate or attempt to understand opposition. Maybe this toxic penchant for oversimplifying very complex issues is related to the rampant smartphone usage I’ve noticed during GMs these days. Whatever it is, I just wish we could recognize that “victory” at the Coop will neither ease pain nor improve the world. Only compassion and respect for each other, no matter how difficult, can do that.

Best,
Brian Shuman

LET OUR VOICES BE HEARD—REALLY

Member-owners,

Kudos to the Equity, Access and Community committee for their recent demographic survey, a step toward understanding members’ identities and needs.

I hope the General Manager Search Committee will follow this lead and survey members about what's important in a new GM (whose salary, like all Coop employees, is funded by the markup we pay).

To date, the only communication we have received from the GM Search Team was emailed on 12/20/24. It concludes, *If you have questions or comments for the Search Committee, please contact us via this link: bit.ly/PSFCgmquestion.*

Though any member who opened this email during that hectic December week had the option to “ask questions or make comments,” this is a far cry from seeking members’ input on what they want in a new GM.

This email was signed:

The GM Search Committee

Yolanda McBride, Valerie Vadala, and Steve Jenkins, representing the Personnel Committee

Karen Mancuso and Charles Parham, representing the hourly paid staff

Ann Herpel and Matt Hoagland, representing the General Coordinator team

Only three member-owners represent over 16,000 of us. I encourage them to be in full communication with all of us, to seek our opinions, and to make use of our experience and expertise.

I joined the Coop in 1978. We need a new General Manager who honors the Coop's history of food and social justice and who helps us persevere at a time when outside forces encourage us to capitulate.

Best,

Alyce Barr

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AMONG BOARD MEMBERS

Dear Fellow members:

The race for Board of Directors seats begins.

Eight members are running for two seats on the Board. Two of the candidates (Taylor Pate and Dan Kaminsky) are part of PSFC Members 4 Palestine, pushing the Coop to boycott Israel—a campaign that is tearing our Coop apart. Two other candidates (Noah Potter and Ralph Yozzo) have been endorsed by the Coop 4 Unity group fighting to preserve the Coop's autonomy, harmony and financial stability.

At the March general meeting, during the Q&A of the candidates, a member asked about a complaint (to the State Division of Human Rights) filed by a member who was active in the Coop 4 Unity group, and whether it would be a conflict of interest for the Coop 4 Unity candidates to be on the Board.

The answer: No, because the member who filed the complaint did so on his own initiative, none of the other Coop 4 Unity members are involved in it, and that member is not running for the Board.

You know what IS a conflict of interest? Actively pursuing a campaign that is dividing the Coop and creating hostility among the members—which is what current Directors Keyian Vafai and Tess Brown-Lavoie are doing.

*Many kind thanks,
Zara Watkins*

WHAT'S THEIR VERSION OF TRANSPARENCY?

Greetings:

At the March membership meeting, a BDS adherent stated that a director candidate endorsed by Coop 4 Unity would have a conflict of interest due to the “Coop 4 Unity lawsuit” (actually a proceeding at the State Department of Human Rights). As a candidate endorsed by C4U, I responded that there is no such lawsuit: a member affiliated with C4U brought the claim on his own behalf, not ‘on behalf’ of or in coordination with C4U.

Here’s a fuller response. The only possible conflicts I can imagine would be if a C4U-affiliated director were (a) to share confidential information (such as legal advice from the Coop’s counsel) with the claimant, or (b) to compel a settlement on terms that are unfair to the Coop. Even if there were a conflict, (a) I have no reason to believe that any director would have access to confidential information without assistance from staff—which I assume would not be given, and it is a standard practice for corporate directors in such situations to be excluded from (i) discussions of the claim and (i-i) any vote relating to the claim. I challenge the member asserting a potential breach of fiduciary duty to state the basis for her belief. (Incidentally, this discussion shows the need to evaluate comprehensive bylaw amendments.)

Letters to the *Gazette* in support of the boycott from two board candidates appear on the Members 4 Palestine’s website (<https://psfc4palestine.org/boycott-letters/> letters dated 3/19/24 and 1/7/25). Pate was a moderator of M4P’s January 2025 teach-in. When the candidates were questioned whether their platforms and beliefs align with M4P, she did not respond; Dan Kaminsky was not present to answer. Neither one’s candidacy statement mentions their M4P affiliation.

What is M4P’s version of transparency?

FEELING BAD ABOUT THE COOP

Greetings:

I feel upset. We should be spending these next few months celebrating the remarkable accomplishments of Joe Holtz during his 50-year tenure as General Manager. Under Joe's stewardship we achieved the improbable. We should all feel gratitude and satisfaction and be looking forward to the Coop's continued success and stability.

Instead, the Coop is held hostage by a group of members who have introduced division, distrust and enmity into the Coop. They seek to impose ideological conformity, disregarding differing perspectives.

I feel betrayed. The Coop is built on trust, goodwill and respect. Members say, "If only one person is affected, we should...." or "We must have dialog and understanding." Yet our concerns are ignored, even mocked. Requests for dialogue are dismissed. The committees tasked with addressing disputes appear to be at best indifferent, at worst hostile.

I feel disappointed. The General Coordinators responsible for the Coop's success have clearly stated the risks posed by PSFC Members for Palestine (M4P) three part strategy:

1. Hybrid General Meetings
2. Simple majority boycott threshold
3. Boycott Israeli products.

The General Coordinators, the Agenda Committee and the Chair Committee all have the authority to reject these reckless proposals.

Instead, at great cost to the Coop, they proceed.

I feel disrespected. The violence motivated by “Free Palestine” is real and directed against Jews. No other movement targeting any other identity group would ever be considered in the Coop.

Yet, we are forced to spend our precious free time defending ourselves. By allowing this motion to proceed, the Coop legitimizes a proposal that threatens our safety, even if it is rejected. The Coop is saying it’s acceptable to promote violence against Jews. Therefore, we resist.

I feel unwelcome and no one cares.

Barbara Mazor

Editor’s Note: Barbara Mazor states that the GCs, Agenda Committee and Chair have the authority to “reject these reckless proposals.” That is incorrect; the GCs and Chair committee have no authority to prohibit agenda items. Only the agenda committee has the authority as defined by the GM to create the agenda. The agenda committee is the body in the Coop’s governance which is authorized to create the GM agenda. Nowhere in the organization’s governance documents are the GCs or the Chair given that authority.

IN THE SPIRIT OF MUTUAL EDUCATION

Dear Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones,

I was pleased to see that you read my article regarding the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat and that you appreciated the parallel between humans and trees in terms of how we both grow and develop by way of self-abnegation (trees through a seed disintegrating into the ground, and humans through humbling ourselves by way of nullifying our egos).

As you alluded to, the verse from which I excerpted the phrase "For man is a tree in the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19) is indeed on a literal level a reference to how we are instructed to behave during wartime.

It is certainly unfortunate that Hamas has set up so many of its terror bases in such close proximity to trees to have resulted in such environmental devastation in Gaza.

Getting back to the focus of my original article however, it is well known amongst Torah scholars that there are a multitude of ways in which the Torah can be read and understood. The Hebrew language is replete with inner and multitudinous meanings, deeming all translations somewhat inadequate.

It is taught that there are four basic lenses through which the Torah can be read, known as: *Pshat* (Simple), *Remez* (Allegorical), *Drush* (Homiletical) and *Sod* (Secret/Mystical).

While you correctly cited the meaning of the verse on a Pshat (Simple) level, I was sharing a well-known Sod (Secret/Mystical) understanding based on Chassidic and Kabbalistic teachings.

If you'd be interested in learning more about how to understand the Torah through a more mystical lens, let's set up a *chavruta* (lit. "learning partner/friend"), meaning, I'd like to offer that we learn together in friendship. I would love to hear from you.

Sarede Rachel Switzer

WHAT'S THE TRUE CO\$T OF HYBRID MEETINGS?

Greetings:

I've built numerous hybrid events and can confirm they require significant investment in time, equipment, technical staff and platform subscriptions.

Organizations that rush into hybrid formats inevitably face low online attendance, technical glitches and unexpected costs that could have been anticipated with proper planning.

Recently, a Members for Palestine advocate claimed hybrid meetings would have “no financial impact” on the Coop. This statement simply isn't based in reality.

Before making such a significant change to our organization, we need proper due diligence. I propose that interested members join me to:

- Create a cost-benefit analysis with multiple scaled options
- Design a detailed technology implementation plan
- Solicit vendor proposals with actual costs
- Develop a comprehensive budget for review
- Set aside political differences for the Coop's benefit

Claims that raising these concerns is “fearmongering” ignore the real challenges of hybrid implementation. A concept is not a plan.

Until we do this work, please vote NO on April 29. I've reached out to M4P for their cost estimates and welcome collaboration on creating a proper proposal that address-

es these practical realities.

*Respectfully,
Meg Robertson
Member, Coop 4 Unity*

WAIT WAIT...DON'T DOX ME!

Dear Members:

The Gazette editors' grace was now ending

As our members had long been sensing

"He submits and submits"

"Wish he'd find a new hobby that sticks"

Still a guy who defends ethnic cleansing.

Lauren Hudson

EVIDENCE THAT "HYBRID" GENERAL MEETINGS ARE A BAD IDEA

To Members:

There has been much clamoring lately in favor of switching to "hybrid" General Meetings (GMs), so that members who cannot attend in person can nevertheless partici-

pate. “Hybrid” GMs could also be useful when no space can accommodate member interest in an agenda item.

Looking at the actual history of GM attendance when all meetings were held remotely shows that making the GMs hybrid will not draw more members. The first two meetings did have much higher participation than usual. I do not have the actual record of how many came to the May and June 2020 meetings, but I think it reached 500 or 600. From the General Meeting minutes, below are the numbers in attendance at GMs at the highpoint in the meeting (people came and went throughout).

Another way of solving the problem of membership interest exceeding venue space for certain GMs is to change the bylaws to accommodate allowing GMs to be held over Zoom only in those instances.

Record of member attendance at remotely-held General Meetings:

May	2020	No record
June	2020	No record
July	2020	341
August	2020	451
September	2020	221
October	2020	169
November	2020	No meeting
December	2020	170
January	2021	131
February	2021	205
March	2021	200

April	2021	207
May	2021	110
June	2021	127
July	2021	187
August	2021	127
September	2021	170
October	2021	95
November	2021	130
December	2021	No meeting
January	2022	154
February	2022	105
March	2022	100
April	2022	123
May	2022	120
June	2022	86
July	2022	149
August	2022	112
September	2022	165
October	2022	201
November	2022	126
December	2022	No meeting
January	2023	116
February	2023	121

March	2023	116
April	2023	85
May	2023	128
June	2023	72
July	2023	80
August	2023	61

*Sincerely,
Elizabeth Tobier*

QUESTIONS ON FUNDING PROPOSED HYBRID MEETINGS

Greetings:

Who and how will the current hybrid meeting proposal be funded for over 16,000 people?

Multibillion-dollar companies regularly host online, verified hybrid meetings. However, these organizations have fully dedicated staff members and business units allocated specifically to this function.

We are a community-based organization in Brooklyn. The reality—which should be abundantly clear to anyone who has engaged with any financial documentation that the Coop has produced recently—is that we do not have the cash capital of a multibillion-dollar organization.

My request to members proposing this new format is quite simple: Where within our budget will the monetary cost be absorbed for investment in hybrid meetings, not on-

ly for technology, but also for the operational fees associated with staffing to set up and maintain the rigor of the meeting? Who will ensure that a physical space accommodates engagement for online members? And most importantly: who will validate and authenticate that only members join meetings virtually?

I love the idea of making meetings more accessible for all, but in its current state, the hybrid meeting proposal lacks the clarity and rigor necessary to make meetings accessible for all.

*Thank you,
Zachary Zaban*

WHAT A “REFERENDUM” ENTAILS AND MEANS

Greetings:

Lady Bracknell: To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. (Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest)

As a 20-year member of the Park Slope Food Coop I used to hear the word “referendum” and assumed that it meant that we polled the entire membership and truly found out the general will of the membership.

About 15 years ago, I argued regarding some Coop loan program that we have 14,000 members and shouldn’t we hear from them before we vote??

I attended that 2012 vote about boycott at Brooklyn Tech. I was amazed at the turnout; the line was all the way around the building and the meeting went on for hours.

I thought for sure all these people wouldn't vote against a vote. I was incorrect.

To answer the question. It turns out a referendum is only of those who choose to vote. And the current numbers show that a recent high of 2,802 people voted yes in the recent board of directors election for one candidate. That's 2,802 out of 16,000 approximate members. Or 17.5% of the membership.

The general membership should be aware that if you create a mailing list or social group of several thousand people in the Food Coop that will listen to the group's endorsements (given the current voter turnout) you can significantly affect the future of the Coop.

What appears to be the "silent majority" may not be aware of that fact. And this is a small attempt to shine some light on it.

Ralph Yozzo

BETTER DEMOCRACY THROUGH THOUGHTFUL REFORM—NOT JUST HYBRID

Greetings:

There is growing momentum to create a more representative and deliberative governing process; one that works for parents, the immunocompromised, staff and for the tech-savvy and tech-limited alike. As a busy parent, I understand the call for increased accessibility to General Meetings. At the same time, a fundamental change to our governing structure **MUST** be approached with care.

The Members 4 Palestine endorsed proposal focuses only on a bylaw change to enable hybrid meetings.

Though hybrid meetings may *appear* to increase accessibility, they also introduce a new online space that can quickly devolve into something toxic. Online debate has a way of flattening contentious issues into the same kind of venomous discussions which rage on Twitter/Reddit...pitting one avatar against another. The hybrid proposal offers no mechanism to ensure digital engagement is constructive, equitable and safe.

In order to enable members to cooperatively solve problems, we need clear and effective policies in place BEFORE we amend our bylaws.

We also need to widen the lens through which we view this issue; we should not risk further polarization without genuine reform. There have been several other proposals that have appealing ideas. For example, Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner shared his ideas in a Gazette submission ("A New Coop Democracy" 10/15). To my knowledge, there are several other proposals as well.

To affect true and meaningful change, we should form a committee to design a governance structure that strengthens member voices and democratic participation. This committee would comprehensively study the issues and flesh out all related proposals in order to evaluate their risks and benefits and take the best of each.

In cooperation,
Tali Rasis

ANTI-HYBRIDERS WANT US TO CUT OFF OUR NOSE TO SPITE OUR FACE

Dear Coop members:

The Food Coop's mission statement reads "We are committed to diversity and equali-

ty. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store.”

Hybrid GMs would FINALLY fulfill this commitment to extend policy-making powers to ALL 17,000 of us. For the past 53 years, this right has been reserved only for those privileged enough to attend in-person.

General Coordinators and pro-Israel members don’t want Hybrid and want to “cut off our nose to spite our face” by voting against our best and democratic interests. The boogie man? The proposal to de-shelve Israeli products made by an apartheid regime actively engaging in collective punishment of 2 million Palestinians through forced starvation, genocide, ethnic cleansing and land theft. It’s offensive that a call for racial justice and human rights is leveraged to shut down hybrid meetings that would finally allow a democratic structure for all 17,000 of us. Don’t want to boycott Israel? Then vote against it during a hybrid meeting. Several other pending proposals: reduce our reliance on plastic bags; bring back the bulletin board for member usage; bring back the print version of *Linewaiters’ Gazette* and possibly more.

We used zoom during COVID. THIS was our “feasibility study.” Create a hybrid squad to overcome tech problems. One anti-hybrider suggested Coop-approved exemptions only for the sick, disabled and parents with young kids to attend virtual GMs. Another wants only some proposals to be voted through hybrid.

REJECT ANYTHING THAT DOESN’T ALLOW ALL OF US TO PARTICIPATE BY HYBRID FOR EVERY GM. Anyone who continues to deprive all of this right are obstructionists to a truly democratic Coop.

In solidarity,
Hima B.

PLEASE CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENTAL TOLL IN GAZA

Dear Fellow Members,

I am a long-time Coop member with a form of cancer linked to asbestos exposure. It's an experience I wouldn't wish on anybody. I flinch when I even see the word "asbestos," let alone when I hear about new incidents of environmental contamination with this horrific poison. Recently I read a story in the Electronic Intifada: "Asbestos Dust Threat Looms Over Much of Gaza" (published March 24). I learned that Israel's destruction of an estimated 92 percent of housing units in Gaza has created some 39 million tons of debris, much of it asbestos-laden (UN figures). Pulmonologist Dr. Shadi Awad of Al-Shifa Hospital describes the consequences: "polluted air enters the airways and directly impacts lung tissues." Those who escape cancer may develop other severe respiratory disorders.

It's easy to feel distanced from atrocities occurring thousands of miles away. I have not felt detached from the suffering in Gaza, but reading this story renewed my sense of urgency. I can't bear to think of small children (those "lucky" ones who survive the current carnage) going on to develop asbestos-related lung diseases. Given Israel's deliberate targeting of medical infrastructure, will appropriate treatment even be available?

Coop members have the option to join a powerful global movement that refuses complicity with these horrors. We can send a clear signal to our own government, the chief patron of Israel's rampage: We refuse cooperation with genocide and occupation.

Don't fall for the argument that our Coop is too small to make a meaningful difference.

Or that it's not worth "upsetting" Coop members who support a genocidal ethnostate. Action on the local level is exactly what's needed to chip away at the wall of impunity that permits unspeakable crimes to continue unchecked. Please join PSFC4Palestine in calling for an Israeli products boycott.

In Cooperation,
[Name Withheld]