

VOLUNTARY ARTICLE: IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

June 24, 2025



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By Jan Clausen

As we welcome incoming General Manager Joe Szladek, a referendum on hybrid General Meetings (GM) is underway. The Coop has entered a time of dramatic transitions. New beginnings offer openings for positive change. It's worth a look back at recent developments to help us plan wisely for the future.

At the April GM, the Coop's Board took action to let members vote on the popular hybrid proposal. They did this after an expected GM vote was taken off the agenda due to the cancellation of our rental agreement with City Tech. That large facility bowed out in the wake of a scurrilous email pressure campaign by a non-Coop group (End Jew Hatred). The Board needed to address the resulting governance crisis once it be-

came apparent that the General Coordinators (GCs) would not. Otherwise, our ability to decide matters vital to the Coop would have been permanently undermined.

The Board clearly acted within the scope of our bylaws, which specify that it may issue a referendum “on any matter.” There was overwhelming support from the member-owners at the April GM. Nevertheless, two out of the five Board members present (including Joe Holtz and Imani Q’ryn, both outgoing) argued strongly against the action, claiming it violated the tradition whereby the Board limits itself to affirming the results of a formal member vote. In the wake of the Board’s split decision to issue the referendum, the GCs solicited a legal opinion. That opinion not only confirmed the propriety of the action but stated that no change to the bylaws is required for the Coop to adopt hybrid General Meetings! Yet, because the GCs had previously dug in their heels on claims that the bylaws change was needed (requiring a two-thirds majority “yes” vote, not a simple majority), the referendum will be subject to the bylaws change threshold.

JUST AS THE BOARD (OUR ELECTED LEADERSHIP BODY) IS CHARGED WITH SAFEGUARDING THE COOP’S FINANCIAL SURVIVAL, SO IT MUST ACT TO SUPPORT MEMBER-LED DEMOCRACY.

Critics warn of an “activist board,” failing to distinguish between arbitrary Board action and the Board’s support of members’ right to vote when normal channels have been blocked. We’ve heard claims that the work of PSFC Members for Palestine on behalf of the hybrid measure is sneaky or suspect. In fact, seeking a boycott of Israeli products and supporting an expansion of member democracy are both cherished goals of PSFC Members for Palestine.

Just as the Board (our elected leadership body) is charged with safeguarding the Coop’s financial survival, so it must act to support member-led democracy. If its recent move comes as a surprise, perhaps that’s because we’ve gotten used to a rela-

tively quiet role for the membership. The Board has often accepted member advice based on GM votes whose outcomes were heavily influenced by the views and interests of the GCs. One important example is the March GM vote in 2012 rejecting a proposal that would have mandated a Coop-wide vote (referendum) on a pro-Palestine boycott. Prior to that meeting, Joe Holtz weighed in to urge a “no” vote, strongly implying that to do otherwise would mark the voter as anti-Coop. Holts also vocally supported the 2016 measure that saw the GM adopt an unprecedented 75% supermajority requirement for approving boycotts.* Recently, an extraordinary series of Coordinators’ Corner columns collectively signed by the GCs has sought to replicate this pattern of GC influence over votes. What this strategy may fail to recognize is that an energized membership is a plus for the Coop.

A new situation requires new thinking. At the May GM, Szladek cautioned us not to take the Coop’s success for granted and vowed to prioritize stability. Stability is important but shouldn’t be confused with a “tradition” of resistance to member input. Stability and democratic decision-making must be partners for success over the long haul.

Jan Clausen is a writer, teacher, and activist with Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine.

VOLUNTARY ARTICLE: “BECAUSE IT’S ALWAYS BEEN DONE THIS WAY” AS THE COOP’S NORTH STAR?

June 24, 2025



June 24, 2025

By Tim Hospodar

It was frightful when many members attending the May 2025 General Meeting (GM) demanded outgoing General Manager Joe Holtz disclose the legal counsel who supported the General Coordinators' (GC) inquiry into the April 2025 GM proceedings. Curious about what fellow members plan to do with the information, I became equally curious about why GCs solicited counsel without questioning its cost. At the May GM, Holtz reminded members that "Legal Fees" is an expense itemized on each financial statement discussed at every meeting, and I suppose that's reason not to hesitate an inquiry into whether April GM votes were allowable. "What would it cost?" has guided GCs to deliberate hybrid meetings, the return of childcare, but not the employment of a third-party firm.

The Bylaws (Article V, Section 2) confirm the Coop may employ a firm for such purposes, namely actions deemed necessary for the good of the corporation that cannot

await the next meeting of directors. During the past couple of years, mail ballots had been distributed prior to the May GM; resolving what that ballot would look like before Tuesday, May 27 was appropriate. It's why I sponsored a resolution (Article V, Section 1), authorizing GCs to take such action without further inquiry. While the April GM could be endlessly studied and debated, the mail ballot could take shape as decided by the Board of Directors at the April GM. The resolution would absolve us from any liability in this purposeful collection of data. Remember, also, that the data alone will not enable an amendment to the Bylaws.

I shared this resolution with GCs by email—our primary form of discussion between GMs. Besides hundreds of member emails, some members on the Board ask questions of the GCs, ask questions of the Agenda Committee (AC), while copying other committees too. Occasionally the questions lead to discussion, when a GC responds or the AC. When members of the Board posed questions about the mail ballot, however, it was radio silence from the GCs. I chimed in late, suggesting resolutions could serve as an appropriate solution. Acknowledging the cost, a law firm's decision makes the resolution a moot issue.

THE DATA ALONE WILL NOT ENABLE AN AMENDMENT TO THE BYLAWS.

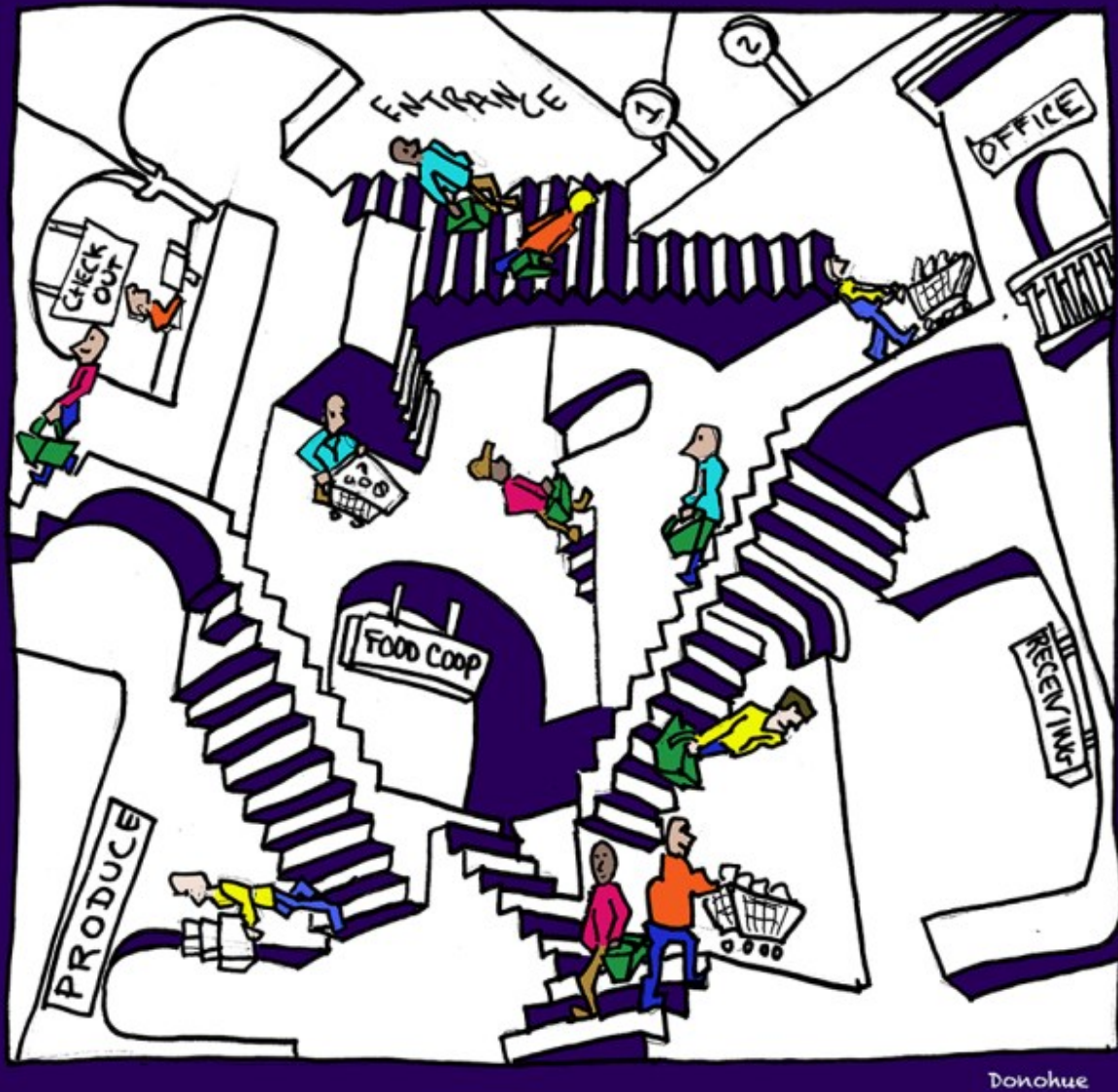
"It's always been done this way," was probably no factor in how the law firm reached their decision. If they consulted the Coop's guide to GMs and AMs, Section V informed them that the structure of the GM can be changed by a majority vote of the members present. They might have established that the Board may consider this vote to be the advice of the members. Maybe they decided the members' requests that the Board take action or the introduction of a referendum during the Open Forum served as advice baked into a demonstration of overwhelming support by the voting members. I figure the Board drew an inference from the number of raised hands, and the Board ratified the advice of the members present. And this is what the Board was asked to do—ratify the members' advice—regardless of how it's always been done for 48-plus

years.

Timothy Hospodar is a member of the Coop's Board of Directors.

VOLUNTARY ARTICLE: MISSED CONNECTIONS

June 24, 2025



June 3, 2025

By Arpita Dey

You: A literary agent who handles academics.

I walked you home several years ago and explained my book idea. I am now ready to write! Maybe you are still interested.

You: Shopping, with ball cap and beard

Me: Doing checkout, with glasses and goatee

I said I thought cremini mushrooms were just baby portobellos—then I started to doubt myself. Well, I just looked it up. Guess what? I was right! Anyway, if you see this and you're not busy, we could talk some more—about mushrooms, or anything else!

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MEMBER SUBMISSION: VOTING ON HYBRID GMS

June 24, 2025



April 22, 2025

By CJ Glackin and Morgan Vö

We submitted the following article on March 31 to re-introduce our proposal to make General Meetings hybrid ahead of an April 29 vote, to be held at City Tech College's theater space. But on April 11, we were unexpectedly notified that City Tech had cancelled the rental. The GM then moved back to the regular venue of the Picnic House, and the vote was removed from the agenda.

This proposal has been in limbo since it was submitted in December 2023, but we remain committed to seeing it through, and urge the General Coordinators to facilitate bringing it to the membership for a vote. Members want to vote on this proposal—the GCs need to find a way to let their voices be heard.

Below is our original article, written before the cancellation. We believe that it is important to publish it for the historical record:

As Coop members committed to the PSFC's mission to "maximize participation at every level," we're excited to present our proposal to allow in-person and online participation in the Coop's General Meetings (GMs) at the upcoming April 29 meeting.

Currently, GMs are held in-person at the Prospect Park Picnic House on the last Tuesday night of each month. This presents barriers for many: immunocompromised folks who avoid large, multi-hour gatherings; parents/caregivers who can't leave loved ones for a night; people living far from the area; people for whom mobility issues make evening travel a burden. Accessibility issues may be ongoing or temporary. If you're home with a cold, you should still get to participate in the Coop's policymaking.

Members who contribute labor deserve accessible ways to participate in the Coop's governance. Online attendance is a commonsense step toward better facilitating access for all.

What's in our proposal?

The text of our proposal is as follows:

"Proposal to make all General Meetings hybrid—both in-person and online—through amending the PSFC Bylaws, Article VI, Sections 2 and 4, by appending the following: 'Presence and gathering at meetings shall be by physical presence and by virtual presence consistent with New York Business Corporation Law Section 708(c). Meetings may be entirely virtual if a physical gathering is not feasible.' The Coop will begin holding hybrid General Meetings within three months of this proposal's passing. The proposal's sponsors will finalize protocols for hybrid General Meetings, in cooperation with the Chair Committee, the GM squad, and PSFC staff. This proposal may require the GM squad to create additional work slots to facilitate hybrid meetings."

During our September 2024 presentation, we heard questions and concerns that deserve to be thoughtfully addressed. We also heard plenty of enthusiasm, including from the Chair Committee and from fellow members, who offered different ideas around how hybrid could work, and how issues might be solved. To ensure the best experience possible for a hybrid model, our proposal now includes the three-month period defined above, in which we will work with the Chair Committee, the GM squad, and PSFC staff to optimize hybrid protocols for our Coop's unique context.

Imagining a Hybrid GM

Here, you will find our full proposal, including recommendations for what we think a good hybrid GM looks like, developed in collaboration with a Chair Committee member and two members who approached us after our initial presentation, all of whom have professional expertise in producing hybrid events and meetings.

We stop short of including these recommendations in our proposal. We believe it is in the long term interest of the Coop that this proposal not prescribe how hybrid GMs work. New technologies and practices will arise, and it shouldn't take another proposal to utilize them in our GMs. The "Guide to the General and Annual Meetings" is already set up this way: it doesn't say that we need a projector or a PA system, but we use those technologies because they improve the effectiveness of our meetings.

We believe our recommendations demonstrate that hybrid GMs are achievable for our purposes here at the Coop. Hybrid GMs would provide a significant step towards maximizing participation in our collective decision making. We hope that you, too, want to see a more participatory PSFC, and we look forward to seeing you at the April 29th GM, at City Tech College.