

MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

June 24, 2025



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

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By Kim Velsey

The May 27 General Meeting was well attended, with a large number of members coming out to voice opinions, concerns and frustrations about what happened at the April 29 meeting, when the Board—for the first time in Coop history—adjourned the General Meeting without discussing the published agenda, went straight to the board meeting and voted to allow a Coop-wide referendum on hybrid meetings. Supporters and opponents of the Board’s move both turned out, many of them wearing buttons, and used every opportunity to speak up about the situation. There was also an extended discussion of hybrid meetings following Coop Secretary Elizabeth Tobier’s proposal to amend the bylaws to specify when Coop meetings could be held remotely.

Open Forum

The Open Forum segment was dominated by questions and comments on the events of the April meeting. Someone asked what would happen to agenda items from the last meeting—would they be carried over? Jaime Principe, commenting that the “standard procedure that has been around for as long the Coop has been completely disregarded,” wanted to know the name of the legal counsel who had advised the Coop that a referendum could be held after the last meeting—a demand echoed by several others, including Noah Potter. Potter also withdrew his name from the running for the Board. Someone else said that board members who voted to adjourn the GM and move on to the board meeting and referendum vote without public discussion should resign. A number of people in the audience applauded until the meeting chair told members to hold their applause.

One member asked, as she put it, a “less serious” question about why there weren’t peanut- and almond-butter grinders at the Coop as it seemed like it would be sustainable and affordable to have them.

Treasurer’s Report

Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, first noted that the Coop would be closing early, at 5 p.m., on Juneteenth (June 19).

Holtz then addressed what had happened at the April meeting and the Coop’s decision to allow a referendum on hybrid meetings to move forward: “We received a legal opinion that it was OK for the Board to take the action they did at the GM meeting. We’re not saying it’s right.” Holtz noted that they had deviated from the Coop’s general bylaws for the first time in the Coop’s history; the one other time the Board deviated from the membership’s advice, during the 1990s, the agenda was followed and advice was given. Holtz said that before the April GM, a message was sent out by members of the pro-Palestinian group, which led to what he called a “curated group” attending. “We have not had such curated general meetings in the Coop’s past,” said Holtz. Though what happened, “is legal,” he added, “we do not believe it is right or in the best interest of the Coop. The boards in the past have been trustees of the demo-

cratic process.” He noted, however, that “elections have consequences.”

Holtz said that the legal counsel was a firm that has a specialty department in cooperative law and that there was no written opinion; he felt he could not share the firm’s name without consulting them and speaking with the General Coordinators. When asked by a member what the cost of the legal advice had been and if the advice of membership was sought before seeking legal advice, Holtz responded that the Coop had not received an invoice yet, but that legal fees were a line item in the financial statement, to be used at the General Coordinators’ discretion, and that there was not “a history of micromanaging the staff.”

Asked how many times meeting venues had been cancelled because of an email campaign that threatened violence—referring to City Tech cancelling the Coop’s venue rental—Holtz said that he didn’t think violence was ever threatened, rather that people had called the venue and predicted it. “I wish we were at City Tech on April 29—that would have been the best thing, in my opinion,” he said.

Holtz then presented the highlights for the income statement for the 12 weeks ending April 27—the full eight-page document was sent to members via email. Compared to the same period last year, net sales were up: \$14.91 million this year vs. \$13.52 million last year. The gross margin is up 19.61% from 19.23%, and operating income went from \$2,000 negative to \$85,000 positive. These numbers were likely impacted by changing the base markup from 24% to 25%.

Alyce Barr asked about the legal expenses for the Unity council lawsuit initiated last year. Holtz said that total legal fees last year came to \$2,513 and this year so far are \$3,412, and that the Coop has a robust insurance policy for suits brought against it, but has to pay out \$35,000 before the insurance kicks in.

Member Committee Reports

Steve Jenkins of the Personnel Committee announced that General Coordinator Joe

Szladdek had been selected as the Coop's next General Manager. The Coop, with the help of the Carlyle Search Group, reviewed over 1,200 resumes, interviewed five candidates in person, did another round with three candidates, then a final round with Coop staff members. Szladdek's dedication to the Coop and his vision "made him a natural choice," according to Jenkins.

After that, Szladdek got up to speak, starting off with a joke that Coop members "got another Joe." He said it was an honor to be stepping into the role given how special our Coop is: "It's proof that a member-owned co-op can thrive on a large scale. We've thrived, with members providing over 80 percent of the labor." He added that he'd been a staff member for the past 15 years and a member for five more and "felt very lucky to be running this store." His top priority, he said, "will be the stability of the Coop."

"I DON'T THINK THE COOP WOULD BE HERE, AT LEAST NOT IN THIS FORM AND THIS SIZE, IF NOT FOR JOE [HOLTZ]."

INCOMING GENERAL MANAGER JOE SZLADEK

"We're employed by membership to help run our shared business," he added, which meant being "transparent when it matters, navigating disagreements, keeping the health of the Coop front and center. I think we significantly agree on more than [we] disagree on." Thousands of members, he said, rely on the Coop, unaware of the flyering and debates, and while their voices don't often show up at these meetings, they are important for the Coop to take into consideration. He also thanked Joe Holtz for his leadership and tireless work on behalf of the Coop "I don't think the Coop would be here, at least not in this form and this size, if not for Joe."

Szladdek also said he would be looking into ways to keep the Coop competitive: offering more prepared foods, building on the success of Court Street sandwiches, and

even possibly adding home delivery. Asked whether the Coop would be hiring another General Coordinator to replace him, Szladek said they are considering different options.

Bart DeCoursey of the International Trade Information Squad then gave a short presentation on Trump's tariffs, describing the havoc they were wreaking on the market while making projections difficult. He added that the committee has room for new members.



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Revolving Loan Committee Election

Kathy Martino, the only current member of the Revolving Loan Committee, and Joe Holtz, the staff liaison to the committee, were up for re-election and election, respectively. Martino explained that the committee oversees a fund, which currently has around \$67,000, that gives low-interest loans to new worker co-ops like the Greene Hill Food Coop in Clinton Hill. Greene Hill received two loans, one of which was paid

off, another which has about \$7,000 left, and the committee is in the process of evaluating another loan application from them.

Martino described her background working at the New York City's Comptroller's Office. Then Holtz explained the origins of the fund: It was created in response to the many inquiries the Coop received asking for guidance and help—the Coop would mail out information packets but felt that it was not enough, particularly for groups who wanted to start worker co-ops, which largely fell out of favor in the 1970s. The fund, which sits in a 501c3 (or non-profit) foundation, is a donor-advised fund, with the Coop serving as donor and supplying advice through the Revolving Loan Fund Committee. When loans are repaid, they are returned to the fund.

The Revolving Loan Fund Committee now has two members—one, who was not at the meeting, still has time on her term and therefore is not up for re-election. As Holtz explained, the committee often goes a long time without work, during which period members do not receive work credit.

One member suggested adding a third member to the team who could learn from their institutional knowledge, which Martino replied was a great idea.

The vote followed, with Martino re-elected and Holtz elected to the committee.

Pension Education and Reporting Committee Election

Nils Mellquist and Avi Fisher, both up for re-election to the Pension Education and Reporting Committee, explained their qualifications briefly, then, in response to member questions, explained at length that the committee helps manage the Coop staff's \$12 million pension fund by interfacing with the investment manager and keeping tabs on its performance. "We try not to advise, just make sure it is adhering to the mission statement," said Fisher. There was some confusion among audience members between the Coop mission statement and the pension's mission statement—which are different—and whether the investments were in companies that were socially respon-

sible. “I’ve been on the committee since 2019, and I’m surprised it’s taken someone that long to ask that,” said Fisher, explaining that there were no socially responsible carve outs, but that members could introduce resolutions to make them. One member suggested that staff members, but not the larger membership, have a say over whether the investments were socially responsible. A staff member got up to say that while they do not currently have a say over the pension fund, they do have control over their own 401Ks.

Both Fisher and Mellquist were re-elected.

Remote Meetings

Coop Secretary Elizabeth Tobier presented a proposal to amend Article VI of the by-laws to add a paragraph specifying under which circumstances a GM can be held remotely using a videoconferencing application. Speaking on the benefits of in-person discussion and engagement, she argued that remote meetings should only be held when the Coop cannot locate a meeting space in which to hold a scheduled meeting, either because of anticipated member turnout and/or a politically charged topic on the agenda. “There is this myth that the GM is the decision-making body of the Coop. No, it isn’t,” she said. “It’s a place where members come together. Working on ideas together is the actual work of the General Meeting. This is best achieved by getting together in person.”

She also presented graphs on hybrid meetings held during the pandemic, showing that while meeting attendance started out exceptionally high—around 500—it fell to levels comparable to or even lower than average GM attendance, around 100.

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COOP SECRETARY ELIZABETH TOBIER

A number of members then spoke in favor of and against the proposal. Several members spoke of their positive experiences with hybrid meetings in other groups, including community boards and unions. Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham recommended not only making meetings remote, but recording them and delaying voting until the next meeting to accommodate people who were not only unable to attend in person, but working or putting kids to bed during the meeting time.

Another member said that if an issue was so divisive that no one would rent the Coop space to discuss it, it was better to “let the issue lie” because “we don’t want to overturn what we’ve created.”

Chair Committee Goodbye

Imani Q’ryn announced that it was her last board meeting as a member of the Chair Committee after 18 years on the Board and 20 years on the committee. “It’s been an honor being on the Board and working with my fellow Chair Committee members,” she said.

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.