

TAYLOR PATE WINS BOARD SEAT, DEFEATING COOP CO-FOUNDER JOE HOLTZ

July 28, 2026



Taylor Pate, with Joe Holtz at left. Photographs by Michael Berman.

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By Leila Darabi

Photos by Michael Berman

Members elected Taylor Pate to the Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting held the evening of Tuesday, June 30. Pate defeated a field that included Coop co-founder and former General Manager Joe Holtz despite a coordinated campaign urging members to vote against her.

Pate received 3,447 yes votes, 813 more than Holtz, and was the only candidate elected to the Board's lone open seat. Her victory came despite endorsements from Coop 4 Unity urging members to vote no on her candidacy and paid social media advertisements by a seemingly related group called Israel War Room promoting Holtz and opposing both Pate and fellow candidate Tim Hospodar. Meanwhile, the Instagram account Park Slope Food Coop Members in Solidarity with Palestine endorsed Pate, while opposing Holtz and fellow candidates Barbara Mazor, Ralph Yozzo and Serko Artinian. They also distributed a voter guide and campaign video ahead of the election and members handed out copies of the group's newsletter, *Express Checkout*, outside the meeting.

The election concluded the Coop's 2026 Annual Meeting, where members also reviewed the Coop's audited financial statements (PDF) before convening the June General Meeting, during which they voted to retain the Coop's independent auditors and reelected the Board's existing officers.



Members at the meeting.



Ben Sacks wants the Coop to use data to make shopping lists.

A QUIETER MEETING, FAMILIAR DIVISIONS

The first annual meeting since members voted in May to boycott Israeli products opened with a noticeably different atmosphere from recent General Meetings.

The Prospect Park Picnic House filled steadily as members arrived, though there was no line stretching outside the building as there had been during the boycott debate. Unlike recent General Meetings, which opened with member comments, the annual meeting began with the contested election for one open Board seat.

"I just want to acknowledge the last couple of meetings of the Coop have been quite contentious and heated," Chair Committee member, Genevieve Yue, told members.

Referring to May's record-setting meeting, she said the Chair Committee had been working to improve members' experience after "the largest General Meeting ever held at the Coop."

For much of the evening, the atmosphere reflected that effort. Applause was limited, interruptions were rare and discussion remained largely focused on candidates and governance.



Yuri Weber explains Coop sourcing priorities.

BOARD CANDIDATES FACE THE MEMBERSHIP

Seven candidates sought the Board's lone vacant seat.

Before candidate statements began, Board President Brandon West read a message from incumbent board member Tim Hospodar announcing that he was withdrawing from the race in protest of an item passed at a previous general meeting that would require the Board treasurer to be a high-ranking Coop staff member involved in the Coop's finances, calling the requirement "unfair, if not undemocratic" and "a dangerous precedent." Because online voting had already opened, Hospodar remained on the ballot.

The remaining candidates offered sharply different visions for the Coop.



Holtz reflected on helping found the Coop in 1973 and described Board members as “the keepers of that flame” of direct democracy.

Pate, a food policy professional and former housing cooperative Board member, emphasized democratic governance while expressing support for the May boycott vote.

“I’m really proud of our Coop for fighting for human rights and for using our voices to vote,” she said.



Rex Ledesma

Rex Ledesma and Serko Artinian focused on technology, transparency and improving members’ shopping experience. Artinian also emphasized that he was “not endorsed

by any group.”

Appearing remotely via Zoom, Barbara Mazor argued that the debate surrounding the boycott had exposed broader governance concerns.

“Democracy means that you listen to all sides,” she said. “It’s not a democracy when only one side gets to speak.”

Questions from members centered on whether candidates would uphold the Coop’s May vote to boycott Israeli products if elected and whether they had been transparent about endorsements or affiliations with organized groups campaigning in the election.

Member Damien Neva asked Holtz about paid social media advertisements from a group called Israel War Room directing members to Coop 4 Unity’s website while promoting his candidacy and opposing Pate.

“I wasn’t aware of that group or those activities,” Holtz replied. “As a Board member, if I were to be elected, what would I do about people’s activities outside the Coop? I don’t think there’s much we can do.”

Members also repeatedly questioned Holtz about his relationship with Coop 4 Unity.

“You have been endorsed over and over and over by Coop 4 Unity,” one member said. “Why have you not disclosed your affiliation with Coop 4 Unity and your alliance with them?”

Holtz rejected that characterization.

“I’m not affiliated with any group of members,” he said. “I am affiliated with all members who love the Coop.”

The question of whether Board members should implement the will of the membership also surfaced repeatedly. Asked directly whether she would uphold member decisions, Pate answered unequivocally.

“Yes, I would always uphold the will of the membership. That is no question,” she said.

Mazor offered a different perspective, arguing that directors have an independent legal obligation to act if members approve actions that could harm the Coop.

“If the members did something that was illegal or damaging to the Coop, even if everybody wanted to do it, I would be obliged and obligated, legally obligated, to turn that down,” she said.



Joe Szladek

Mazor also faced questions about remarks she made during April's General Meeting referring to "Arab supremacy," comments General Manager Joe Szladek later criticized as divisive in an email to members sent on May 4. His email referenced the comment without naming Mazor.

During the June meeting, Mazor acknowledged that she had made the comment, claiming she had been referring to "a historical fact of Arab hegemony and the subjugation of all the native peoples of the Near East."

Responding later to questions about Coop 4 Unity, Mazor said the group's concerns were about governance rather than Middle East politics.

"We call ourselves Coop 4 Unity because we support the cooperative principles of the International Cooperative Alliance," she said.



Collecting votes.

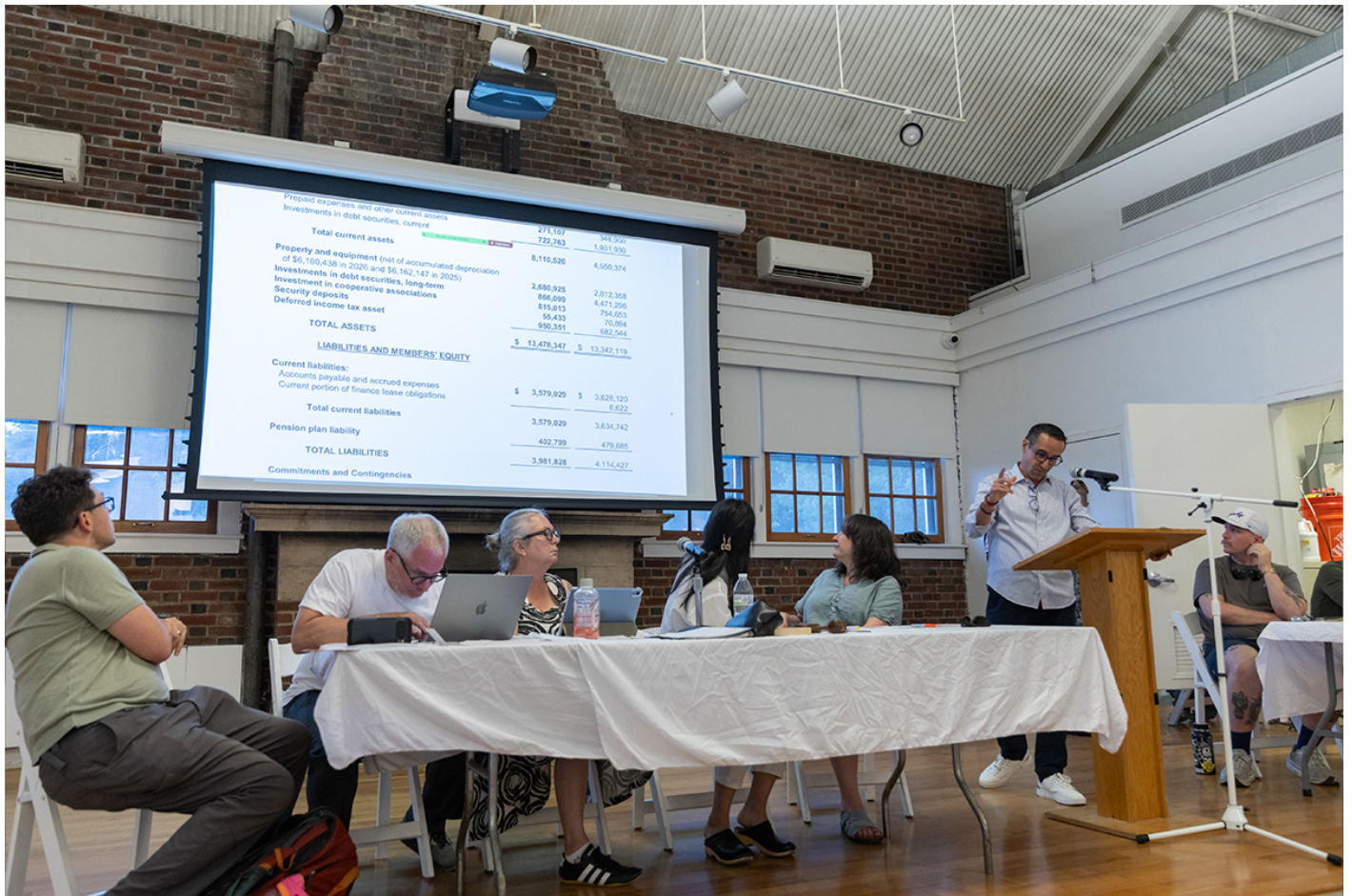
THE RESULTS

When voting closed, Pate emerged as the clear winner. She received 3,447 yes votes and 2,185 no votes. Holtz received 2,634 yes votes and 3,091 no votes. Rex Ledesma received 2,433 yes votes and 1,724 no votes, the only other candidate to receive more yes than no votes, though Ledesma was not elected because only one seat was available. Barbara Mazor received 1,746 yes votes and 3,748 no votes; Serko Artinian received 1,945 yes votes and 3,096 no votes; Ralph Yozzo received 1,500 yes votes and 3,453 no votes; and Tim Hospodar, who had withdrawn from the race after voting had begun, received 1,294 yes votes and 2,962 no votes.

FINANCIAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS HEALTHY BALANCE SHEET

Following the Board election, members turned to the remaining business of the annual meeting: the presentation of the Coop's audited financial statements.

Representatives from Cornick, Garber & Sandler reported that the Coop remained financially healthy, with sales exceeding \$63 million, a return to a modest net profit after posting a loss the previous year, and changes to the Coop's cash and investment holdings that prompted questions from members.



Sal Vicari from the Coop's accounting firm.

Members pressed the auditors on market volatility, the Coop's long-term pension obligations, rising healthcare costs and the decision to shift investments into cash. The auditors said the Coop's balance sheet remained strong. Pension trustee Terry Meyers said the Coop's pension plan had recently been evaluated as approximately 17 percent overfunded and explained that the Coop continues to make annual contributions under its funding formula.

The annual meeting concluded following the financial presentation.



Marita Downes wants to keep the accounting firm.

Members then convened the June General Meeting, where they voted to retain Cornick, Garber & Sandler as the Coop's independent auditors before reelecting Brandon West as president, Tess Brown-Lavoie as vice president, General Manager Joe Szladek as treasurer and Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones as secretary.

By the end of the evening, the Coop had one new Board member, but otherwise an unchanged roster of officers of the Board of Directors.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She posts photos of the food she makes with Coop ingredients on Instagram (@persian_ish).