

PROPOSAL TO REINSTATE MEMBER LABOR WILL NOT GO TO A VOTE

September 11, 2020

DEAR COOP COMMUNITY,

At the August GM I tried to present a proposal to restore voluntary member labor for discussion. The response to my presentation was so overwhelmingly negative that I have decided not to request a vote. But I do want to address a few points as they bear on the state of our Coop.

First, although the General Coordinators knew about my proposal and I had written to them about the matter several times, and although I have had a cooperative relationship with them for many years, including as Committee Chair on the Loan Committee, they did not tell me that they intended to present the return to member labor as an apparent *fait accompli*, during their report at the beginning of the GM. I believe that there had been no earlier public proposal from the GCs to restore member labor. Had the GCs informed me of their intentions, I would have withdrawn my proposal.

Second, several comments suggested that my motives for wanting to restore member labor were political. One person explicitly said I was “screaming like Trump’s girlfriend.” Ouch. Without trotting out my progressive *bona fides*, I assert that people can legitimately disagree on which precautions are science-based and which are fear-based. Contrary to comments during the meeting, I had thought a lot about the issue, discussed it with other Coop stakeholders (staff and members), and spent considerable time reviewing health research and guidelines. I was motivated entirely by caring about the cooperative model and financial viability. I am concerned that liberals are becoming as reactionary as the right. I hope we are not going to meet disagreement with disparagement, either within our Coop or in the broader community. I tried to present as coherently as I could, within the limits of the Zoom meeting, a response to whatever concerns I could anticipate. I don’t think anyone should be dismissed or mocked for suggesting alternative approaches. That does not strengthen us, it weakens us.

Third, the Chair of the meeting said that the Chair committee members are not receiving work credit. He also noted that they are working more than average to make the GM happen. I think that the Coop should grant work credit to members who provide essential functions, such as running the GM and the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. For essential functions we should not depend on members' willingness to donate their time.

Finally, I had requested that my presentation be made available, but I don't think that happened. Unfortunately, because my time was cut short and I had technical difficulties with my Zoom connection, the presentation was rushed, and I could not introduce myself, respond to questions, or provide clarifications. I am a public school special ed teacher; I used to be a social scientist; I have been a member of the Coop for about 25 years, and I was the chair of the Revolving Loan Committee. If anyone is interested, here is the link to the presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1UdZdpijqqvhxaK_06NjrTyqeOM8jAvnQSe-ablaLbIKc/edit?usp=sharing

In Cooperation,
Rachel Porter

AN INVITATION

September 11, 2020

HELLO EVERYONE,

I am part of Rockycorner.org, a cohousing community in Connecticut, and a long-time PSFC member. Quite a few of us at Rocky Corner are also members of the PSFC, and we would like to invite the Coop community and their families to events that we are planning on our property and the surrounding area in rural Connecticut.

A Special Event for PSFC members & families: the Rocky Corner Cohousing community is planning some foraging and herb walks / hikes on some of the nice weather weekends we have left in this summer/early fall. We would like to extend a special invitation to the members of the Park Slope Food Coop and their families to come and spend a day in rural Connecticut with us.

Social distancing is easy at Rocky Corner; our property is situated on 33 acres of mostly farmland and is adjacent to a hiking trail that leads down to Lake Chamberlain, Connecticut's largest reservoir.

We have a few knowledgeable members ready to guide us as we forage and identify the herbs and edible wild plants that grow on our land.

We invite you to bring a picnic basket. There is plenty of space in our "outdoor living room" to organize some fun activities and games for all ages.

If you have a portable instrument, feel free to bring it along. The musically inclined among us are always ready for a jam session!

Since these events are very much weather-dependent and can not therefore be scheduled far in advance, we invite you to check our website regularly for updates: www.rockycorner.org/events. We only ask that you dress appropriately for a walk/hike (sturdy shoes and long pants!) and bring a smile to the event!

All of us at Rocky Corner Cohousing look forward to welcoming our friends at the PSFC to these events and to celebrate outdoor living with all of you.

Be sure to RSVP for the event of your choice by emailing info@rockycorner.org a few days before the event so we can plan appropriately for the ages and abilities of attendees. Rocky Corner is a respectful and inclusive community and ALL ARE WELCOME!

Lori Schumann

BOTH MEMBER + SHOPPER, NOT EITHER/OR

September 11, 2020

PSFC's mission reads: "The Park Slope Food Coop is a member-owned and operated food store ..."

At the 7/28 GM, members were asked to be our Better Selves in considering and approving the Black Lives Matter statement. Then, the Coordinators asked us to consider a markup increase to help PSFC's economic recovery. This proposal felt like an austerity measure asked of me as a shopper-customer.

We each are both a member and a shopper. As "an alternative to commercial profit-oriented business," our PSFC challenge is to hold and practice Both aspects vs. Either/Or. At the GM, a small yet significant symbol was that the Coordinators remembered the dollar amount of fresh MOEI recently infused into PSFC but not how many members/member-households made those investments.

I cherish PSFC as a nugget in our collective endeavor towards Another Future that is Possible. At a time when many are receiving packaged food distribution, the psychological and nutritional value of even a modicum of fresh produce cannot be overstated. So, when Coordinator Joe S characterized the proposed markup as affordable since folks are no longer going to restaurants, I asked myself: How many members who currently don't shop at PSFC or shop infrequently might be receiving boxed food distributions and/or standing in a food-pantry line?

Money is critical for PSFC to operate as a store. At the same time, PSFC would have lost its soul if certain members could no longer come to the Coop or afford to shop in it.

I am a Chinese-Asian American, self-identified as POC. A member since 1988 and a

Park Slope resident for 18 years (until 2004), I have experienced many phases of PSFC.

Proposals:

- Immediately re-institute the member-labor arrangement in whatever manner feasible.
- The first order of business should be an Audit (not a survey) to look into the well being of each member in each Squad/Committee as well as unattached members, prioritizing those who have not shopped since early March.
- An Audit will show members who have transitioned, recovering from COVID-19, grieving losses, or struggling to cover rent, food and other necessities. It likely find Black and Brown members who have not shopped recently residing in clusters/areas due to Brooklyn's segregated housing.
- Since the PSFC process requires two GMs to approve a proposal, the audit should be started by a team of volunteer members with pertinent skills and necessary staff support.
- PSFC proactively uses its vendor relationships and buying power to join forces with mutual-aid groups, pantries and smaller food coops. By leveraging PSFC capabilities, we can expand collaborative buying and allow fresher produce to be more accessible.

Black Lives Matter because not everyone has mattered under the euphemistic "All Lives Matter" approach to which the business and institutional sides of PSFC have often succumbed too easily. However, PSFC has too much history and potential for us to give up. Let's actively work towards Both aspects in a wholistic PSFC.

Respectfully,

Marion Yuen

VOTING AT THE ZOOM MEETING

September 11, 2020

Thank you to the people who organized the Zoom General Meeting held on Tuesday, July 28, 2020. It is good to keep an open forum so that Members can be informed about operations at the Coop. This is a useful tool to provide updates via committee reports, on financial matters and general information regarding the Coop. However the technology is not robust enough to allow for replacing the in-person discussion and voting on proposals and issues.

While we were able to participate via Zoom video last month, this month we were not able to sign on. Another person during the meeting described the identical problem we had, where Zoom did not accept our email address and/or password.

Without the video we could not see the poll questions or polls, and following the issues by voice only was more difficult without seeing people and their faces or even the simple name in a screen box. When it came time to vote, we were not able to vote in confidence on the phone, it was confusing to determine if we were voting on an amendment and how to cast a Yes or No vote. For households with a single computer but multiple Coop members, only one member can vote and not in private.

We suggest that until a robust viable solution is available for people using video and/or voice to attend, that future meetings restrict the agenda to committee reports and operational issues. Voting seems especially problematic using only a non-video connection.

We urge the Coop to continue to explore how to hold a remote meeting while Covid restricts our physical attendance. But we firmly believe that this not a replacement for attending and voting in-person and especially for those that use non-video means to attend.

Again thanks to those that worked hard on finding and implementing a technological solution. As retired Network Engineers, we understand the challenge. We just don't believe that the current solution supports the ideals of Coop democracy at this time.

In Cooperation,

Stewart Pravda and Cathy Monblatt

MEMBER LABOR

September 11, 2020

Dear Members,

At the August General Meeting I hope to propose to restore a modified, voluntary and temporary member labor system. I had hoped that the General Coordinators would do this, but since they have not, I hope that we, the members and owners of the Park Slope Food Coop can convince them with our collective vote. There are two reasons that this is important to our Coop. First, the current system of only paid labor is eroding our culture of cooperation and turning our unique Coop into a regular store with all of the spoken and unspoken alienation between staff and customers that we have so beautifully avoided for almost 50 years. Second, because we do not have member labor, we have hired a huge number of new, temporary staff and we still are not open for our full hours, consequently we are losing an incredible amount of money each week—according to Joe Holtz, our General Manager, about \$90,000/week. We are paying only minimum wage to the temporary staff, thus going back on our values to be an excellent employer. We are also jeopardizing our permanent staff's job security as our financial condition worsens.

I will propose that member labor is returned to solve both problems. I will propose that each area of labor is examined with key staff to make sure that public health and

safety protocols are established and easy to follow; the protocols for check out and shopping will no doubt be different from receiving for example. Initially, members will still be able to shop without working and we will offer modest incentives to members to bank work shift credits, for example, credit for 2 full shifts in the future for every 4 hour shift worked voluntarily. I will try to anticipate as many issues as I can in my presentation, but the agenda item specifies that restoring member labor will involve co-operative revision.

My usual work slot is leading the Loan Committee and in that capacity I regularly interact with groups wanting to start a Coop using our model. I had two such conversations this week, one with a group in Connecticut and another in upstate NY. I sent them each a couple of videos that are on YouTube about our Coop. I urge you all to look up these short videos to be reminded of how special and functional our model is. Let's bring it back. Please sign up for the GM and consider voting to restore our model.

*In Cooperation,
Rachel Porter*

FASTER COOP VOTES

September 11, 2020

I'm gonna keep shopping at the Coop because the groceries are great but our collective core is taking a bad hit if the June GM is any indication. The agenda item to make a public statement of support for the movement for Black Lives should have been voted on, and not stalled via process designating it a discussion-only topic. This is not a new problem.

