

MARCH GENERAL MEETING: SPRING PRODUCTS, BOARD CANDIDATES AND MORE

April 22, 2025



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By Zach Schiffman

As attendees entered the Picnic House on March 25, the sidewalk was flanked with members advocating for various causes, handing out info sheets about hybrid meetings or QR code slips introducing candidates up for election. On one side of the immediate entry, members offered “halvah from Israel,” while on the other, a table with a handful of food options featured literature with voices from Gaza. The competing efforts outside the Picnic House foreshadowed what would come in the well-attended meeting, with the issues spilling into nearly every aspect of the agenda.

OPEN FORUM



Members turned out for the March General Meeting.

The Open Forum began with a member asking the Chair Committee to clarify the policy around open forum rules, pointing out that past meetings have allowed topics unrelated to Coop operations, with speakers granted longer than one minute. Chair Committee member David Moss responded that the committee uses a document called the Park Slope Food Coop Guide to General and Annual Meetings, which does not limit topics to Coop operations. He added that the one-minute rule is interpreted flexibly, depending on the needs of a particular meeting.

While some brought up items of general interest to the membership—honoring the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, increasing the amount of meetings eligible for work credit, a plea to stop members from eating while working the checkout shift—speakers continued to challenge the transparency of the general meetings.

Coop member Josh Geller flagged how he was not on the ballot for the evening's dispute resolution community, while member Noah Potter questioned how his agenda item had not come up, despite requesting it to be expedited. "I've been ghosted. I think it's inappropriate," Potter said, in the first of many comments he would make throughout the meeting.

One member asked if the June 24 General meeting date could be moved to avoid conflicting with the New York State and City primary elections, but outgoing General Coordinator Joe Holtz said that wasn't possible due to the timing of the annual financial audit.



Member Adam Tager asked the candidates some questions.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz, who also serves as Treasurer, reported on the four-week period ending 3/2/25,

with a presentation of the top-line details and a full report sent to members' inboxes the previous week. The report compared the first four weeks of the current fiscal year to the same period last year, noting that the previous fiscal year ended in January 2024. Holtz pointed out that last year's gross margin for this period was unrealistically high due to error, ("The first four weeks last year had an unreasonably high gross margin that was unrealistic. So I didn't bother to write it down because it sorted itself out by the eight-week statement.") but that this year's data was more reliable, with a positive swing in bottom-line income from negative \$35,000 to positive \$33,000. He noted a rosy outlook, with sales up 10.4 percent, and an increase of \$182,000 cash on hand, the most vital asset in the Coop's finances. The overall financial stability of the Coop is underscored by the increase in base markup from 24 percent to 25 percent.

As of February 25, 2024, total liabilities were \$5.22 million, while total member equity—including member investments, paid-in capital and retained earnings—was \$8.64 million. He explained that member equity includes all member investments and the Coop's retained earnings, and that donated investments are categorized as additional paid-in capital. He walked members through other financial statements, including a cash comparison from the beginning of the fiscal year.

The final portion of the report introduced a new feature: comparing projections for the year with the annualized actual results for the four-week period. Holtz noted that the Coop had projected \$62.8 million in annual sales, but if current trends continue, sales could exceed \$63.8 million. Expenses and gross margin were also slightly better than projected. He clarified that these annualized figures are theoretical and could shift. "The slow summer months are not yet included and therefore the projected variance could be overstated," he said. Holtz closed by explaining how annualization works mathematically. A member then raised a concern about whether the financial statement had been received by email (it had), and another asked about the backlog of new member applicants.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Joe Szladek, one of the general coordinators, began with a few announcements. He shared that the April General Meeting will be held at a new location: The theater at City Tech, located at 275 Jay Street in Brooklyn. The venue change was made “to accommodate the anticipated larger audience” for the discussion and a vote on the hybrid general meeting proposal. Szladek also announced two staffing updates: Guillermo Rojas Hernandez has started as a developer/programmer, and Eric Alger, a receiving coordinator, has left Coop employment. Szladek reminded members that the Coop’s hours had been extended.



Produce Buyer Cecelia Rembert asked for feedback.

Cecelia Rembert, one of the Coop’s two produce buyers, shared seasonal highlights: “The citrus season is wrapping up, so if you have been enjoying the California citrus, do it now,” she said, highlighting the Oro Blancos and mandarins.

She mentioned that berries are “mostly out of Mexico except for some blueberries from Chile,” and while pricing deals aren’t yet available, “look forward to that in a month or two, maybe in April and going into May.” Apples are also winding down and will be replaced by New Zealand apples in the summer. Rembert also gave a grape outlook: Grapes are currently out of South Africa right now but will soon move to Mexican grapes, with California grape season beginning in June. Local vegetables are just beginning to arrive, including “some little gem lettuce from Lancaster next week,” and “head lettuces coming the week after that.”

She highlighted California-grown Delta Queen asparagus and noted they are “on the lookout” for sustainably harvested ramps: “There aren’t that many farms that do that that we feel comfortable with.” Fiddlehead ferns have arrived as “a good sign of spring,” and she reminded members, “Make sure to cook them.”

Rembert also shared that the Coop has seeds in soil right now, and a new pallet of soil will arrive mostly on Thursdays over the next six or seven weekends. The Coop will also be running its small plant program through the spring, which she described as “really fun.” During the Q&A, member Serko Artinian raised concerns about the freshness of the raspberries. Rembert explained: “Raspberries have the highest sugar content, and they mold the fastest; sometimes, there’s more age on them than we would like.” Another member asked about reduced plastic packaging and lower-quality organic produce coming to the Coop. Rembert responded, “No, I haven’t noticed that,” regarding suppliers dumping poor-quality items at the Coop.

Dory Kornfield, a member of the Equity, Access and Community Committee (EACC), announced the upcoming launch of the Coop’s first-ever member demographic survey. The goal is to gather basic information about the Coop membership through a quick 15-question, five-minute survey. She emphasized that this is “not a household survey,” it’s an individual survey for people 18 and over. The questions will cover neighborhood, household composition, disabilities status, as well as some general demographic questions: age, race, gender and sexual orientation.

“The reason we are doing this is because the Coop doesn’t collect any of this information and we don’t know who we are or enough about ourselves to know if we are as diverse and welcoming as we say we are,” she said, noting that the data could help “inform and guide policy decisions, processes in the Coop.”

She cited childcare as an example: “Childcare has been a hot topic for a couple of years now, but we actually don’t know how many members have kids.”

Dan Weiss, a member of the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) since 2017, gave an overview of the committee’s role and process. “The Dispute Resolution Committee—our charge is to facilitate the resolution of disputes among members.” Weiss explained the committee handles “complaints of member misconduct,” including “conflict, goods, shopping for businesses, masking violations, violations of personal space, intimidation, harassment, incomplete work on shift.”

He described the work as consensus-based and guided by “GM-approved resolution procedures,” with two membership coordinators serving as liaisons. Weiss emphasized the committee’s standards: “Our members approach their work without prejudice. We set aside our political opinions to ensure the fair and equitable process for our membership.” He also addressed a recent development: “This month, we made a difficult decision to halt certain types of cases involving political issues at the Coop. We’re in the midst of legal proceedings related to these matters.”

Until a “reasonable framework” is developed, those cases will remain on hold, which he said has precedent: “We’ve had legal proceedings in the past involving civil rights issues, and we’ve had to pause on those cases.”

Bart DeCoursy from the International Trade Education Squad (ITES) reported that the group had signed on to a USMCA review organizational letter ahead of the mandatory six-year review of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement. He outlined their hopes for renegotiation: “End the offshoring of good-paying jobs, raise wages, strengthen rural communities, stop abuses of big tech, make medicine more affordable.” DeCoursy also

warned of the Trump administration's announcement of "reciprocal tariffs" beginning April 2, including a "25 percent tariff on all goods from any country that imports Venezuelan oil." He joked, "Almost by threatening one thing and walking it back, he could manipulate the market, but who's to say—he also just might not know what he's doing." He encouraged members to follow the squad on Bluesky to keep up on all things international trade.

A representative from the Personnel Committee gave a brief update, noting that the committee currently has only five members instead of the usual seven. They announced that in the April 1st Gazette, there will be an ad asking for more members, and encouraged anyone with experience in employment law, general management, staffing or conflict resolution to apply. The committee is also continuing the search for a new general coordinator to replace Joe Holtz: "Four people have been interviewed, and there's one or two more to be interviewed, and that's ongoing."

DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION

Existing DRC committee member Christopher Cox presented two new members up for election, Dorothy Lund and Olivia Goldberg, and four members who are up for reelection: Deb Magocsi, Lee Bantle, Melinda Daniels and Grace Protos. Cox noted that the committee received dozens of applications for these spots, "definitely more than we could handle," and emphasized that this was "just the first step in helping rebuild the committee to handle our caseload."



Dispute Resolution Committee candidate Olivia Goldberg addressed the meeting. New candidate Olivia Goldberg shared her long-standing Coop connection: “My parents met at the Coop’s 16th anniversary party in 1989, so I might not actually exist without the Coop”—and cited her professional experience in early childhood education, the tree care industry and food service. Dorothy Lund, a law professor at Columbia University, touted her work studying how organizations manage conflict, saying her skills could help people “feel like they’ve been seen and heard.”

Returning members emphasized commitment, collaboration and deep Coop knowledge. Deborah Magocsi recalled joining when the committee’s name changed from “Disciplinary” to “Dispute Resolution” and said she strives to “listen with an open mind and an open heart.” Grace Protos said she valued being part of a process where “people feel as if they’re actually seen,” and noted that the work “comes in emails and phone calls and committee meetings” beyond standard shift hours. Melinda Daniels said she brings “patience, empathy and problem solving” and called it an hon-

or to continue the work. Helen Koh read a statement from Lee Bantle, who was absent, in which he said his goal was “to take down the temperature when members are in conflict.”

During the Q&A, members raised serious concerns about the committee’s recent decision to pause certain politically sensitive cases. One asked: “If a member punches me and said it’s because I’m calling for a boycott, will your committee decline to consider my complaint?” Other questions addressed transparency, the onboarding process, and whether incumbents disputed how only six candidates were advanced. In response, Magocsi explained: “We can only bring a couple of members on at a time because it is a lengthy onboarding process.” Current members of the committee emphasized their hope to grow the DRC to 16 members, doubling the current size. The vote followed, with all six unopposed candidates elected to the board.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES

The Board of Directors candidates all presented statements explaining why they should be elected. Dan Kaminsky submitted a video statement because he was attending “the biggest event in the pizza world... the Pizza Expo.” In his recorded statement, Kaminsky said he has been a Coop member since 2018 and is currently completing a master’s in social work: “Quite literally, my master’s degree is in the study and practice of Cooperation.” Other candidates introduced themselves in person, including Serko Artinian, who presented data from his informal poll of members, attempting to find out what percentage of people exclusively shop at the Coop and identifying pain points that members raised.



Board candidate Taylor Pate spoke at the meeting.

Lynn Husum, a Carroll Gardens resident who successfully sold her company last year, said she hoped to use her business acumen to serve the Coop. Taylor Pate highlighted her experience on nonprofit boards and at other food coops: “I believe that the solidarity economy and Cooperative movements are how we build community power.” Brandon West, the current board president, stressed his “institutional memory,” having the best record for GM attendance of any current members. He also hopes to make the Coop more democratic, easier to understand and less volatile. Ralph Yozzo advocated for term limits and listening to members. Noah Potter invoked our current president, saying he hopes to “Make the Coop Cooperative Again.” Elizabeth Tobier, the current Coop secretary, emphasized the importance of attendance at the General Meeting in her statement.

During the Q&A, candidates were asked to share what makes their platforms unique. Pate noted her “deep knowledge of supply chains” and experience with leadership

transitions (something the Coop currently faces with the departure of Joe Holtz), while Potter sought to facilitate “intramembership communication” and update bylaws. Artinian proposed “building coalitions with other coops” and using tech to bring the Coop into the future.

Candidates also discussed Coop challenges. Tobier said the hardest part is learning “how to communicate Cooperatively.” West cited structural tensions: “There are now differing ideas about what the board should do.” Several, including Yozzo, stressed the importance of preserving the Coop’s Cooperative spirit: “It means we cooperate, not rip ourselves apart.”

Members also raised concerns about candidate affiliations. One member asked the candidates to disclose endorsements, with Potter and Yozzo confirming they were endorsed by Coop for Unity. Another member asked if candidates aligned with Coop Members for Palestine, which Tonier dismissed as irrelevant, adding that it “has nothing to do with being a board member.” Finally, candidates responded to a question about hybrid meetings. Most supported the idea, while Tobier reiterated her view that board members should remain neutral on any upcoming votes or agenda items: “Our personal feelings as members would not come into play.”

A question about favorite Coop products offered a reprieve: For Serko Artinian, the heirloom organic oranges and for Ralph Yozzo, the gluten-free bread that’s not frozen—“Literally my family went up to Chatham, New York where they come from and we bought it there and it costs less at the Coop than right at the warehouse.”

Noah Potter refused to answer, “Just one? I don’t know if I can do that.” Lynn Husum shouted out the chickpea salad and the quiches that are no longer sold—“What happened to the quiches?” Taylor Pate said the White Mustache yogurt. West and Tobier both highlighted the beer selection.

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