

MAY GM: MEMBERS DIVIDED ON ISRAEL, ALIGNED IN DISDAIN FOR PLASTIC WASTE

July 2, 2024



By Leila Darabi

The May General Meeting kicked off on May 28 at the Prospect Park Picnic House with a charged open forum focused not only on members' differing views on the Israel-Hamas War, but on how those views are communicated. The chair committee reminded members throughout the evening that singling out other members in their statements would not be tolerated and repeatedly asked members to refrain from shouting out comments from the audience.

Members also discussed a proposal to bring back the print edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* and a proposal to create a new committee to reduce the Coop's plastic use.

OPEN FORUM

During the open forum, several speakers called on fellow members to embrace civility. (Note: Coop members are not required to share their full names during the open forum.)

Seth Pollack shared that he felt some materials being circulated ahead of the Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors elections reflected the division among members and stated “the very, very least that I feel we can do is answer the call of civil society groups and join the BDS movement” referring to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

ONE MEMBER REPORTED THAT LABELS OF ISRAELI PEARLED COUSCOUS HAVE BEEN DEFACED ON THE COOP SHELVES AND CALLED THE BEHAVIOR “PETTY AND UNCOOPERATIVE.”

Jonathan T. claimed that another Coop member had been called a Nazi by another member and that “hate has no place here and neither does BDS.”

Amos reported that labels of Israeli pearled couscous have been defaced on the Coop shelves and called the behavior “petty and uncooperative.”

Several members addressed the ongoing debate around whether the Coop would need to change its bylaws to permit virtual or hybrid meetings and voting by proxy.

Dena Beard stated that she works for the Tow Center for Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, a potential venue to host a GM that included a BDS discussion or vote, and that she felt threatened after receiving a voicemail from a member warning her that hosting such a meeting would incite violence. Tensions peaked when Beard said that one voicemail had come from a member whom she mentioned by name.

MJ reported that Professor Michael Haber had, pro bono, drafted a legal memo after reviewing the Coop's bylaws and that in his opinion the Coop would not need to change bylaws to legally host hybrid or virtual meetings.

Alex also commented on the benefits of virtual meetings, noting that virtual meetings and votes worked well throughout the pandemic.

In response to the open forum, General Coordinators offered some clarifications:

Joe Holtz shared that the Coop's lawyer had reached the opposite conclusion and thought the bylaws would indeed first need to change before a virtual or hybrid meeting could be considered. He noted that the Board had received both decisions.

GENERAL COORDINATOR ELINOR ASTRINSKY REPORTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN UPTICK IN NON-MEMBERS ENTERING THE STORE AND CAUTIONED SHOPPERS AND WORKERS TO KEEP THEIR VALUABLES CLOSE AT ALL TIMES.

Ann Herpel also clarified that Brooklyn College had offered to host a GM where a BDS vote could take place but that, before signing a contract, the General Coordinators asked the agenda committee to contact the four members who had previously submitted items related to a vote on the boycott of products from Israel to confirm that these items could be brought to the May GM. Herpel shared that:

"All four members declined the May 28th date and instead requested to postpone their items until after another pending agenda item about changing the 75% supermajority currently needed to approve a boycott was discussed and voted on," and closed stating: "Though it took more years than many would have liked, the [General Coordinators] did fulfill our commitment to secure a location."

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz also reviewed the 12-week financial statement shared ahead of the meeting covering the period from April 21 through May 28, 2024. He shared that there has been a 7.65% increase in average weekly sales compared to the previous year, but that he expected this average to fall to around 5% by the end of the year.

Holtz also took questions, clarifying that the Coop currently marks products up 24% over wholesale, a 1% decrease from the previous year, which impacts profits.

COORDINATOR'S REPORTS

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky shared what she called a “nuts and bolts” report with updates across a range of topics. Among these, she reported that there has been an uptick in non-members entering the store and cautioned shoppers and workers to keep their valuables close at all times. She also stressed that anyone working a shift should wear close-toed shoes.

ALEX GODIN SHARED THAT “THE COOP FEELS MORE AND MORE LIKE A WHOLE FOODS AND LESS LIKE A COMMUNITY,” LAMENTING THE LOSS OF FREE CHILD-CARE AND THE STORE BULLETIN BOARD.

Herpel read a statement from the General Coordinators taking issue with how their views were characterized during the April GM during a vote on the Coop's HR policies.

COMMITTEE REPORT

Bart DeCoursy of the International Trade Education Squad gave the lone committee report sharing awareness that hearings are ongoing to settle Mexico's ongoing dispute with the U.S. over corn. Mexico refuses to import genetically modified corn, which accounts for most corn grown in the U.S.

NOSTALGIA FOR A PRINT EDITION OF THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*

For the first of two agenda items for discussion, Alex Godin shared that “the Coop feels more and more like a Whole Foods and less like a community,” lamenting that the loss of free childcare and the store bulletin board during the pandemic also contributed to this feeling. The proposal: reinstate a print version of the Coop’s newsletter, the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*.

Eric Lewis, a former co-coordinating editor of the *Gazette* voiced enthusiastic support and suggested investigating ad sales as a way to cover costs and testing out a new print version for a year to see what worked. The *Gazette*, he said, “is a place for budding journalists... and deepens and strengthens the sense of community [at the Coop]”

Coop member Morgan also shared, in support of the proposal, “print ephemera is an amazing way to create an embodied sense of community.”

Coop member Kian asked what the cost would be to reinstate a print edition. In response, Herpel shared that in the last 30 days, the online *Gazette* has received 31,000 views of articles and 10,000 visitors. She also said that to revive the print edition, the Coop would need to replace several computers, resubscribe to Adobe software and cover the cost of printing.

Staff member Jana Cunningham shared that the Coop is working on adding classified ads to the digital *Gazette*.

Coop member Yasmine also voiced support, noting that digital news can be changed but that “in print, the work of journalists is set in stone.”

TRACY FITZ PROPOSED THE CREATION OF A COOP CLIMATE CRISIS COMMITTEE
AND COLLECTED EMAILS FROM MEMBERS WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED TO JOIN.

In response to a question about the kind of paper used to print the *Gazette*, Herpel clarified that the prior *Gazette* was printed on post-consumer newsprint by a union print shop.

The second and final agenda item, introduced by Tracy Fitz, proposed the creation of a Coop Climate Crisis Committee (4Cs) and collected emails from members who would be interested to join.

“In 2019, the Coop went through 49,000 plastic produce bags a week. We now use 57% of that, 28,200 produce bags a week because we have clamshells instead!” In a lively presentation, Fitz pulled sample bags and plastic clamshells out of a bag and waved them around, inspiring laughter across a room that an hour earlier had felt quite tense. “We’re all addicted, [to plastic]!” she cried. A suggestion to wrap General Coordinators in plastic as an artistic action drew applause.

During the discussion that followed, no one disagreed, but members shared additional thoughts on ways to reduce plastic.

Zoe added that compostable bags also include fossil fuel and aren’t necessarily a safe alternative.

Sunny shared that she had a similar idea to create a committee and asked interested members to email plasticfreefoodcoop@gmail.com to join, noting that she was open to joining forces and creating a single Coop Climate Crisis Committee.

Lois Wilken urged people to read her recent *Gazette* submission “Love Letter from a Mermaid: On Plastics and Your Health.”

For historical context, Holtz shared that the Coop had in the past banned plastic produce bags, then brought them back. “There’s a lot of education to do,” Holtz said. “We also sell something in aisle four to wash and reuse plastic bags.”

CLOSING

Board member Brandon West called a vote to close the meeting during which the board voted to accept the minutes from the April GM.

PERSONNEL POLICIES LEAD TO COOP DIVIDE

July 2, 2024



By Sanoja Bhaumik

At the April 30 General Meeting, General Coordinators Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore introduced an agenda item to update personnel policies, which they described as outdat-

ed compared to current human resources (HR) practices. In a surprising turn, the item was rejected, in part because of organized opposition from PSFC Members for Palestine.

Prior to the meeting, PSFC Members for Palestine published a memo arguing that the proposal “concentrates even more executive power in the hands of the General Coordinators,” with “alarming” implications for labor practices and union busting.

Those opposed to the group have since responded. Ramon Maislen, candidate for Board of Directors, wrote in a recent *Linewaiters’ Gazette* letter to the editor, “[The PSFC Members for Palestine] are encouraging members to vote against Coop interests even when they are unrelated to a boycott.”

THE QUESTION REMAINS: HOW DID AN AGENDA ITEM RELATED TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS BECOME SO DIVISIVE?

In addition to the debate around the proposal’s content, the vote itself was controversial. There were not enough written ballots, and the Chair Committee was forced to initiate two hand counts, both of which resulted in the rejection of the proposal. Park Slope Food Coop staff and PSFC Members for Palestine both criticized the lack of organization. But the question remains: How did an agenda item related to employee handbooks become so divisive?

THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Holtz and Moore first proposed changes to the personnel policies at the March GM. They designed the proposal to address “deficiencies” in current policies and centralize all policies in a single place.

PSFC Members for Palestine voiced several concerns, writing that the proposal did not

“address the problems that led to the Personnel Committee’s current dysfunction.” In a statement to the *Gazette*, the group added, “The proposal’s language was unclear. The first and second paragraphs contradicted each other.”

The first clause states that the “GCs shall be solely responsible for all personnel-related matters,” while the second states that the “Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Coordinator team, shall be solely responsible for all personnel-related matters.”

The proposal consolidates Coop HR practices already in place, and therefore may not alter the GCs’ authority over HR. Jana Cunningham, Membership Coordinator, wrote to the *Gazette*, “The identical HR practices are listed in several different GM mandates. General Coordinators have the responsibility for HR and the authority to take disciplinary actions, in accordance with the Employee Handbook in regards to the Area Coordinators, this remains the same.”

PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE STATED, “PEOPLE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW WHY THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HAS REMAINED SEVERELY UNDERSTAFFED FOR ABOUT 15 MONTHS. THE PROPOSERS DIDN’T ANSWER.”

The Personnel Committee was created in 1981 to be a five-member elected council. Its mandate, as reiterated by the Committee in 2022, has been the following: “The Committee is an elected group of members that serves in an advisory capacity to the General Coordinators, supporting them with personnel matters such as performance evaluations, succession planning and developing human resources policies.”

At present, the Personnel Committee only has two members. Speaking about the March GM, PSFC Members for Palestine stated, “People also wanted to know why the Personnel Committee has remained severely understaffed for about 15 months. The proposers didn’t answer.”

In July of 2022, the Committee faced intense criticism after suspending Holtz without pay for 30 days after he breached COVID-19 protocols. In August of 2022, in a letter published in the *Gazette*, Safe Food Committee staff member Margaret Maugenest wrote, “One has to wonder about the agenda of the Personnel Committee. Who are these people? Why is there no appeal process to challenge the Personnel Committee’s decision?”

In another letter published in November of 2022, Coop member Claudia Joseph added, “It is time to rethink the structure of the Personnel Committee: Five members who were elected by uncontested vote are clearly not qualified to wield this much power.”

DEBATING THE PROPOSAL

The Personnel Committee proposal introduced by Holtz and Moore was ostensibly designed to address structural issues that became apparent in the aftermath of Holtz’s suspension. But it remains unclear how the proposal updates policies to meet “widely accepted HR practices.”

Holtz and Moore noted that the proposal had been designed with consultation from the two-member Personnel Committee and with input from an employment lawyer recommended by the National Co+Op Grocers. On its website, the latter describes itself as “a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States.”

Cunningham noted that the GC proposal would correct the Coop’s current practices, some of which she called “outdated and potentially libelous.”

At the March GM, the GCs agreed to take members’ feedback into account when reintroducing the proposal at the following meeting. The policy introduced in April returned with one addition: “The complaint policy includes the provision to employ a neutral third-party employment lawyer to thoroughly investigate these complaints and provide recommended courses of action for any offenses committed.”

THE LETTER ALSO CRITICIZED THE “POLITICIZED EFFORTS”: “THE PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE GROUP ENCOURAGED THEIR MEMBERS TO VOTE AGAINST THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COOP AND THE STAFF.”

No alternative proposals—such as contracting an outside HR service to bear responsibility for all personnel issues—were considered. PSFC Members for Palestine commented to the *Gazette*, “No proposal, including one presented by a general coordinator, is automatically entitled to a yes vote. A new proposal must address the ambiguities and contradictions that a majority of members voted down in April.”

Following the April GM vote, a group of 43 Area Coordinators—non-GC paid staff at the Coop—signed a letter to the Agenda Committee criticizing the “no” vote and the handling of the agenda item.

The letter also criticized the “politicized efforts” of the PSFC Members for Palestine: “The PSFC Members for Palestine group encouraged their members to vote against the best interest of the Coop and the staff and we believe this leaves the Coop vulnerable to any potential wrongdoing by senior staff.”

The letter supports the GC’s GM proposal, stating that it puts “the Personnel Committee and the General Coordinators in a better position to make much needed decisions on personnel issues that are currently not possible.” Despite this expressed backing, the letter also proposes significant amendments to the GC proposal—amendments yet to be introduced in the April GM.

The Area Coordinators’ amended proposal excludes the first item of the original GC--supported proposal, which places responsibility for personnel-related matters in the hands of the GC. Instead, the amended proposal suggests: “The Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Manager and General Coordinator team, shall be responsible for the hiring, compensation and employment policies for the General

Coordinator team.”

The amended proposal also sets forth a plan for selecting the Personnel Committee—a feature absent from the original proposal—that would include the participation of two GCs, the General Manager and four Area Coordinators.

While the amended proposal diverges from the GC proposal with these two changes, the Area Coordinator staff who signed “resent this [GC] proposal having been hijacked by a member group whose purpose is unrelated to the matter at hand.” The letter continues, “Nothing in the GC proposal mentions Palestine.”

This concern was echoed by individual staff. Cunningham, who signed the letter, commented to the *Gazette*:

What concerns me is that an organized group of members can make a statement like “the GC proposal had alarming implications for labor practices and union-busting,” which was inflammatory and completely inaccurate, influence others to vote against the best interest of the Coop staff and put the Coop at financial risk.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Personnel policies will undoubtedly reemerge as a central issue in future GMs, but the discussion risks veering into debate around PSFC Members for Palestine’s tactics and right to organize.

Responding to criticism around their involvement, the PSFC Members for Palestine stated:

We believe meaningful member participation strengthens our democratic governance system and upholds our cooperative principles[...] Rather than acknowledging the weaknesses in their proposal, the GCs chose to undermine our Coop’s democratic tenets by vilifying member engagement.

For Cunningham, the most important step is to move forward with changes to the personnel policies. “My colleagues and I (more than half of the ACs) firmly support the GC proposal and want to see its implementation as soon as possible,” she added.

Amid the debate, all seem to agree that the most important goal is for the Coop to be a safe, welcoming work environment, in which issues of fairness, discrimination and labor standards can be handled in a confidential and professional manner.

APRIL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

July 2, 2024



By Anita Bushell

Personnel Policies, Childcare Woes, and Home Delivery: Highlights from the April 30 General Meeting

The April 30, 2024 General Meeting focused on personnel policies, updates to the Personnel Committee and General Coordinator roles, as well as solutions for families without childcare.

OPEN FORUM

In the open forum, members brought up several concerns surrounding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, including opinions on boycotting Israeli products to protest the war in Gaza; the issue of whether the group Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BD-S) supports violence; and a 4/30/24 *Linewaiters' Gazette* letter titled "Coop Members Engage in Intimidation Campaign." A member who had recently traveled to Israel and Palestine spoke about the need for inclusivity at the Coop at this time. Several members advocated for hybrid (in person and video) General Meetings to accommodate those who cannot get to in-person meetings. One member spoke about how successful the Coop is and the need to bring the model to other neighborhoods. A member asked why childcare is not returning to the Coop.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz began his report by answering the question about childcare. The Coop cannot reinstate childcare because insurers will no longer provide coverage unless the Coop becomes a licensed childcare facility. Holtz shared the financial summary for the 8-week period ending March 24, 2024. Highlights included:

- Average weekly sales were \$1,122,000 (2024), compared to \$1,049,000 (2023)
- The gross margin was \$1,724,000

- There was a \$49,000 shortfall to cover current expenses of \$1,773,000
- Cash and cash equivalents were \$7.8 million, as opposed to \$7.3 million in 2023
- Employee health benefits were 3.93% of sales as compared to 2.90% in the same period of the prior year

Holtz spoke about the gross margin drop this period versus the same period last year, as a result of decreasing the 25% markup to 24%, which lowers gross margin.

Another factor in lowered gross margin is “shrink” (a loss of inventory because of factors such as damages, theft or administrative errors).

Holtz discussed the Coop’s financial plans for the future, which include: home delivery, which will begin in approximately one year; restoring nine regular checkout stations (as opposed to the current seven); a savings plan of \$7.5 to \$10 million for the next pandemic because of concerns that the grocery industry will not receive the same support from the government that it got during the Covid pandemic.

During the Q&A period, a member asked whether expenses will be going up; another member asked what current interest rates were (5–5.25%). The question of how many members there currently are came up (15,900), and a discussion ensued about membership size control since 2009 because of lack of space at the Coop.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Joe Szladek opened the report by introducing the possibility of home delivery on weekdays as opposed to weekends. He then outlined the state of the current online member labor system, which has now been in place for three years, as member labor returned in full in July 2022. Szladek elaborated on the ongoing challenge of full operation with enough member labor, while having enough shifts for members to sign up for.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel added that it was important that members schedule

more shifts if necessary to stay up to date, as well as plan for the summer, in case of absence for vacations. In addition, she reminded members that the online system responds to sales decreases, and fewer slots will be available when the Coop is receiving and selling less food in the summer months. During the Q&A period, members asked about growth in membership, beer committee work and an increase in stocking shifts.

A PUBLIC JOB PERFORMANCE REVIEW IS CONTRARY TO GOOD HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICE AND COULD EASILY RESULT IN A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE COOP.

Previous open forum questions were addressed, including push notifications for early-morning shifts, whether member labor would be involved in the proposed home delivery system, as well as shifts for the recently created Youth Committee, whose members are between 18 and 22 years old.

AGENDA ITEM: ROLE OF PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

General Coordinators (GCs) Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore presented a proposal for new Personnel Committee (PC) practices. Holtz stated that the GCs, in reviewing General Meeting-approved personnel policies, realized that there were deficiencies that needed to be addressed. Holtz referred to a 1981 policy that states that one role of the PC is for all performance reviews of GCs to come to the GM in writing and verbally. Holtz stated that a public job performance review is contrary to good human resources (HR) practice and could easily result in a lawsuit against the Coop. HR-related discussions must take place confidentially under the guidance of qualified HR professionals. The GCs work with the PC and an attorney recommended by National Cooperative Grocers to develop comprehensive policies that comply with widely accepted HR practices and establish a system of accountability and fairness. Holtz stated that the role of the PC, as delineated in this evening's proposal, is a result of that process. Additionally, Holtz said, the Coop and the GCs need a fully functioning PC. Passing this

proposal would be a vital step to rebuilding the PC, which currently has two of the seven authorized member positions filled. Approving this proposal would allow the Coop to once again look for additional members of the PC.

The GCs and the PC have explored the possibility of implementing an appeals process, however after consulting multiple HR attorneys the Coop has been counseled that such an implementation could result in legal action against the Coop. The proposal outlines a neutral outside employment lawyer to conduct an investigation of complaints.

Moore then read part one of the PC proposal, relating to the role of the GCs in personnel policies. Moore stated that the proposal asks to combine into one coherent policy the current policy which was granted to the GCs by the GM over two separate proposals, in 1995 and 2002, and has been the practice for decades. Moore stated that the turnover in Coop staff is extremely low. Additionally, Coop employee policies are regularly reviewed by employment lawyers and employee handbook changes are regularly made with the input of Coop staff.

Moore then outlined and read part two of the proposal, which addresses the role of the PC. The purpose of part two of the proposal is to establish a system of accountability for the management team. The current proposal was approved in 1981, when standards were lower on PCs and would leave the Coop open to litigation. Moore re-emphasized the importance of rebuilding the Coop in order to clarify the role of the PC and asked for the GM to support the proposal.

THE COOP NO LONGER HAS SQUADS AND SQUAD LEADERS, WHICH HAS ROBBED THE COOP OF A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, SAID A MEMBER.

During the Q&A period members asked questions including who appoints the members of the PC, and why it is currently understaffed. Another member asked about

grievances and how they would be handled by the PC. Moore outlined how the current grievance process works. A member referred to a previous issue with a GC and how it was handled 15 months ago. Moore stated that personnel matters remain confidential in reference to this incident. One member asked whether members would be on the PC or only GCs. Moore answered by stating that PC applications would be from the membership pool, and then outlined how the applications process works.

After discussion, the meeting voted by hand count, because not enough ballots had been prepared. There were two attempts at counting hands. The first result was 71 yes, 86 no votes. The second result was 80 yes, 85 no votes. Thus, the proposal was voted down.

AGENDA ITEM: CHILDCARE

Member Lauren Belski presented the agenda item, and proposed returning to a more “family friendly” Coop. She described the struggle of parents who cannot make it to GMs, or work shifts because of challenges with the current online labor system. In addition, Belski spoke about how the shift cycle is now different and that the Coop no longer has squads and squad leaders, which has robbed the Coop of a sense of community. Belski also brought up the possibility of hybrid General Meetings so that more members could attend. Holtz reminded the meeting that the Coop bylaws state that meetings must be in person (they were remote only during the pandemic) and that a change in meeting style would first mean a change in the bylaws. Members presented their views regarding childcare and hybrid meetings.

PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

Elizabeth Tobier presented the minutes of March 26, 2024; no corrections were made.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Tim Hospodor chaired the meeting and all members of the board present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the members on the minutes of the March 26, 2024 GM. All members of the board present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the

members on Agenda Item 1, Personnel Policies: Personnel Committee and General Coordinator Roles.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. She just published Object Essays.

MARCH GENERAL MEETING: STATUS OF THE BDS VOTE, POTENTIAL BOARD MEMBERS AND PERSONNEL POLICIES

July 2, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

By Jess Powers

The March General Meeting returned to the Picnic House in Prospect Park. It addressed the status of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) vote, provided introductions to potential Board members and discussed personnel policies and other Coop business. Roughly 150 people were in attendance. Attendees receive a detailed email with the agenda, a four-week financial statement, draft February minutes and materials on Coop governance.

Update on the BDS Vote

Ahead of the member Open Forum, the Chair Committee decided to invite General Coordinator Joe Holtz to speak. When questioned about this decision by a member, Joseph Senda explained that the Chair anticipated questions and comments about the BDS vote and wanted to address the current status of the vote. Holtz explained that after an eight-year search for a venue that can accommodate more than two thousand people, anticipated for a “referendum on Israeli products,” the Claire Tow Theater at Brooklyn College could be secured for the May 28 General Meeting. Four members submitted agenda items for a vote; all four members declined to put forward their item for the May meeting. Members for and against the BDS movement voiced their positions. Before beginning the Treasurer’s Report, Holtz added that “boycotts in the past had 87-100% support” whereas “this one has thousands of members who are upset on both sides.” He offered: “The Coop is open to different groups. It’s a challenge. I don’t know how our Coop is going to resolve this.”

One member made a comment regarding a lack of hooks to hang carts (which were already replaced) and another spoke about food waste in the compost bins. Another member questioned how agenda items are prioritized and why, as a person with a disability who had difficulty attending in person, their item about hybrid meetings was bumped in favor of an agenda item from staff.

Holtz said that the agenda item on personnel was of “vital importance to the Coop”

for “succession planning.” During the Treasurer’s Report, Holtz elaborated on employee health benefits: “Each financial report is an opportunity to learn more about some important aspect of the financial statement,” he said.

Compost, Sewage and Tortillas

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky responded to an Open Forum question about composting. She explained that with thousands of new members and no squads with specialties that were refined over time, there is a “constant training battle.” Blemished food suitable for the soup kitchen winds up in compost. A video has been made to better train produce workers.

Recent long lines at the Coop for the bathrooms had to do with “untoward stuff [making its] way down to food processing.” Raw sewage was leaking and repairs included snaking, water jetting and cameras in the pipes (“kind of like a colonoscopy,” she added). A sagging pipe is being properly pitched and a new pipe connected to the sewer.

Astrinsky also explained that spring produce is still growing, so besides an “unusual crop of strawberries, under \$2 a quart,” there are Vista Hermosa tortillas, Rancho Gordo beans, and other specialty items to try, as well as Easter chocolates and chocolate matzah for Passover.



Board of Director Candidate Presentations

Nine candidates are competing for two open seats on the Board; elections will be held at the June 25, 2024 Annual Meeting. All of the candidates expressed their love of the Coop community and interest in participating as Board members.

Tess Brown-Lavoie has a background in agriculture, land and food justice. JulieAnn Buzzanca was unable to attend but created a video message; she works in financial and accounting services. Avery Houser founded an all-natural hard seltzer company. Ramon Maislen is a project manager for complex construction projects who attended the Sudbury Valley School, a democratic school where elementary school students had votes equal to teachers. Jimmy Royston is a partner at a global consulting firm who works with many of the brands found at the Coop. Sondra Shaievitz, a Coop member for 30 years who attended “so many GMs and almost every single Zoom meet-

ing,” is a corporate lawyer who became an energy healer and spiritual teacher. And finally, Keyian Vafai was a field organizer for Julia Salazar’s State Senate campaign.

When asked if they could envision not following the advice of the membership in a controversial vote, the prospective Board members said they could as long as no legal or financial hardships would come to the Coop as a result. Maislen added that he was probably one of the few people in the room to have visited multiple Palestinian cities, adding “[Coop members] have to live together, live in a democracy.” Candidates Richard Alvarez and Ralph Yozzo were not in attendance.

Please refer to full candidate statements here: <https://linewaitersgazette.com/2024/03/19/board-candidates-who-they-are-and-why-theyre-running/>.

Coop Employees and Personnel Policies

General Coordinators Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore proposed changes to personnel policies, citing “deficiencies” in the policies approved by the GM in 1981, which need to be updated to reflect widely accepted HR practices. The goal is to have all policies in one place and to codify existing policies. Holtz also noted that they cannot advertise for new members to the Personnel Committee, which currently has two members, without approval of the proposal, which clarifies the role of the Committee.

Moore explained the four-part proposal. The first part restated a policy that had already been passed, which states that all HR matters related to staff under the supervision of the general coordinators will be decided by the general coordinators. She stated that the employee handbook is regularly reviewed with an employment lawyer and that changes are reviewed with staff. The second part dealt with HR matters related to the general coordinators and the general manager. According to Moore, the general coordinators worked with the Personnel Committee and sought input from an employment lawyer recommended by National Co+op Grocers to revise the hiring, disciplinary actions and termination policies for the general coordinators and the general manager. All general coordinators agreed to these changes. The third part estab-

lished that personnel policies would only be decided by the general manager, general coordinator team and/or the Personnel Committee. The final part stated that this new policy would replace all previous decisions related to these HR policies.

Coop member Andy Feldman cited a *Gazette* article that alluded to “deep divides [among] Coordinators.” Holtz acknowledged “deep and painful divides” and suggested that committee members could assist with “actively trying to heal them.” Moore added that the Coop works with the New York Peace Institute, an organization that helps mediate workplace issues, and noted that it has been “a path that helped us” with “developing a policy that we could all agree to.” Both acknowledged a need to balance transparency with confidentiality on workplace and performance issues. Chair Committee member Imani Q’ryn pointed out that with only two open board seats, some of the candidates might consider using their skills in this important role.

Jason Weiner, a membership coordinator, spoke as an hourly employee and responded to a question about the status of the union. He believes that the personnel proposal serves to protect his rights as a paid employee at the Coop. He described a need to balance membership and paid staff, to have more transparency and a codified plan. Lastly, he recognized the two remaining members of the Personnel Committee: “They are amazing, and hopefully [there will be] more [soon].”

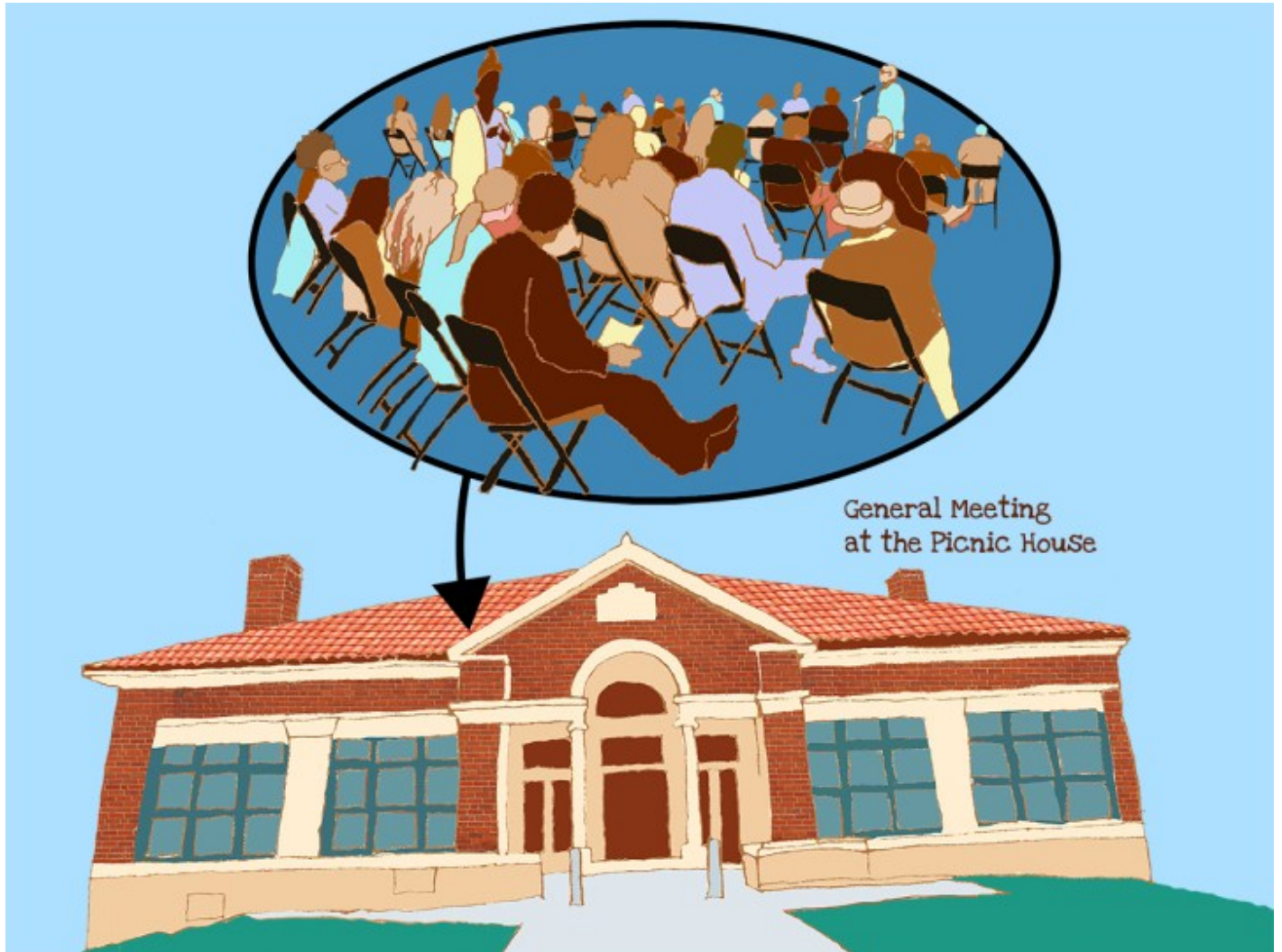
The minutes for the previous meeting were approved and the meeting was adjourned.

Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and cooking. She’s on IG @foodandfury.

Editor’s Note: On April 1st, the General Coordinators (GCs) were informed that Brooklyn College has rescinded its offer to lease their theater to the Park Slope Food Coop for a General Meeting to discuss and vote on matters regarding Israel and Palestine. The GCs will continue to search for a suitable, large venue to hold the General Meeting for all topics relating to boycotts.

TWISTS AND TURNS OF ROBERT'S RULES AT THE FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

July 2, 2024



By Jess Powers

The General Meeting (GM) held its February 27 gathering in person at ShapeShifter Labs, a performance space diagonally across the street from the Park Slope Food Coop. Roughly 132 members attended that rainy evening.

OPEN FORUM POLITICALLY CHARGED BUT RESPECTFUL

The Open Forum began with questions about securing a larger meeting space, so the

Coop can hold a vote on a proposal to boycott Israeli goods. Past votes drew large crowds and led to a rules change requiring a supermajority for boycotts. The current venue doesn't have sufficient capacity to house the vote.

FLEX WORKER CAROL WALD'S REMARKS ELICITED BOTH APPLAUSE AND A REMINDER FROM CHAIR COMMITTEE MEMBER IMANI Q'RYN THAT APPLAUSE AND BOOS ARE DISCOURAGED AT THE MEETING.

Carol Wald, a flex worker, acknowledged strong feelings on the subject as "a proud Jew, whose grandfather and uncle were killed in Auschwitz. The rage and grief and trauma that propels so many to work against the boycott," she said, "[is what] compels me to work with Palestinian people against genocide." She called for mutual respect as debate continues. Her remarks elicited both applause and a reminder from Chair Committee member Imani Q'ryn that applause and boos are discouraged at the meeting.

Coop member Sophie Glickman spoke of a strategic boycott as the civilian death toll in Gaza exceeds 30,000, many of the victims women and children. She continued that Israel is using starvation as a tactic—a war crime—and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has openly stated his opposition to Palestinian statehood. She did not wish to "[make] fellow Jewish Coop members uncomfortable" but inquired about the location for the vote.

Outspoken Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) critic, Jesse Rosenfeld said that Coop members who support Palestine support BDS, and that BDS supports violence. He stated that the BDS website itself describes "armed resistance" and "any action, whether one considers it legally or ethically justifiable." [Note: This reporter's review and fact check of the BDS website did not find these words; rather, "non-violence" and opposition to "discrimination, including anti-Semitism."]

Rosenfeld continued, “October 7, rape, infanticide... when will the Chair Committee clamp down [against BDS]?” His comments were also met by applause—and another reminder from Chair Committee member Q’ryn about applause and boos.

Brian Shuman, a food processor, expressed appreciation for Carol Wald (who spoke earlier), even though he disagreed with her position. He supports Anera (American Near East Refugee Aid), which provides immediate emergency aid and he “opposes BDS, which does not acknowledge Israel’s right to exist and is anti-Semitic.”

In response, someone in the audience called a point of order, asking whether clarification can be made if a point made is based on fact or opinion.

GENERAL COORDINATOR UPDATES ON SPACE FOR BDS VOTE, CHILDCARE AND FLYERS IN THE STAIRWELL

Ann Herpel provided updates as one of five General Coordinators. Regarding the larger space for a BDS vote, “we are making progress,” she said. The Coop is negotiating with a venue, and although an agreement isn’t finalized, “it looks promising... hopeful,” she continued.

“CHILDCARE WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO THE COOP,” ANN HERPEL ANNOUNCED. THOSE INVOLVED HAD BEEN WAITING TO HEAR BACK FROM A FINAL INSURANCE BROKER AND WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN SECURING COVERAGE.

“Childcare will not be returning to the Coop,” Herpel announced. Those involved had been waiting to hear back from a final insurance broker and were unsuccessful in securing coverage. The “landscape around insurance has changed dramatically,” she continued, and “would now require a license to operate [childcare].” The Coop will repurpose the room for operational needs.

In another shift from pre-pandemic times, the stairwell leading up to the office used to be covered in flyers announcing things like shows, rooms for rent and kombucha SCOBYs to share. That practice is not going to return, Herpel declared. The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) and New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF—which the Coop gets inspected by) declared that fire exits have to be “unobstructed.”

Herpel is working with the staff liaison to the *Gazette* to create a digital listing for community events, things for sale or trade, etc.

TREASURER’S REPORT

General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented the preliminary 52-week Financial Statement, provided online with the agenda for the GM. He explained that the financial statement needs to be audited, and there are usually not many changes.

ONE OF THE “EXTRAORDINARY THINGS” ABOUT THE COOP, GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ EFFUSED, IS THAT WE HAD A COMPLETE INVENTORY TURNOVER OF 62 TIMES THIS YEAR. PLENTY OF STORES HAVE TURNS OF 14 TIMES A YEAR.

One of the “extraordinary things” about the Coop, Holtz effused, is that we had a complete inventory turnover of 62 times this year, exceeding the year prior. Plenty of stores, he continued, have turns of 14 times a year. “Our dried mangos are less hard,” he mused.

REPORT ON NEW LABELS AND FUTURE NCG SAVINGS

General Coordinator Joe Szladek explained that new electronic shelf labels appearing in the produce aisles (and soon to spread throughout the store) will provide more accuracy in pricing, as prices change often. This is due to purchasing from a vendor at a different wholesale price or when United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) has a deal on some items.

Szladdek continued that he hopes the electronic shelf labels will save a few hours a day of staff time daily by not having to reprint and post new labels. He also expects the Coop to implement a National Cooperative Grocer program called Coop Deals after the deployment of electronic shelf labels is complete throughout the store. With Coop Deals, members will see savings on particular items of 20-30% off every two weeks, from Kettle brand potato chips to yogurt. Currently, staff are “too busy to handle all the labels” in order to comply with requirements NCG has set, but electronic shelf labels will solve some of those issues. Additionally, utilizing NCG resources would save staff time previously spent negotiating prices.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE PRESENTS REVISED RULES

Deb Magocsi, Helen Koh, and Grace Protos from the Dispute Resolution Committee presented the sole proposal on the agenda, “Revisions to the Procedures that Govern the Coop’s Disciplinary Process.”

Magocsi explained that the original rules were written in 2005, revised in 2012, and again in 2018. The nature of disputes has changed and committee members have “seen many opportunities to make the process better,” she continued. She described the process as unnecessarily adversarial and legalistic, and the intent of the new rules to be “more reflective of a cooperative institution.”

DEB MAGOCSI FROM THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE DESCRIBED THE HEARING PROCESS AS LONG, “ARDUOUS AND PAINFUL FOR EVERYONE,” “HUMILIATING FOR THE ACCUSED,” AND SHARED THAT THE “HEARING GROUP FELT IT WAS A WASTE OF TIME AND ENERGY.”

The disciplinary process involves the Dispute Resolution Committee, which investigates complaints and recommends actions; the Hearing Administration Committee, which organizes and administers hearings; and the Hearing Officer Committee, which

runs hearings. In summary, when the DRC receives a report of member misconduct, it assigns a member to investigate, and the full committee decides by consensus how to respond, typically a warning letter—but potentially the maximum penalty: being asked to resign. See also: [How the Dispute Resolution Process at the Coop Works](#); [Inside the Coop Hearing Process](#); and [Coop Member Expelled After Repeated Mask Wearing Violations](#).

The goal, Magocsi explained, is to use “more accessible language,” to have a “clearer definition of member misconduct,” and to recommend “mediation as the first option” thereby “[avoiding] hearings and judicial style process.” Hearings would still be available to members wishing to appeal serious DRC decisions, but the rule change would mean instead of the hearing group, three members of the HOC would determine whether the misconduct took place, rather than Coop members selected at random.

Magocsi described the hearing process as long (up to five hours), “arduous and painful for everyone,” “humiliating for the accused,” and shared that the “hearing group felt it was a waste of time and energy.”

Jesse Rosenfeld then proposed an amendment to “various ‘-isms’” in Article III sec D Part 6, which reads: “Racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, discriminatory, or other harmful conduct.” He said that “harmful conduct is a good start” but urged the members to “add to it” after the “Trump administration normalized a lot of hatred.” Specifically, he asked to add: “xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia.”

Member Abdi, who is Muslim and Somali, countered that he “[feels] protected by the amendment as is.” Others chimed in for or against. A vote on the amendment was held and the “nays” had it.

The meeting then returned to discussion of the proposal of the Committee. George, a floor monitor, argued that we “need a process that allows more informed, deliberative decision-making.”

There was a move to table the vote, followed by a Robert's Rules check. (Robert's Rules of Order are the parliamentary procedures used by many voluntary organizations for governance of meetings.)

A point of information was made and Koh explained that the agenda item was presented for discussion at the previous meeting. A vote to table was held, and the "nays" had it again. Discussion continued on the proposal.

David Moss of the Chair Committee argued that it's a "good proposal and there's no f—ing way to get a group of people to read 20-page documents before they come to the meeting." Member Jim concurred that there are "a lot of holes in the democratic process overall," but he believed that it's important to be fair to those who invested time in the agenda item. "In a democracy," he continued, "it's on us to be informed and to come to the meeting prepared. As we move forward, there are a lot of discussions to be had about procedures." Dan agreed and reminded the room of the process already in place: Vote on the item tonight, propose an amendment if there are any issues, and resolve those later.

In the end, 115 voted in favor of the new guidelines and five opposed. The Coop board accepted the advice of the members and the meeting was adjourned.

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