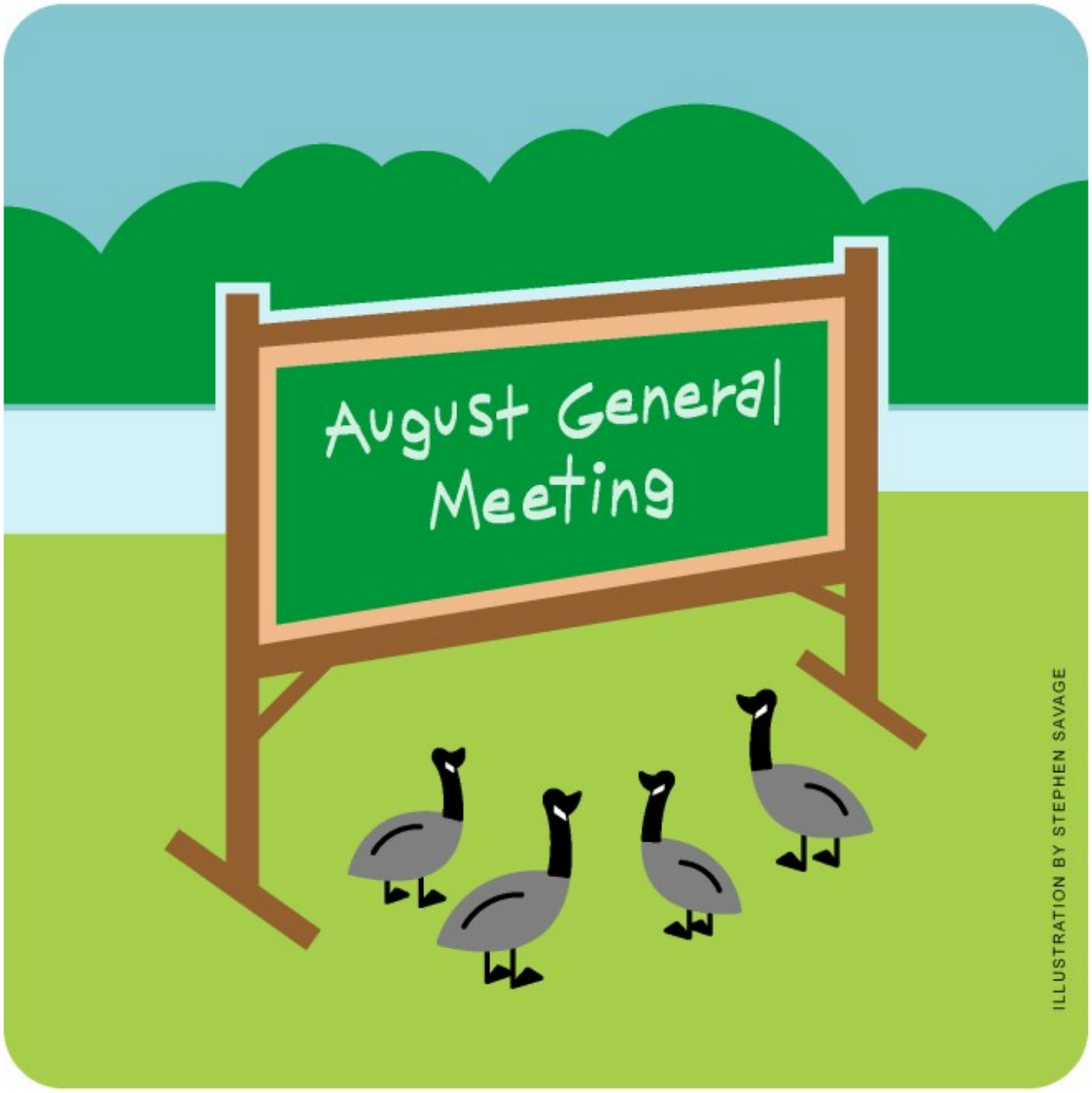
AUGUST GENERAL MEETING: NEW APPOINTMENTS AND DEBATE OVER HYBRID MEETINGS

October 7, 2025



October 7, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

With the end of summer on the horizon, more than 100 Coop members attended the August General Meeting at the Picnic House in Prospect Park, where they approved a slate of new appointments. The Coop's board also debated a contentious proposal about moving toward a hybrid meeting structure next year.

OPEN FORUM

The meeting started with Open Forum statements. Some were straightforward, such as member requests to make the cilantro and parsley less wet and reinstate work credit for attending General Meetings.

Others were written statements that called on the General Coordinators to share the legal opinion that upheld the Coop's Board of Directors actions in the April 2025 General Meeting, when they voted to approve a referendum on hybrid meetings.

One member, Pam Thomas, presented an idea for a new kind of boycott, against LesserEvil popcorn, whose CEO, Charles Coristine, is the father of a staffer of President Trump's DOGE initiative, Edward Coristine.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Joe Szladek, the Coop's new general manager, reported that the Coop's year-to-date sales through July 20 were up 9.3 percent over the previous year.

He attributed the increase to longer opening hours, growth in membership and inflation. The Coop's gross margin—the money left over after subtracting the cost of goods from sales—increased by about $600,000. However, operating expenses have gone up a little more, by about $700,000.

The increase in operating expenses is partly related to one-off expenditures, such as the roll out of the new electronic shelf price labels, which make it easier to update prices, for approximately $50,000 and an increase in electronic payment service charges from our current provider of approximately $40,000.

MEAT REPORT

Masha Bezlepkina, the Coop's meat and prepared food buyer, presented a summary of recent farm visits, which were an opportunity to review practices at our supplying farms.

Interestingly, she noted that she is a vegetarian.

"So I knew nothing about meat, but I can differentiate between steaks now," she joked. "These farm visits were very educational for me."

The Coop strives to source meat from small farms and small farm partnerships. Bezlepkina explained that "the idea is that when you support small family farms, you allow them to make more profit. If farmers are more profitable that means they will care about the soil, and that means the animals will be healthy and the meat that comes from these animals will be more nutritional."

Following a member vote in 2002, the Coop can sell only 100 percent grass-fed and grass-finished beef. Bezlepkina reported that this typically requires around one acre per animal in a herd. For example, Slope Farms—a longterm farm partner of the Coop—has a herd of 100 to 120 animals located on its 97 acre farm.

Bezlepkina said a new partner for the Coop, Hickory Nut Gap Farms, sources beef from farms in North Carolina, Georgia and a few other southern states, where they can graze the animals year-round by moving them between mountainous regions in the summer, and coastal regions in the winter.

The farm partnership is interested in better making the nutritional case for its 100 percent grassfed beef. "They talk a lot about nutrition," Bezlepkina said. "However, they are very interested in actually testing it. They submitted some of their meat samples to organizations for testing, and they would like to develop standard tests." These tests will aim to demonstrate the nutritional benefits of grassfed cattle.

Member Robbie Gottlieb asked about whether the Coop was also selecting farms based on how they treat workers. Bezlepkina stressed that the Coop sources meat from “super tiny” farms, often only run by one person, where “these farmers are fanatics. It is really hard, but they love their jobs.”

The least encouraging outcome from the educational visits was on the outlook for the price of beef. “Usually the markets go up and then they come down,” said Bezlepkina, “but this market is just going up and up.”

COMMITEE REPORTS

International Trade Education Committee member Bart DeCoursy provided a brief narrative of what he believes are the negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its successor, the United States–Mexica–Canada Agreement (USMCA). He said the pacts have resulted in a “a dramatic increase in the agribusiness market share concentration and, as a result, small farmers were hit the hardest.”

NEW COORDINATING EDITORS FOR THE LINEWAITERS’ GAZETTE

The first agenda item was the election of Co-Coordinating Editors for the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. Petra Lewis, an editor for the Gazette since 1999 and a member since 1994, explained the role. “Coordinating editors are responsible for overseeing the Gazette’s editors, writers, art directors, photographers, illustrators and production teams,” she said. “They play a crucial role in the quality, content and overall direction of the Gazette.”

Six candidates responded to a job posting in November, of which three were presented for election for the Co-Coordinating Editors roles: Eric Baldwin, Lily Rothman and Whitney Curry Wimbish. (Rothman is the managing editor of *Time* magazine.)

In response to questions about how the Co-Coordinating Editors would review guidelines for selecting submitted work for publication, Baldwin said they do not want to

“be the voice of the Gazette, but to guide that process. I believe that all of us are in agreement that that’s the role of an editor, to shepherd along your voices and make sure that this is a communal plural voice.”

All three candidates were elected.

ELIGIBILITY FOR POSITION OF TREASURER

Bookkeeping Coordinator Terry Meyers—along with Membership Coordinators Jana Cunningham and Yuwie Tantipech—led a presentation for the second agenda item: a vote to modify the language in the PSFC Guide to General and Annual Meetings to tighten the eligibility requirements to be elected as Treasurer of the Coop. The suggestion would specify that any candidate for the position “must, at the time of the election, be an upper-level management staff person who is chiefly responsible for the financial operations of the Coop.”

The item was presented as a common sense clarification of existing precedent: for the past 25 years of the Coop, the Treasurer has been an upper-level management staff person. Meyers said that “for the bookkeeping department in particular, having a member worker in the role of treasurer and thus not fully versed in all the financial aspects of the Co-op and only on site intermittently would be untenable. It would simply make the smooth functioning of the Coop impossible.”

Many members spoke in support of the motion from the floor; however, there were some comments with a note of caution. Adam Rosenberg was concerned that the candidate pool for treasurer would be overly restricted by the motion.

The proposed motion was voted by members to instead be considered an amendment to the Coop’s bylaws. It passed by a vote of 97 to 35, more than the threshold for a bylaw amendment, which requires a two-thirds majority.

HYBRID MEETINGS

Most of the drama occurred after the monthly meeting, during the board meeting that followed.

The procedural wrangling began with a complicated dispute between a Coop member and the Coop's corporate secretary about the previous monthly meeting's draft minutes, which led to those minutes not being approved.

The draft minutes will be amended and then presented again for a vote at the September meeting.

The discussion then turned to an issue that has roiled the Coop over the last year: whether to adopt a hybrid meeting format. Board President Brandon West took the stage.

"I know there's been a lot more conversation at the board meetings than usual, but I wanted to take this time to do this one more time and talk about something that's very pertinent and important to everyone at the Coop," he said.

West noted that a recent referendum about hybrid meetings reached a simple majority typically needed to pass motions, but fell short of the supermajority that would be needed to amend a bylaw.

West continued: "We need to be able to come to a decision about how we conduct a general meeting and it needs to not be weighed down by the conversation about BDS to the point that it shuts down our ability to function as a Coop."

BDS is the movement to boycott products from Israel, and questions have been raised at past general meetings about whether the hybrid meeting proposal is an effort to promote a BDS vote at the Coop.

West said that, after consulting with General Manager Szladek about the set of proposals, some Board members decided to make a motion to direct that general meetings be in hybrid format beginning in January 2026. West then explained a process for appointing a Hybrid Meeting Subcommittee to present the proposed details to the membership.

Szladek later clarified to the Gazette that his role was not in initiating or authorizing the decision, but in serving as a reference point for Board members on the governance lawyer's advice, as previously shared in an email to the membership sent on May 23 by Joe Holtz, Szladek's predecessor.

That email noted that such Board actions are legally allowable, though far outside the nearly 50 years of General Meeting precedent.

There was some confusion over the details for how this Subcommittee would be established, and concern about the limited consultation that the Chair Committee had in supporting this process. Members of the Chair Committee objected to the lack of consultation.

Fellow Board Members Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai, as well as Szladek, voiced support for the proposal, but collectively the Board agreed to continue discussion for another month and present the directive to a Board Vote at the next General Meeting, an approach suggested by Szladek.

Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.

JULY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

October 7, 2025



August 26, 2025

By William Doran

A boisterous crowd quickly filled the Atolye Venue and Bar on 6th Street in Gowanus for the Coop's July 2025 General Meeting (GM). General coordinator and committee reports followed a lively open forum, as did a full agenda that included committee elections and a vote to officially create the Plastics Reduction Committee.

OPEN FORUM

Nine members came up to share thoughts on a variety of issues, including hybrid meetings, the boycott of Israeli products and the Agenda Committee election to take place that evening.

Sentiments in favor of the boycott have grown significantly more pointed over the course of 2025. Six of the nine members who came up spoke very passionately about the war in Gaza. Member Gabriel Young quoted UN Secretary General António Guter-

res in calling it “the moral challenge of our century,” stating that “Palestinians are starving to death: 88 children as of yesterday.” He continued, “and yet we continue to stock food from Israel at our Coop.”

Member Damien Neva echoed the gravity of the situation: “Facing annihilation for the last 22 months, Palestinians in Gaza are now being subjected to a starvation campaign of an industrial scale by Israel.”

Member Noah Potter then came up to speak out against the candidacy of Adrien Weibgen for membership on the Agenda Committee. Chair Committee Member David Moss asked Potter to leave the stage and the venue after Potter accused Weibgen of expressing personal support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and highlighting her personal social media accounts on a flyer that was passed out on the sidewalk prior to the meeting.

> NEW GENERAL MANAGER JOE SZLADEK ADDRESSED THE HIGH TENSIONS FELT DURING THE OPEN FORUM AND RECENTLY AT THE COOP SURROUNDING THE BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI PRODUCTS.

Lastly in the Open Forum, member Makrand Bhoot reminded us of the Coop’s 50-year commitment to supporting CHiPS (Community Help in Park Slope) with donations of food and member labor. Members can select a shift at CHiPS for their work slot. Bhoot asked why the CHiPS shift does not have an assigned coordinator.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Before providing a thorough treasury report, new General Manager Joe Szladek—who succeeded Joe Holtz—addressed the high tensions felt during the open forum and recently at the Coop surrounding the boycott of Israeli products. He discouraged the publication of individuals’ names, saying, “This does really feel like it crosses a line.

Members are being publicly named, and there are flyers being passed out about them.”

Szladek also mentioned Members’ concerns about their physical safety on both sides of the boycott issue, stating that he felt compelled to seek help from Community Affairs and other mediation organizations to get advice on how to manage the tensions. After he rhetorically asked, “What do we do?” an audience member boldly shouted, “We vote!” This referred to a general membership vote on boycotting Israeli products—which lies at the heart of the current conflict.

COOP SALES THROUGH JUNE 2025 WERE AT ROUGHLY $25,000,000—AN INCREASE OF ABOUT 10.1% OVER THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR.

TREASURY REPORT

Coop sales through June 2025 were at roughly $25,000,000—an increase of about 10.1% over the same period last year, due to a number of factors: The Coop is now open 7% more hours; the markup on goods increased by 1% as of February 2025 and membership is approximately 4 to 5% higher than it was last year. Inflation also impacts this number.

The Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) as of June also went up from $18,000,000 to $20,000,000 over the same period last year. Gross Margin Dollars to date—the money we keep—is sitting close to $4,900,000, while operating expenses were $120,000 higher than that. As of August 2025, the Coop is operating at a slight loss. The Coop does have non-operating income that helps make up the difference—which includes things like new member investments and interest earned on Coop investments—totaling $160,000.

THE COOP’S GRAB-AND-GO REFRIGERATOR IS NOW BACK UP AND RUNNING. HIGH TARIFFS ON EQUIPMENT ADDED SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE COST AND THE TIME IT TOOK TO REPLACE THAT CASE.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORT

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky provided assorted updates on Coop operations and staff, along with a few announcements. The Coop’s grab-and-go refrigerator, typically offering Court Street Grocers sandwiches and sushi (among other treats), is now back up and running. High tariffs on equipment added significantly to the cost and the time it took to replace that case.

The Coop is changing the way food processing shifts are structured by combining bulk and cheese shifts into more generic food processing shifts to make member labor more flexible addressing day-to-day workloads. Astrinsky also mentioned that Food Processing is looking for squad leaders in both bulk and cheese. Interested members should have worked shifts on the squad they’re interested in leading and speak directly to food processing staff during their shift.

The Coop has also hired a new bookkeeper named Jacob Slaton. He is currently training under Kathy Hieatt, who will retire soon.

Astrinsky brought attention to author Sun Yu who wrote a book about the Coop called *Park Slope Food Coop: Fifty Years of Cooperation*, written solely based on archived editions of the *Gazette*.

Astrinsky added that the Coop is holding a special summer food drive to support the soup kitchen and pantry CHiPS. Donation boxes are located near the Coop exit through the end of August, or you can donate via a QR code at each checkout.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Member Sarah Schenck made some announcements on behalf of Wordsprouts, the Coop's longstanding reading series that features published authors who are also Coop members. The next event is Wednesday, September 24, at 7 pm at the Old Stone House of Brooklyn, at 336 3rd Street. It will feature Carina Finn's book, *Feast and Famine*. RSVP to Wordsprouts events at Eventbrite. Members may also make suggestions for future events or nominate featured speakers via email at psfcwordsprouts@gmail.com. You can also follow the Wordsprouts squad on Instagram at @foodcoopwordsprouts.

THE COOP COOKING SQUAD HOSTED ITS FIRST IN-PERSON COOKING CLASS SINCE THE PANDEMIC ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, AT THE COOP. THE CLASS FEATURED BREAKFAST TACOS.

The International Trade Education Squad (ITES) provided an update on tariffs. The Trump Administration continues to negotiate tariffs and extend deadlines for agreements, making for a very uncertain future. The squad also highlighted that the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) is coming up for its six-year review next year. ITES is seeking new members. If interested, contact the squad via its Bluesky Account at trade@psfc-trade.bsky.social.

The Coop Cooking squad hosted its first in-person cooking class since the pandemic on Wednesday, July 30, at the Coop. The class featured breakfast tacos, and it was also broadcast on Zoom. You can watch the classes, which are hosted monthly, here on the squad's You Tube page. Next class will feature an eggplant dish by *Gazette* reporter Leila Darabi on Wednesday, September 24, at 7:30 pm. Learn more at foodcoopcooks.org or on the squads Instagram page: instagram.com/foodcoopcooks.

AGENDA

The evening's agenda included two elections: Members approved Adrien Lorenzo Weibgen (190–21) and Leslie Schultz (185–10) to serve on the Agenda and Personnel Committees, respectively, following brief presentations of their experience and relevant qualifications.

> THE PLASTICS REDUCTION COMMITTEE WILL NOW BECOME AN OFFICIAL WORKING COMMITTEE AT THE COOP TO WORK WITH STAFF TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO SHRINK OUR RELIANCE ON PLASTICS.

The Plastics Reduction Committee was also approved by the membership by a vote of 181–14. This new committee made a full presentation of their proposal to the GM in January 2025 and will now become an official working committee at the Coop to work with staff to develop strategies to shrink our reliance on plastics. Members may email the new committee at reduce.plastic.psfc@gmail.com to offer suggestions, ask questions or participate.

The agenda concluded with a beautiful presentation by Coop Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner titled "A Call for Cooperative Renewal," which guided members through a critical reconsideration of the general meeting format and how we make decisions. His presentation compared the Coop's somewhat antiquated form of governance to its sophisticated membership management and inventory systems.

He noted, "Despite increasing membership tenfold, the general meeting format hasn't meaningfully changed in decades." He continued, "Democratic Coop governance should involve all members, but our system doesn't come close." His proposal focused primarily on ways the Coop can use technology to push the meeting format and decision-making processes into a more equitable and inclusive future.

He noted the inconsistency of attendance at meetings and the fact that only roughly 1% of the Coop's entire membership are able to attend a single, in-person meeting (and vote). You can find Weiner's full presentation on You Tube as well as the full text of Weiner's presentation. Weiner also solicits questions and comments from membership via an online submission form.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Board President Brandon West came to the stage to lead the Board of Directors meeting. Directors Tim Hospodar and Lynn Husum were also present. The Board voted to officially accept the advice of the membership, as well as the items voted on during the meeting.

Board Member Husum presented the findings of a hybrid meeting referendum paper recount called by the Board at the June 2025 Annual Meeting. The recount took place at the Coop on Wednesday, June 23. Husum reported that 6,371 votes were cast online via Simply Voting and 133 paper ballots were cast, for a total of 6,504 votes. Of the 133 paper ballots, 79 were yes and 54 were no. No discrepancy was found between the initial count and the recount of the paper ballots. Two Coop members working a Flex shift on the shopping floor were tapped at random to conduct the recount in the presence of Board Members Husum, Keyian Vefai and Hospodar, along with the two members who were the original paper ballot counters, General Coordinator Matt Hoagland, IT Coordinator Gerald Barker and Coop General Manager Joe Szladek.

William Doran is a licensed architect, educator and food writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Though originally from New Orleans, LA, he has been a Coop member and New York City resident since 2022. He has taught cooking classes for the Coop (foodcoopcooks.org) and publishes a free quarterly newsletter at adventurouscooks.com.

ALL HOT AND BOTHERED: THE JUNE ANNUAL MEETING REACHED A FEVER PITCH

October 7, 2025



AN ACCOUNT OF A FRAUGHT NIGHT AT THE PICNIC HOUSE

August 5, 2025

By Liz Welch

It was unseasonably hot on June 24, with temperatures surpassing 100 degrees—but the sweltering heat did not stop the PSFC General Meeting from taking place. Nor did it get in the way of scads of members lining up outside the Prospect Park Picnic House for what promised, based on the sight of protesters milling about, to be a con-

tentious evening.

One woman, who gave only her first name as Sue, was holding a sign that said: “What other country are you boycotting?”



Her message referred to the ongoing and difficult debate around selling Israeli products at the Coop, which Sue had read about in local papers. “I was so upset,” she said. “I’m not even a member of the Coop, but I wanted to come show my support.”

Member Noah Potter held a sign that read: “Save the Coop from The Blame, Silence and Dehumanize Movement.” The “B”, “D” and “S” were drawn in purple to stand out among the otherwise blue letters—and to signify the “Boycott, Divest and Sanction” movement that is a global “Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality” according to www.bdsmovement.net.



As I waited to enter the Picnic House, somebody handed me a slip of paper that stated:

“Protect The Coop! Vote in the Board of Directors Elections!
Vote NO Dan Kaminsky, Taylor Pate, Brandon West.
Vote YES Serko Artinian, Lynn Husum, Elizabeth Tobier, Ralph Yozzo.”

This flyer, published by Coop 4 Unity, also advocated for other issues on the meeting agenda, including voting NO on hybrid meetings as well as voting for the two open positions for the Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors has five seats and plays “a crucial role in running the Coop” according to a story in the March 11 *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. “Board members make their decisions based on the advice of Coop members who attend the monthly General Meetings.”



A few weeks before the June 2025 General Meeting, Joe Holtz, the General Manager and co-founder of the Coop who was set to retire from his duties on June 30, sent an email to all Coop members, asking everyone to vote in this election. While he made it clear that he was speaking only for himself, he wrote the following in an official capacity:

`This election could shape the future of our Coop.`

Here's why: Two candidates running for the Board, Dan Kaminsky and Taylor Pate, are sponsored by an organized group within the Coop called PSFC Members for Palestine. If they win, five out of six Board seats will be held by people aligned with the BDS movement. That would give us a Board with a clear majority pushing to have the Coop take a side in one of the world's most divisive conflicts.

Right now, the devastating crisis in Gaza and Israel is not only causing unimaginable human suffering—it's also creating real division in our Coop. Some members feel silenced. Others feel unheard. Passionate views are turning into personal conflicts, and I'm deeply concerned about how this is affecting our community.

I don't remember ever receiving such an email about Coop matters prior to Holtz's message. Before I had even signed in for my reporting duty, I knew that this was not going to be a typical General Meeting. It was not the night to discuss whether or not to offer plastic bags in the produce aisle.

At the check-in table, I was handed a press pass and a paper ballot to vote for the Board Election. I decided to just take notes—and not participate in the vote. I would simply do my job, and report on what happened so that every person who reads this article can come to his or her own conclusion.



I took a seat in one of the rows of white folding chairs that filled the cavernous space. On the stage at the front of the room, four members of the PSFC Chair Committee sat at a table with a large screen behind them. As everyone waited for the seats to fill, a woman handed me a booklet titled “The Olive Press,” which was published by Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine (PSFC4Pal), which has been calling for boycotts on Israeli products at the Coop dating back to 2012, according to their website. Their 12-page publication included a 10-page interview with Amir, a farmer in Palestine who talked about how his village Khusa’a had been destroyed by Israeli forces, and the majority of his family members killed.

On the back page, the PSFC4Pal states its request for “[a] Coop-wide boycott of Israeli products,” explaining that “by contributing to the Israeli economy and to normalization of that government’s actions, our purchase of such goods currently makes the PSFC complicit in Israel’s apartheid system and anti-Palestinian genocide.”

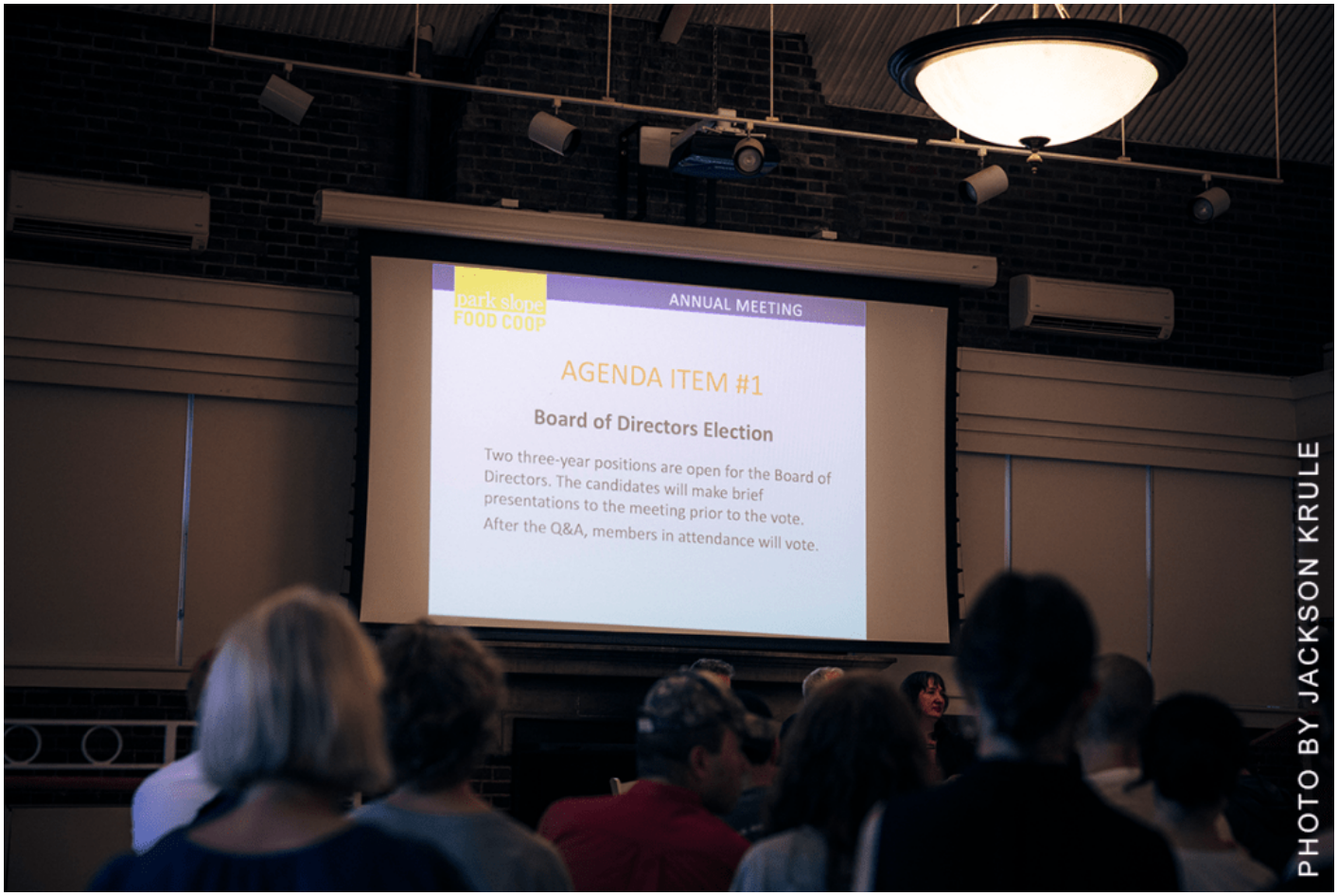
I was only able to read that back page before the meeting officially began. At 7:10pm,

Chair Committee member David Moss welcomed everyone and then got down to the first order of business: to meet the candidates running to fill two spots on the Board of Directors. One member, Imani Q'Ryn, who had served as Vice President, was vacating her spot. Another Board member, Brandon West, was seeking re-election after his three-year run. There were two board openings possible and six new candidates, in addition to West.

> "BEFORE I HAD EVEN SIGNED IN FOR MY REPORTING DUTY, I KNEW THAT THIS WAS NOT GOING TO BE A TYPICAL GENERAL MEETING."

All PSFC members had the opportunity to read the bios of those running online prior to the meeting. They were able to vote online.

This evening was the last possible moment for people to vote in person—the majority of Coop members had already voted online prior to the meeting—and for those paper ballots to be counted in order to determine the winners. It was also a chance to hear the candidates speak and field questions.



The chairperson gave clear instructions:

- Candidates will have up to one minute to make a presentation.
- After their statement is read, the members of the audience can ask questions.
- Each candidate will have three minutes to respond to audience questions.

Serko Artinian was the first to speak. He stepped to the microphone and explained that his last name rhymes with “Armenian,” which also aptly described his background. His manner went from jovial to serious as he explained that he was running for “the survival of the Coop,” adding, “we need to band together and put our differences aside. We need to work together. Each member is equal to another.”

Lynn Husum was the next candidate listed, but she was unable to be present that evening. Her personal statement, which can be found in the March 11 issue of the

Gazette, was read in her absence. A member for seven years, and a business owner for 21 years, she focused on her experience balancing "efficiency with ethical business practices." A regular volunteer at CHiPS, she added that the Park Slope Food Coop "is more than just a place to shop—it is a model of what is possible when people come together with shared values. I love being a part of this cooperative world, and I would be honored to help guide its future."

Dan Kaminsky was up next. Born and raised in Brooklyn, the social worker, longtime community organizer, and guide for Scott's Pizza Tours started off with his personal position on the proposed boycott.

"I do support a boycott," he said, while adding that he would not let his leanings sway his commitment to represent all members if elected to the board. "I would support whichever way the members vote."



Taylor Pate was unable to attend and asked Kaminsky to read her candidacy state-

ment in her absence, including that she was “proud to be endorsed by PSFC for Palestine” and that she also “strongly believed that board members should look like” her. A member of several food coops in NYC, Tate first joined Greene Hill Food Coop and then joined Central Brooklyn Food Coop because she “was interested in organizing with other Black folks and building a grocery store that was built for those that have historically lacked access to fresh food in central Brooklyn.”

She joined the Coop three years ago and was committed to representing the voice of “other Coop members.”

Elizabeth Tobier was next in line to share her reasons for wanting to join the Board. A member since 1990, she had attended General Meetings off and on since 1998, and began regularly showing up in 2020. She said she was committed to representing the “full view of the wider membership,” adding that Board members “are expected to follow the lead of their members.”

Brandon West, the Board member who was running for re-election, has been a member since 2009, a squad leader and the current Board President. “I’m not endorsed by any groups,” he said, adding that, “I think we have some governance problems” and that we “need to have this debate and to figure out how to have this conversation in a clear way.”



The last candidate on the roster was Ralph Yozzo, who was not present as he was working the polls for the New York City democratic primary election that evening. His statement was read by a woman named Barbara Mazor. It was brief. A member for two decades, Yozzo wrote that he had worked in many capacities at the Coop, and that the walking shift “was his favorite.”

His statement ended with, “As a director I would mostly listen to the membership and it would be my honor to serve. I would also promise to only serve the [three year] minimum term to give everyone a chance.”

Before the floor opened to people with questions for the candidates, the Chairperson reminded the audience of the voting procedure, which included checking boxes on the ballot. Next to each candidate’s name were checkboxes for yes, no and abstain.

The rules were again stated clearly by the Chairperson:

- In order to be eligible, the candidates have more yeses than nos.
- When there are more candidates than spots available, the person receiving the most “yes” votes wins.



The first audience member question, from someone who identified himself as “M,” was around governance, which all candidates who were present answered briefly.

The next question came from a member named Richard who first asked rhetorically, “Why are we shopping at the Coop? For fair prices and great selection.” Then he added, “What does a political discourse have to do with it? Why do they need to inflict their political beliefs on us?”

Several people in the audience responded with loud claps.

Kaminsky was the first candidate to respond.

“Is the Coop a political entity? I would say yes,” he said. “We generally engage with our community—we’re part of a larger ecosystem.” He paused before adding, “In a democracy we are not only going to agree. That’s okay! That is healthy. Allow the democratic process to unfold.”

This statement was followed by more clapping.



Brandon West was the next candidate to address the question. “I agree with everything that has been said,” he said. “This Coop has struggled with change, and we need a process for that conversation.”

The third question was from a member named Jonathan who said this was his first time attending a General Meeting. “I‘ve heard that these meetings get contentious,” he said. “As a member who just goes to shop at the Coop, what is the worst-case scenario?”



This led to another hot topic: hybrid meetings.

Noah Potter, no longer holding his sign, approached the stage to ask his question. “I’m hearing a lot of discussion about being cooperative—and the inability to hold hybrid meetings,” he said. “I have reached out to Dan [Kaminsky] and other members about the boycott. Dan, are you willing to reach out and talk to me?”

He was getting emotional, prompting the Chairperson to call the equivalent of a time out.

This did not stop Kaminsky from responding: “You and I have talked, and I found it really helpful! You reached out to my personal email.”

The Chairperson once again called “Time!” as Kaminsky only had 15 seconds to speak. Potter shouted: “I reached out to your LinkedIn profile!”

The meeting attendees were then asked to fill in their ballots. They would be counted by the end of the night.

> A GASP RIPPLED THROUGHOUT THE CROWD BEFORE A WOMAN STOOD UP AND SHOUTED: “I’M A DISABILITY-RIGHTS ATTORNEY – IT IS UNACCEPTABLE!”

As the voting process began, Holtz was called to the stage to introduce the auditors who would then share their financial audit with members. It was the last time he would do so in his role as General Manager. As he took the microphone, loud applause erupted throughout the audience.

“Next Monday is my last day at the Coop,” he said, which explained the warm reception. He shifted to his agenda item, which was about the Coop’s financial audit. “This is a golden opportunity to ask questions about the finances,” he explained.

He next invited two auditors from the firm Cornick, Garber & Sandler to give their report.

Salvatore Vicari thanked Joe for another successful audit. “My second year presenting in person,” and made a joke about not getting the same applause as Joe. Vicari then went through the report, which was shared on the large screen on stage, and made it clear that the Coop was financially healthy. When he got to the statement of cash flows from operating activities, Sal interjected that it was his “favorite page.”

Following his presentation, audience members were invited to ask questions. The first was: “Our income dropped from last year to this year. Why?”

Vicari explained that the change in income was due to several factors, including rising operating expenses, along with wages, and an increase in prices. “The Coop is not going to lose a lot of money or make a lot of money,” he added. “It’s a coop.”

For the more specific questions, Vicari's colleague Zanna Masko took to the stage.

"The Coop was very cautious in investing," she explained. "Eventually there was an increase in interest rates. So the Coop decided to invest in CDs."

Another question was about a line in the audit called "member investment redeemable." There is a non-refundable member fee for $25. The second is a refundable investment for $100.

Holtz explained: "If a member leaves the Coop, the $100 they paid when they joined is refundable or redeemable." However, not everyone asks for that money back—and instead they remain part of the PSFC—just not as working members.

This led to another related question: John Gordon asked, "I saw on page 7 that 40% of the Coop members are eligible for shopping? Does that mean of the 16,000 Coop members, only 40% are shopping?"

Holtz thanked John for the observation and explained that the first page of the Coop's bylaws answers another related question: 'Who owns the Coop?'

"Every person who has a member equity investment owns the Coop," Holtz explained. "There are over 30,000 people who have these investments. Just because you are an owner does not mean you have the right to participate in the activities. Say someone was a member in 1995, and they moved away, and they did not take their $100, they are still an owner. What is 40% of X equals 16,000? That means 40,000 people own the Coop—but only 40% can shop."

Alyce Barr asked, "Why did the legal fees triple this year over the last year?"

Vicari responded, "The legal fees went from $11,776 to $33,970 due to a couple of lawsuits—so there were legal fees in defending the Coop. We did not think it was unwarranted."

Masko added: “We are not allowed to disclose the legal specifics—especially about employees and litigation.” Then she continued, “That is the question, is it more tense this year than last year? How do we protect the Coop from increasing tension?”

This got a wave of laughs and applause throughout the audience and prompted the motion to accept the financial report. The Chairperson asked audience members to raise their hands in favor. There were not any “no” votes.

As everyone waited for the board candidacy ballots to be counted, the Chairman moved to the next contentious item on the agenda: the vote around hybrid meetings.



He had a sealed envelope, which contained the results from a vote which needed a 2/3 majority in order to pass.

The chairman opened the envelope and read:

“Total votes cast 6,504.”

Again, applause erupted throughout the crowd.

- 4,321 voted YES or 66.43%
- 2,183 voted NO or 33.56%
- 66.67% needed to pass.

“It needed to be a 2/3 majority,” the Chairperson continued. “The referendum did not pass.”

A gasp rippled throughout the crowd. A woman stood up and shouted: “I’m a disability-rights attorney—it is unacceptable!”

Many people nodded in agreement and the Chairperson continued with the agenda, which included an update on facilities. Elinoar Astrinsky gave her report. “I am facilities manager,” she started. “The gods of refrigeration have not shined on the Coop.”

She went on to explain that an air conditioning valve needed to be replaced in the office, and that another air handler needed a new part. Also, the staff refrigerator died! That was all upstairs. Meanwhile, shoppers may have noticed that the grab and go case where the sushi and Court Grocers sandwiches are stocked has been out of order. A new part was ordered from China, she explained, “with extra tariffs on it.”

“For now, members can find sushi in the cheese and butter case,” Elinoar added, “And the salads and sandwiches are beneath the mushrooms.”

Also shared was the reason for the Out of Stock signs seen throughout the Coop. “32% of our groceries coming from United Natural Foods, Inc. They experienced a cyber attack which meant they could not take orders, receive deliveries or dispatch

trucks.”

This meant the Coop’s incredible and amazing buyers—many of whom were at the meeting—turned to their local relationships they have built over decades.

“We have less exposure because they are doing a great job, and pivot from one vendor to another,” Elinoar added, giving the buyers a shout-out.

Another round of applause.

As the meeting was coming to an end, attendees learned about new hires and departing staff. Receiving Coordinator Maggie Chan left to pursue her studies, and Receiving Coordinator Lisa Hidem was retiring after working at the Coop for 20 years. “She makes everything accurate, especially aisle 6,” Elinoar said. “She has strong opinions and high standards. She is our bread buyer and pie buyer too!”

Three new people have been hired as receiving coordinators: Garret Mukai, Gabriel Concha, and Marlen Tapia Jimenez.

Elinoar wrapped up with a big thank you to Holtz for his 50 years of service. “We are going to miss you. [Working with you has been an] experience of a lifetime. I am getting emotional.”

She then welcomed incoming General Manager Joe Szladek. “He will lead the way and we will give you lots of support.”

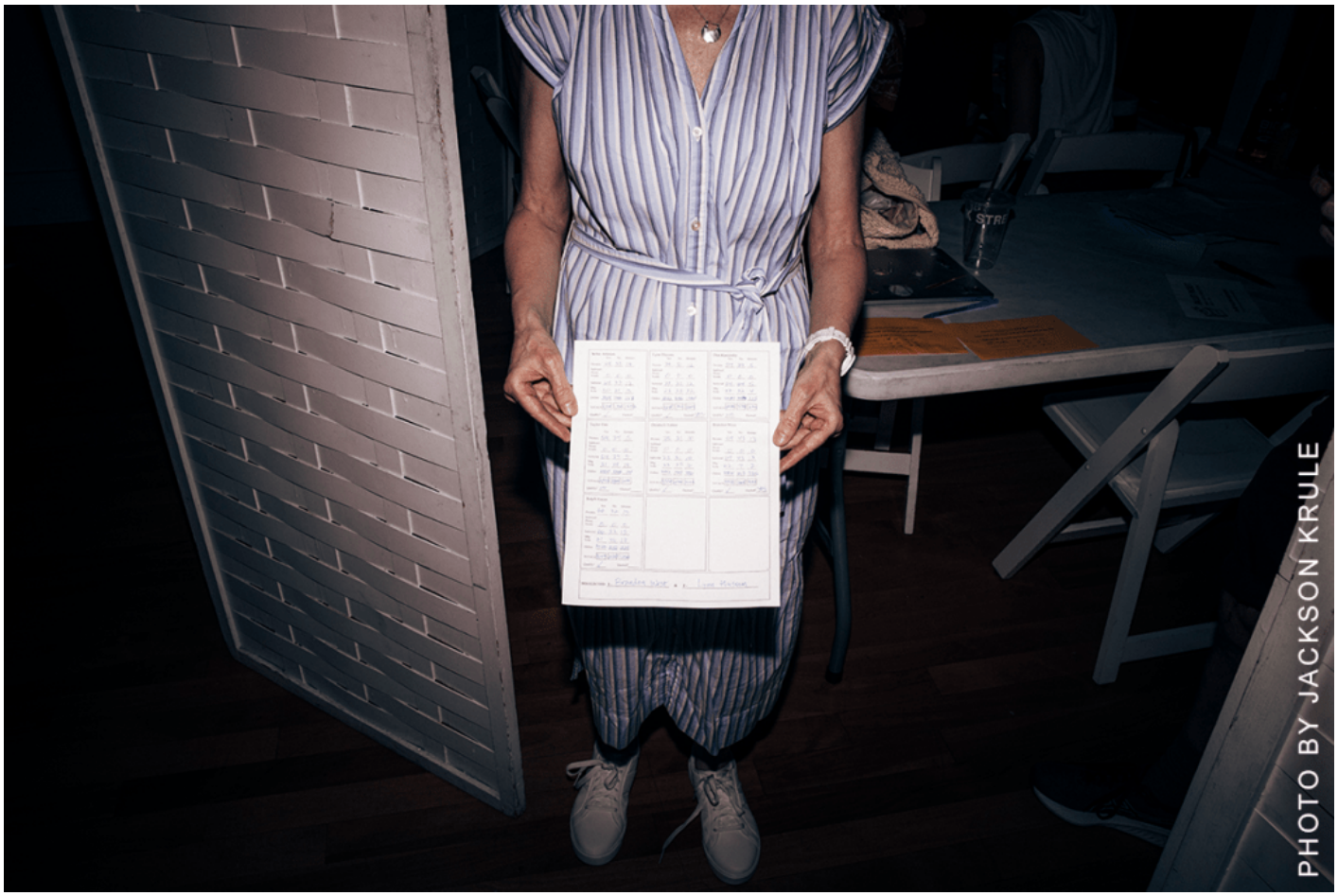
Finally, the election results were shared. Brandon West and Lynn Husum were elected to the Board.

Holtz nominated West as President.

Tess Brown-Lavoie was nominated as Vice President.

Elizabeth Tobier was nominated for Secretary.

Terry Meyers, a Bookkeeping Coordinator, nominated Szladek to be the new Treasurer.



What had been a very long and emotional meeting was not yet over. It was time for the open forum, where each member is given 90 seconds to speak.

One member said, “I don’t understand how the [hybrid meeting] referendum was subjected to a supermajority requirement.” Another member said that June 30 was is the deadline to participate in the Coop’s demographic survey.

Lois Wilcken, who works with the Plastics Reduction Committee, shared that there will be a vote on whether to create that committee and asked the Agenda committee to place them on the July agenda.

A member identified as Gabriel said, “Given ways of tabulating the vote, is a recount on the hybrid votes possible?”

There was another murmur throughout the crowd, as that vote was so shockingly close.

The Chairperson spoke to clarify, saying, “The chairing committee did a count and said it was short by 15 votes.”

The woman who spoke out when the vote was first shared was now on the stage. “I’m here as a member of the Coop and representing the rights of disabled children,” she said. “I want to name people left out of this decision.” She went on to name disabled people, elderly folks, night shift workers, single moms, homebound members, and more. “The lack of accessible accommodations for disabled people is egregious.”

Another member questioned the protocol, for both the board elections and the referendum.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel explained, “I have been working with Membership Coordinators and a member of the IT department on these two votes. We use Simply Voting. One ballot was for the board, the other was for the referendum. People who vote in a board of directors elections are 30,000 [all of the members, including those who quit the Coop but whose original Coop investments are still on file]. The referendum is for active shopping members [what most of us consider current members].”

It was well past 9 p.m., and the crowd seemed weary.

Finally, there was a motion to table the hybrid vote decision until there was a recount. The board agreed to hold a recount of the paper ballots cast in the referendum vote. The results of the recount would be reported at the July GM. And the non-hybrid meeting was officially adjourned at 9:40 p.m. It was still hot out.



From left to right: Board member Keyian Vafai, Board President Brandon West, General Manager and Treasurer Joe Szladek, and Board member Tim Hospodar

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist, and book collaborator.

MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

October 7, 2025

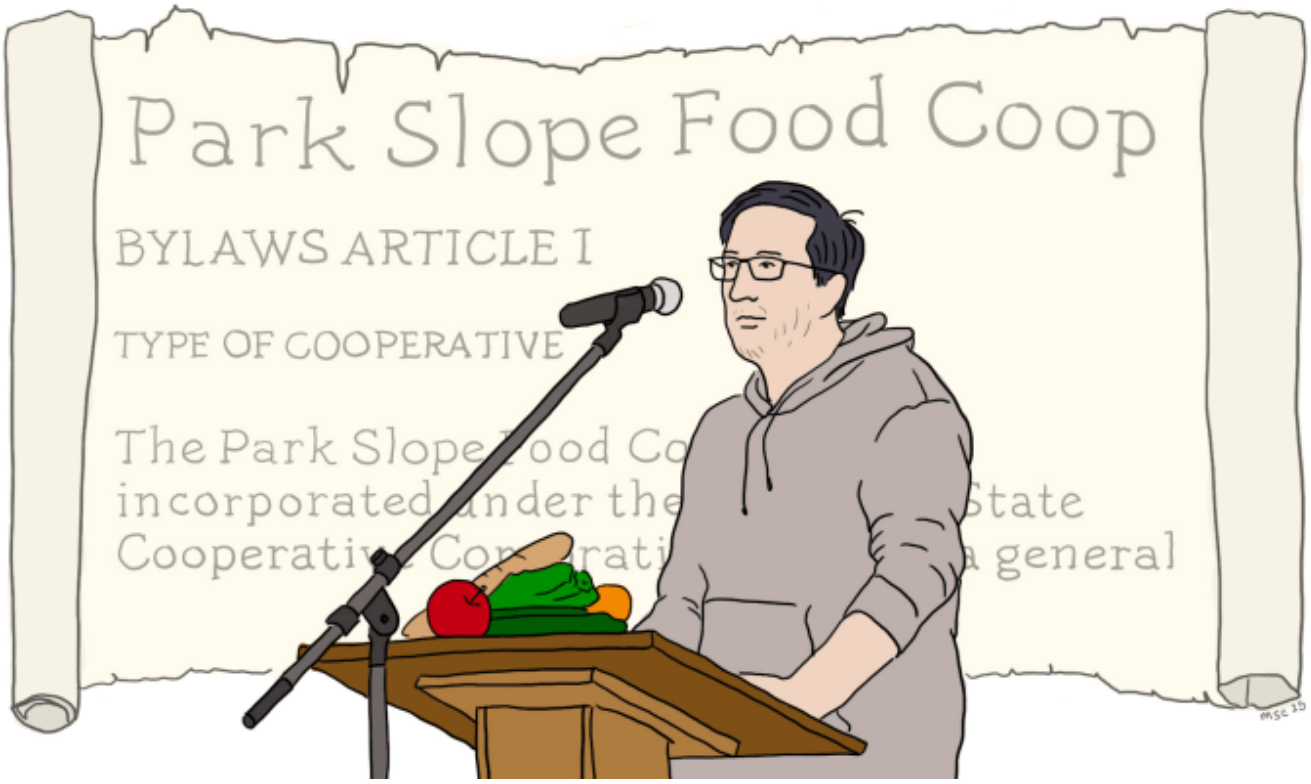


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

June 24, 2025

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 democratic 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 Szladek 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 can-

didates in person, did another round with three candidates, then a final round with Coop staff members. Szladek's dedication to the Coop and his vision "made him a natural choice," according to Jenkins.

After that, Szladek 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."

Szladek 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 op-

tions.

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.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

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 responsible. “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 bylaws 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.

> “THERE IS THIS MYTH THAT THE GM IS THE DECISION-MAKING BODY OF THE COOP. NO, IT ISN’T.”
>
> *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.*

COST CUTTING, THE BULLETIN BOARD, AND A $4,000 QUESTION: NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

October 7, 2025



April 1, 2025

By Nikia Dawkins

At the start of February's General Meeting, Chair David Moss announced that the Dispute Resolution Committee election would be postponed, which left just one issue on the official agenda. It was an issue that elicited excitement, frustration and personal accusations, an issue near and dear to the hearts of many—the Coop bulletin board. During an evening spent discussing hybrid meetings, unexpected financial loss and the search for a new general manager, the most hotly debated issue of the night was where this hypothetical bulletin board should be located.

But first, the open forum began with an impassioned plea from member Spike Kahn about the need for hybrid meetings. While wearing a mask, Kahn argued that hybrid meetings would allow more accessibility for members like herself who are immunocompromised or otherwise unable to attend in person, adding that they would also be more democratic because Prospect Park's Picnic House is not large enough to accommodate the entire Coop community. Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Joe Szladek addressed concerns that the GCs are fundamentally against hybrid meetings. "We are not opposed to considering it," he said, "but are concerned about the impact and how it will be implemented." He went on to raise the following questions: How do we ensure that only Coop members have access and that no one video records or screenshots the meetings? How do we determine who can be remote and who must be there in person? And, finally, how much will it cost? Szladek advised that one tech company gave him a quote of $4,000 per meeting. "And when I asked if we could DIY, they laughed," he said. Szladek floated the idea that we could, perhaps, purchase equipment and use skilled member labor instead of a third party, but right now there are more questions than answers. He bemoaned that a lot of these issues weren't properly addressed by those who initially proposed the idea. "Yes, they were!" said Carol Wald from the audience, after which a few other members raised their hands to speak on the topic, but Chair Moss determined there wasn't enough time left for discussion on the matter.

General Manager Joe Holtz presented the Treasurer's Report, in which he compared the financial projections from 2023 to the financial actualities of 2024. It had been projected that the Coop would have a positive gain of $25,000, but the Coop actually lost

$420,000. Sales last year were up 6.68%, but income was down due to a lower markup and higher-than-expected expenses, including health benefits, electronic payment fees, and business insurance. The unexpected portion of the expenses totaled $438,000, with the bulk of that being the unexpected increase in health benefits, which cost $312,000 more than projected. However, despite these negative variances, the Coop still ended the year with $247,000 in positive cash flow. So, overall, there was an increase in cash despite a loss of income. A few members requested more information about the unexpected increase in expenses. Holtz explained that health insurance rates are skyrocketing across the country, adding that the Coop did tweak the employee health plan to save a little money, and now it is more expensive to seek treatment out-of-network. With regard to insurance, he wanted to make sure the Coop could be rebuilt if it were, say, hit by an asteroid or otherwise demolished, so coverage had to be increased. Finally, Holtz shared that he's working on getting into a program that will lower fees for electronic payments and that the newly extended shopping hours will also help improve Coop finances.

Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Elinoar Astrinsky outlined several ways that members can also help to cut costs. She said that members are now being used for front end support on the shopping floor, a decision designed to decrease staff hours. She suggested that members sign up for squad leader roles and repair shifts to further decrease the Coop's expenses. Most of the repair work requires skill and expertise (so if you *are* experienced, please sign up!), but some of the work can be done by almost anyone, such as painting. She stressed that using member labor instead of hired help saves a lot of money, and that many squad leaders are aging out or retiring, so we need a new generation to step up. On a similar note, Chairwoman and Board Member Imani Q'ryn informed the crowd that she would be retiring in June, which means that we will need a new chair committee member and a new board member to replace her.

Valerie Vadala from the Personnel Committee said they were still reviewing candidates for the new General Manager and had whittled the pool down to four people who would be interviewed in the coming weeks. She said that replacing Joe Holtz,

who's been with us for 50 years, won't be easy. They're looking for someone both innovative and with the appropriate level of experience, who can handle the volume and intensity of the Coop.

Speaking on behalf of the International Trade Education Committee, Bart DeCoursy reported that Trump's tariffs would begin on April 2, raising U.S. inflation by 0.8%. He encouraged members to visit BlueSky for more information as the economic impact will be ongoing and extensive.

At this point, the meeting moved to the official agenda, and Keyian Vafai gave a presentation explaining the history of the Coop bulletin board, from its initial creation in the 1980s to its removal in 2020 due to Covid precautions and fire code regulations. There is now an official Coop-business-only bulletin board in the corner entrance, and he proposed that members should be allowed to use it as well. His presentation was followed by that of Katheryn Keller, who argued that reinstating the bulletin board would foster connection, provide access to trustworthy local resources, and encourage non-digital engagement. A small-business owner herself, she said that over the years, she was able to find a pet sitter, a subletter and multiple clients via the old bulletin board, and she believes that reinstating it would create a lifeline for service providers and freelancers, as well as a shared information hub for events and opportunities. She also presented the results of a member survey she created to determine the level of interest in the bulletin board, and although she was only able to survey 375 out of 17,000 members, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Almost everyone seemed excited about the bulletin board—so excited, in fact, that there was a flurry of ideas. For every idea, however, there was an opposing idea, and for every point a counterpoint. The main issues revolved around the location of the bulletin board and the supervision of its content. Two members were extremely concerned that Vafai, who is a vocal supporter of Palestine, would weaponize the bulletin board to promote and organize the BDS movement. Vafai calmly replied, "I won't be running it," which left members arguing over whether anyone needed to run it. As for its location, members were divided on whether it should be located in the corner en-

trance (which is, perhaps, too small for such use), in the stairwell (where it originally existed but which may not meet fire code regulations or provide enough accessibility), just outside the Coop (which could exacerbate the Coop's current litter problem), or in place of the lockers near the entrance. The animated discussion was ultimately ended by Chair Moss because it was "really in the weeds."

The Board then voted to approve the minutes of the January GM after no one had any suggested changes, and the meeting disbanded.

Nikia Dawkins is a creative writer, journalist, and night owl.

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING REPORT: HIGH TENSIONS ON A COLD NIGHT AND A COOP DIVIDED

October 7, 2025



March 11, 2025

By William Doran

Coop members warmed themselves around pots of soup outside the Prospect Park Picnic House, awaiting entry for the January General Meeting (GM).

Once everyone was settled inside, the evening's agenda hovered above gathered members on a large projection screen. While there were other topics discussed, three contentious issues took up most of the two-and-a-half-hour gathering: boycotts, hybrid general meetings and committee elections.

OPEN FORUM

Several members spoke in favor of boycotting Israeli products and expressed disappointment in two General Coordinators' articles published in the January *Gazette.*

Some members who spoke that night chose to only give their first names.

A Coop member, Jim, argued that, “When the Coop was founded in the ’70s, we boycotted products from apartheid South Africa, despite the fact that the United States, under multiple presidents, had official policies protecting South Africa.”

Another member, Judy, pushed for open discussion: “The Coop is a member-led organization dedicated to democracy and to making the world a better place. Members need to be able to have this discussion. It’s been put off and refused to be discussed for over 10 years.”

Aaron, a member, labeled the General Coordinators’ stance in the *Gazette* as fear--mongering: “The place to mediate disagreements is at these general meetings. As a Jew, I’m pretty familiar with fear-mongering rhetoric around the non-violent protest movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).”

A self-organized group, Coop 4 Unity, spoke against the boycott, calling for unity among members and extending an invitation to engage boycott supporters in dialogue. Another member, Barbara, directly criticized boycott supporters, saying: “You don’t understand the movement you’re promoting, or you are willfully lying to all of us. And to this group I’m going to ask you, do you value the Coop more than you hate Israel? And to everyone else I ask, if you value the Coop, then please, we have to do something to stop them.”



Aaron



Hana



Hima

Boycott supporters have also self-organized as PSFC 4 Palestine, publishing a zine called *The Olive Press*, which they distributed outside before the meeting, along with the aforementioned soup.

Members criticized the 75% majority voting threshold for boycotts, citing important decisions regularly made via simple majority, such as board elections and markup increases. To applause and laughter, a Coop member, Hana, sardonically identified several other things that could become policy with a simple majority: “We could allow suspended members to shop, but only if they wear a scarlet ‘S’ around their neck. We [could] make all Coop general meetings black-tie only. We could even refrigerate beer.”

Another member, Hima, criticized the concept of in-person-only general meetings: “This group of people here, we represent 2% of the membership. Why should we be the only exclusive club that gets to vote on any issues?” Hima continued, “During

COVID, we saw that technology is definitely available and accessible. It's exploitative that 100% of us work, but only 2% of us can actually vote."

> "I CAN'T MEASURE THE IMPACT. IT WOULD BREAK MY HEART FOR PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COOP JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T AGREE WITH A COOP POLICY," SAID JOE HOLTZ, REGARDING THE PROPOSED BOYCOTT.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Coop's net income dropped by about $525,000 from the previous year, due largely to a 1% reduction in the base markup, which returned to 25% at the start of the 2026 fiscal year in February. In 2020, members voted to increase the markup from 21% to 25% to combat pandemic losses. It was later reduced to 24% to alleviate some of the pressure on members.

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz stressed of the decrease, "You can't eat the markup, but you can eat the food." He highlighted cost of goods sold (the value of goods prior to markup) as a better indicator of how the Coop performed which was up roughly $3 million over last year. He noted that member equity—the value of what we all own together, minus debts—stayed consistent from 2023 to 2024 at $8.73 million.

Member questions shifted the focus back to boycotts, requesting financials to support the General Coordinators' stance against the boycotts that were published in the January *Gazette.* The January 7, 2025, piece, with a byline from the "General Coordinator Team," titled, "Coordinator's Corner: Our Coop at Risk," warned, in part: "Financial fallout from a boycott could force tough decisions such as raising prices or laying off staff."

Holtz responded, "I can't measure the impact. It would break my heart for people to leave the Coop just because they don't agree with a Coop policy." Calling attention to

thousands of members on both sides of the issue, Holtz said that taking a stance is a risky prospect, and that the Coop cannot afford to lose members. “I believe that cooperators are precious, and I don’t want to lose any of you.”

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORTS

General Coordinator Lisa Moore validated member complaints about adherence to election protocols, citing that the Agenda Committee missed the deadline to publish an announcement in the *Gazette* prior to elections last year, and it did not announce the opening at the September 2024 GM.

She quieted doubts, however, about the legitimacy of the election in question, saying: “There’s no evidence suggesting that these committees intentionally omitted their announcements from the *Gazette.* Nor should the omission cast doubts on the validity of the elections.”

She called for an update to the Coop’s Guide for General Meetings and Annual Meetings to include guidelines on vacancy announcements and potential consequences for omitting the required steps mentioned. Moore noted, “All committees should be held to the same standard to ensure transparency, cultivate trust and encourage participation among all members.” She invited interested members to submit their information to psfcac@gmail.com, reiterating that there are still openings on the Agenda Committee.

Lastly, she indicated that the Coop has identified several 800-seat (or larger) venues for in-person voting on hybrid meetings. The Agenda Committee will reach out to the proposal’s presenters to select a date.



Lisa Moore



Joe Szladek

General Coordinator Joe Szladek closed the presentation of GC reports by reminding everyone of the Coop's early closing on February 1 for annual inventory.

EIGHT MEMBERS PROPOSED A NEW COMMITTEE TO SHRINK COOP RELIANCE ON PLASTIC. THE COMMITTEE WOULD SOLICIT COOP-MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND WORK WITH STAFF TO IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT CONCRETE CHANGES.

MEMBER COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Pension Education and Reporting Committee solicited members to submit questions for the Committee's upcoming annual report in the *Gazette.*

The Personnel Committee shared progress on its search for a new General Manager

to replace Joe Holtz, who will retire in June of 2025. The committee anticipates selection by late spring of this year. The job posting and salary are publicly available on the Coop's website.

The International Trade Education Committee highlighted potential impacts of Trump Administration tariffs and encouraged members to read "What New Trump Tariffs Would Mean for the Coop," published in the *Gazette* last December by *Gazette* reporter Leila Darabi.

PLASTIC REDUCTION

Eight members proposed a new committee to shrink Coop reliance on plastic. The committee would solicit Coop-member participation and work with staff to identify and implement concrete changes.

Fifteen-year-member Jessica Roff supported the need for such a committee by sharing some staggering statistics: "Of all the plastic produced [in the U.S.] since 1950, 91% has never been recycled." She continued, "Many of the things that make plastic problematic to recycle are the same things that harm our bodies and the environment. There are more than 16,000 chemicals in plastic."

Roff and many of the other presenters advocating for the committee's creation combat environmental hazards in their professional lives. They outlined opportunities and challenges while acknowledging the Coop's significant history of environmental advocacy and valuable insights that could come from Coop members and staff.

Members expressed gratitude for the group's work and posed questions about how to forge ahead. Things like reuseable, member-provided containers came up, as well as frustration over the lack of plastic-free options for some food items, like milk. Presenters emphasized that this must happen in community to be successful. Members can submit questions and ideas to reduce.plastic.psfc@gmail.com.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Meeting Chair Imani Q’Ryn announced that this may be her last meeting, after serving the Coop for 20 years. Many cheered and offered standing applause, expressing thanks for her service.

The Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of the general membership. Director Tim Hospodar addressed how the Coop’s board of directors meets, acknowledging that this portion of the GM is the one time that the board is mandated to meet, however brief.



Imani Q’Ryn seated at left



Tim Hospodar

He suggested leveraging this time as an opportunity to more adeptly engage general membership and discuss important issues. Hospodar proposed, "…Perhaps we can maximize this chance to discuss topics that the board finds concerning or disconcerting. He continued, "The Board of Directors does not have a dedicated part of the meeting to report out or raise our concerns."

Ironically, the discussion was cut short for the sake of time, and the GM adjourned.

William Doran is a licensed architect, educator and food writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Though originally from New Orleans, LA, he has been a Coop member and New York City resident since 2022. He has taught cooking classes for the Coop (foodcoopcooks.org) and publishes a free quarterly newsletter at adventurouscooks.com.