

MARCH GENERAL MEETING REPORT

May 5, 2026

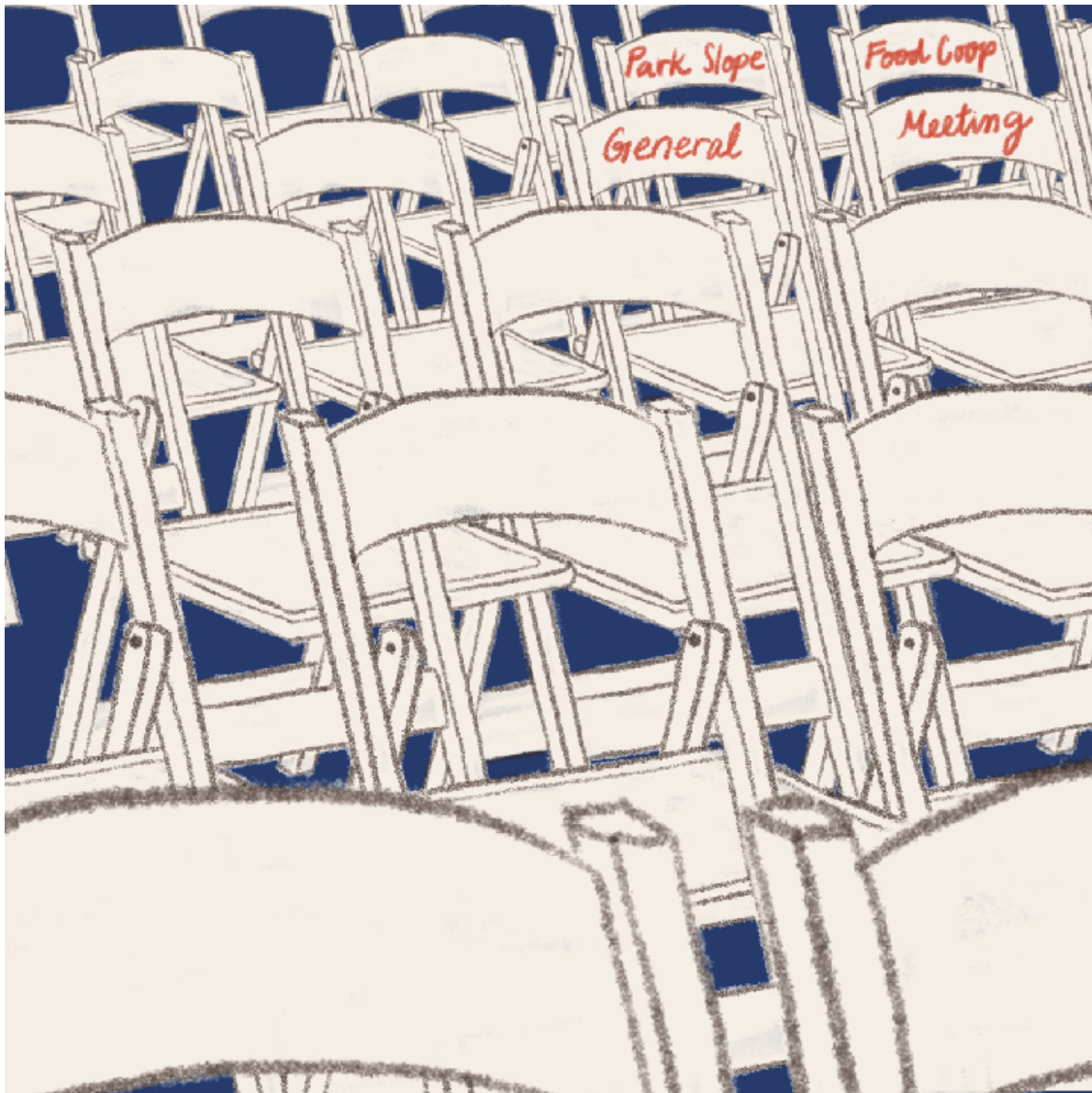


Illustration by Erin Krogh

May 5, 2026

By Emmett Lindner

Throughout the General Meeting, held on March 31, 2026, at the Picnic House in Prospect Park, there was a recurring chorus: “Please refrain from applause.”



Approximately 200 members filled the Picnic House. Photograph by Rod Morrison. The meeting’s agenda shifted from Coop finances to bylaws. Periodically, it prematurely veered toward the proposed boycott of Israeli goods—the last discussion item and what many considered the night’s main event. As talk of budgets and elections were interjected by opinions from both sides of the boycott debate, applause and snaps rippled through the in-person audience of roughly 200 people. For virtual attendance, 782 members signed up and approximately 360 signed on to Zoom.

The virtual meeting of remote members was projected onto a screen that was frequently flooded by laughing, crying and heart emojis.

“Please, stop sending emojis,” the chairman said. No one seemed to hear.



Request by the Chairman to stop sending emojis fell on deaf ears. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

Before tensions were raised as boycott proponents and detractors shared their views and candidates for the Coop’s open board seat made their cases, the meeting began with standard procedures.

AS OF FEBRUARY 21, 2026, NET SALES FOR THE YEAR WERE \$63 MILLION, UP MORE THAN 5 PERCENT FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

OPEN FORUM

The 15-minute section of the assembly, in which members can make general comments in 60 seconds or less, began with a call to maintain peace amid rising boycott tensions.

“I just want to urge us not to break this fragile thing over an issue—Palestine-Israel—that many of us passionately disagree about, but that we here at the Coop really have little impact on,” one member, Daniel, said.

The chairman interrupted to remind members that open forum discussions do not include items listed on the agenda.



Throughout the evening, members took the mic and spoke online to share their views—an avatar even made an appearance. Photographs by Rod Morrison.

The next member, Molly, broached a more domestic issue. They discussed a *Guardian* article that alleged there was a member of the Coop who worked for the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency and detailed the potential hazards of shopping alongside that individual, who remained nameless. The comment ended with a plea for the Coop to investigate. Applause rang out.

General Manager Joe Szladek spoke next. His comments were focused on the limited amount of time allocated to the topic of a boycott of Israeli goods and his concern about process and deliberation. He used his time to urge members not to rush the deliberation of important issues.

The remaining time of the forum went to members who discussed IT modernization and the possible resolution to amend bylaws.

“If it’s not resolved easily, then we resolve it the hard way,” one member, Noah, said over Zoom. The “hard way” was not described, and a handful of people in the audience looked at each other and voiced confusion.



Following the retirement of Joe Holtz last summer, Joe Szladek assumed the role of General Manager. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Mr. Szladek discussed the Coop's financial standings. As of February 21, 2026, net sales for the year were \$63 million, up more than 5 percent from the previous year. There were roughly \$13 million in expenses, and net income was about \$227,000.

He thanked the members for their efforts to keep the Coop running and food turning over.

A line item that members later came back to was the "consultant fees" expense, and legal fees that jumped from \$34,000 to about \$68,000. Part of the former went into

the search for a new general manager and an executive coach. The latter was, in part, because of more money required to hire legal support for member disputes.

“There are a number of lawsuits that the Coop is facing, not all related to this topic of a boycott,” Mr. Szladek said. “But that’s something where the Coop has fees related to that.”



Joe Szladek conducted a review of the Coop’s finances. Photograph by Rod Morrison. Mr. Szladek noted that electronic card payments had gone up, the Coop had spent more on digital shelf pricing, and the Coop last year spent \$15,000 providing masks to members, to ensure everyone could shop equally and comfortably on days that require them.

Prepared foods, a more recent addition to shelves, have been doing gangbusters. Pre--

made sandwiches from Court Street now account for about 1 percent of total sales. Those options could be a viable way to increase foot traffic and revenue, Mr. Szladek said.

He also said the General Coordinators were considering extending Coop operating hours.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES

Seven candidates for the open Board of Directors position took the stage, detailing their causes and taking questions. Serko Artinian, a member for nearly 12 years, called the Coop his second home and said that it had untapped potential. A majority of members, he said, told him that they did not buy all of their groceries at the Coop. He alluded to the boycott debate, saying that he believes in members voting with their carts and in decisions made by broad consensus.

“WHEN WE INCORPORATED, WE NEEDED PEOPLE ON THE BOARD WHO WOULD KEEP THE FLAME ALIVE, KEEP THAT FLAME OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY ALIVE,” MR. HOLTZ SAID.

Taylor Pate said she had a commitment to the solidarity economy, and she believed that making decisions together was vital for the Coop’s democratic values. She detailed her history of working with other coops to make sure people who have long lacked access to food were provided the means to feed themselves and their families. She ended by stating her support for Palestine, which elicited applause from several groups in the audience.

Barbara Mazor said that she joined the Coop in 1989, and she discussed what she saw as the responsibility of the Board.

“It is a failure of the duty of loyalty to prioritize an external cause over the good of the Coop,” she said. She added that a boycott on Israeli items would lead to a significant reduction in overall shopping volume.



Six of the seven candidates for Board of Director seats L to R: Serko Artinian, Tim Hospodar, Barbara Mazor, Taylor Pate, Rex Ledesma and Ralph Yozzo. Photographs by Rod Morrison

Rex Ledesma spoke next and stated that his goals were simple: “I want to empower

our community with transparency and abundance of conveniences in order to share and enjoy all that the Coop has to offer.” He discussed a digital service he had built to keep members informed of the Coop’s goings on and most recent shelf prices.

Joe Holtz, a Coop cofounder and former General Manager, approached the microphone.

“When we incorporated, we needed people on the board who would keep the flame alive, keep that flame of direct democracy alive,” Mr. Holtz said. “That’s why I’m running for the board, because I believe that the Coop has benefited from direct democracy.”

MS. MAZOR SAID THAT SHE BELIEVED THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE COOP IS REBUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND TRUST. “I SUPPORT DIALOG,” SHE SAID.

Ralph Yozzo, a member for over 20 years, said that he was encouraged by everything he heard. He asked to play a video on the dangers of artificial intelligence, but his allotted time had expired.

Tim Hospodar yielded his time for the night’s agenda. The candidates then took questions.

Ms. Pate said that she thinks the Coop has excellent buyers but could do more to be rigid with the producers it carries. She then specified she was referring to the proposed goods boycott and said she was a “strong supporter” of an Israeli boycott. She added that she has been on boards before with different opinions and was the vice president of her housing coop making fiduciary decisions. She was the only member running who supported the boycott.

Ms. Mazor said that she believed the most important issue for the Coop is rebuilding a sense of community and trust. “I support dialog,” she said, adding that people with strong opinions should meet and flesh out issues before it’s brought to the larger membership.

Mr. Holtz said that “over the coming years, the Coop should pay an immense amount of attention to the international principles of cooperation that are promulgated by the international cooperative Alliance.”



Former General Manager, Joe Holtz, seated center is also running for a seat on the Board. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

Mr. Artinian stated that there are “two things that are really important are unifying our members, our membership as a whole, so we all feel like we’re part of one Coop and we’re not broken into multiple pieces.”

He added: “The second area that I find as a candidate that we need to focus on is educating our users to understand what the future of tools and technologies like artificial general intelligence, even just A.I., have to do with the Coop, and how it could impact this in positive and negative ways.”

Mr. Yozzo, speaking of the need for closer scrutiny of Coop elections, said: “I think that’s a very good idea, because our voting used to be a couple hundred, now it’s up to like 6,000. We can look at the record and see if there’s any anomalies in how the voting happens.”

Speaking of the future, Mr. Hospodar said: “I’m wondering how many years from now until trucks are no longer allowed on Union, how long until the BQE goes away, and how long until we restart the second location committee to think about coastal locations.”

THE SLIDESHOW LISTED NINE PRODUCTS THE GROUP SUGGESTED BANNING, WHICH INCLUDED THREE DIFFERENT TAHINIS.

Mr. Ledesma advocated that more price transparency was needed, “so that Coop members can understand what is available for them to purchase in the visual sense, and also see how the price changes, so that they can see whether or not they’re buying things at a deal or buying things on sale.” He also stated that he believed in the “self-determination” of the Coop.

Mr. Artinian opined that “every and any topic that has brought consensus deserves full opportunity to be voted on, no matter what it is, whether it’s one of those boycotts or not, it doesn’t matter.”

Responding to a question about whether candidates would abide by majority decisions, Ms. Pate said that she votes for the will of the membership, and Mr. Yozzo stat-

ed that it was an impossible thing to say because the Coop has a fiduciary responsibility to its members and if the members wanted something against the fiduciary interest of the Coop, the Board would have to vote against it.



Alyce Barr was joined at the podium by Coop members advocating a boycott of Israeli products. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

BOYCOTT DEBATE

Those in favor of the ban took the stage. Alyce Barr spoke first and said that boycotts have a proven track record of eliciting change. She and a group of supporters behind her displayed a slideshow that noted, “We seek to avoid products that depend on the exploitation of others.” Some in the crowd noted the United States exploits many countries and its citizens.

“This is a very nuanced and complicated situation,” one member, Evan, said over Zoom. “For the sake of fairness and simplicity, rather than calling out Israel, there’d be a much easier way to just create guidelines, that if a country does X, they’re eligible for boycott. The U.S. would clearly fall into that.”

The Coop has a history of boycotts, Ms. Barr said, and the slideshow compared the Israeli occupation of Palestine to apartheid in South Africa.



A selection of Israeli products currently for sale at the Coop. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

The slideshow listed nine products the group suggested banning, which included three different tahinis.

Some members stated that there are dozens of genocides happening throughout the world. Several respondents said that this boycott would not preclude members from abstaining from other purchases. Some argued that the issue was too complex for a coop in Brooklyn to solve by banning a handful of products most do not have a connection to. Others said there is still work to be done.



Evan Abel participated in the boycott debate via Zoom. He was among the 360 members attending remotely. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

There were no definitive answers, and a divide among members appeared to persist

as the meeting concluded.

There was a vote to accept the previous session's minutes, which passed.