

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER JOE HOLTZ RETIRES?

May 17, 2022



By Christopher Cox

If there is one person who carries in his mind the whole of the Coop, with all of its convoluted functions and dysfunctions, it is Joe Holtz. He was one of the founding members in 1973, when he was 22 years old. He's been the General Manager for decades and knows more about the Coop's finances than anyone else alive. If there's a question about the how or the why of any of the numerous overlapping rules and procedures in place at 782 Union Street, he's the person to ask.

Speaking recently about what the near future holds for the Coop, Holtz addressed a question that's been hiding in plain sight: What happens when he retires and the

Coop's members, staff, and board can no longer call on his encyclopedic knowledge from day to day? The good news is that, for now at least, Holtz is staying where he is. "I have not made plans to retire as of yet," he said. "I mean, I've definitely thought of the concept. I'm not looking forward to it. I'm not dreading it. But I don't have plans at this time."



Joe Holtz has three roles at the Coop he's a General Coordinator, the General Manager, and the Treasurer.

Officially, Holtz has three roles at the Coop: He's one of the General Coordinators; he's the General Manager; and he's the Treasurer. Filling his spot as one of the General Coordinators should be straightforward. Their numbers have fluctuated over the years—from as many as nine in 2015 to five today—and the process for hiring replacements is well established. The other General Coordinators (Elinoar Astrinsky, Ann Her-

pel, Lisa Moore, and Joe Szladek) would interview candidates in coordination with the Coop's member-run Personnel Committee. Holtz has also been careful, he said, to ensure that the other General Coordinators have a wide-ranging sense of how the Coop operates: "The way I've done my job is to try to get other General Coordinators to be generalists over the years. We try to have a team approach as much as possible." Still, Holtz worries that any expectations of a smooth transition might be "phantasmagorical thinking." "I don't know that it's going to be easy," he said. "We don't have a real plan in place."

As for his work as General Manager, which involves supervising the other General Coordinators, the bylaws of the Coop leave many options open. There doesn't need to be a General Manager at all—the title isn't mentioned in the bylaws. If the General Coordinators do decide to elevate one of their own to a supervisory position, or (less likely) to hire an outsider to serve as General Manager, they can do so however they wish, in consultation, again, with the Personnel Committee.

One concrete measure the Coop could take to prepare for Holtz's departure involves his work as treasurer. Holtz is proud of the organization's financial stability since its founding 50 years ago. "Back in the day, when there were a lot of food coops in New York City, there were coops that went out of business because they had no idea they were losing money. And then one day they turned around and they couldn't function and then they were out of business." At the Coop, in contrast, Holtz and another one of the founders, Robert Weisburd, took keeping the books in balance seriously. "When a problem arose, we didn't sweep anything under the rug. We addressed the problem," Holtz said. "The financial attention at the Coop has been robust from day one in 1973 and that's part of our success and that has to continue."



Joe is very proud of the Coop's financial stability.

Weisburd was the Coop's first treasurer, a task he took on unpaid and continued, about five hours a week, every week, for decades. After Weisburd moved to the West Coast in 1998, part-time Bookkeeping Coordinator Tricia Leith took over the treasurer duties, and Leith eventually became a General Coordinator. For many years the Coop's finances were overseen by three General Coordinators—Joe Holtz, Mike Eakin, and Tricia Leith—in what Holtz referred to as a “three-person financial sustainability working group.” Both Eakin and Leith retired in 2018 and Holtz was then elected treasurer.

Holtz, however, thinks that a more sustainable arrangement would be to create a Finance Committee that could take on much of the work that the treasurer does now. “I think the Coop in general has to double back on its roots, which is getting work in the

hands of members as much as possible,” he said. The financial report delivered at each General Meeting by the treasurer could instead be presented by the Finance Committee. Holtz plans to develop a proposal to create such a committee, vet it with the other General Coordinators, and present it to the general meeting soon—he’s written a draft of the proposal already. “I would like to see that go forward,” he said. “I feel like that’s part of my succession planning.”



We need to get as much work as possible into the hands of our members, observed Holtz.

With that change in place, Holtz’s eventual departure would be made somewhat less painful. But accounting for the formal work he does for the Coop would only solve part of the problem. “Broadly speaking, we’re losing institutional knowledge,” Ann Herpel said. “His departure would represent a sea change.” Herpel said that it would be a difficult transition especially for some of the longest-tenured members, for whom Holtz and the Coop are nearly synonymous.

Holtz has his own requirements for how he'd like to retire. "I've always been a person who wants to be involved in some kind of good work," he said. "I would try to continue that in retirement in some capacity." What about taking some time just to relax? "I love playing ping-pong," he said, "but my left arm is hurting me these days. So I don't think that's good retirement plan either."



Joe Holtz was just 22 when he co-founded what was to become the Park Slope Food Coop.

WHAT A LONG, STRANGE TRIP: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GAZETTE IN THE COVID ERA

May 17, 2022

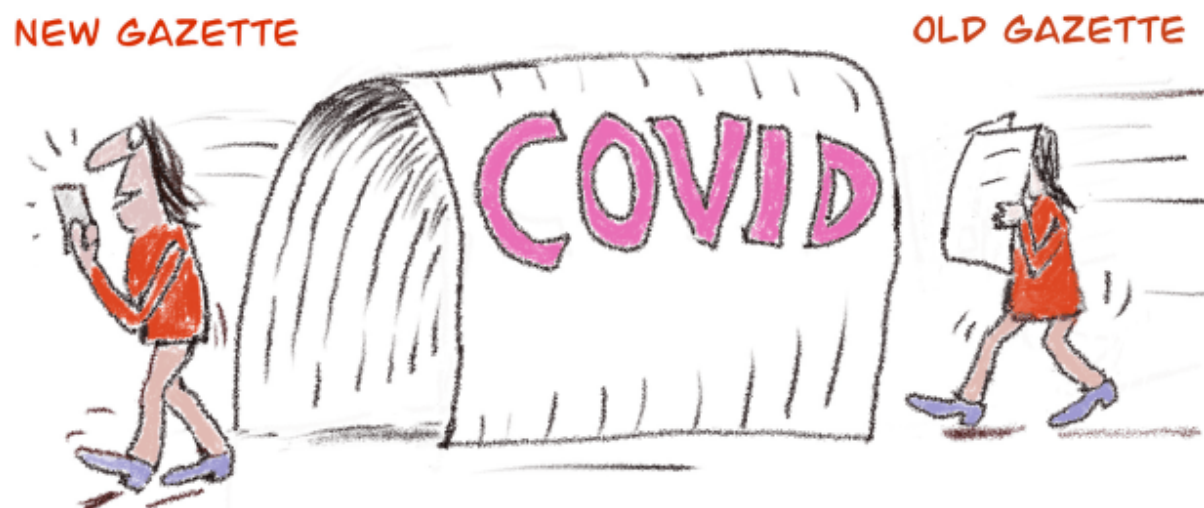


ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

By Frank Haberle

The Park Slope Food Coop, much like Brooklyn and the world around it, has changed and adapted in multiple ways to survive the challenges of the COVID pandemic. In the same way, one of the Coop's chief sources of member communication, the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, has been transformed. Pre-pandemic, the *Linewaiters' Gazette* was a print biweekly available on the shopping floor to all members to leaf through while waiting in line—hence the name—and relayed important information about the Coop and features about its members. In the first months of the crisis, the *Gazette* team had to decide if it could continue producing the paper—and if so, how?

After two years and several manifestations, the *Gazette* has become a digital newspaper—and will remain so going forward. While the decision to move to digital was relatively easy, the process of re-invention took months. For the Coordinating Editors, the Development Art Directors, and Development Editors, there were multiple considerations from an editorial, artistic, and technical perspective regarding how this new *Gazette* could best serve the needs and interests of the Coop community.

The *Gazette's* transformation was the result of thousands of work hours by dedicated staff editors, reporters, artists, and technicians. Recently, we asked several key *Gazette* staff about their role and experience during the digitization process, and their take on the change and its results.

What do you think of the change to digital, and what was your role in the decision?

"It's a change that was overdue," said Carey Meyers, a Coop member since 1997 and past reporter who became one of three Coordinating Editors in 2019. "Digital is more eco-friendly, it's in color, and it offers so much more flexibility in how we share news and stories about the Coop, the PSFC community, and issues that affect us and the food we eat. In fact when I first talked with Nancy [Rosenberg, Coordinating Editor] in 2019 about joining her as a coordinating editor, I agreed to do it with the understanding that we'd develop a process to create a digital *Gazette*."

"Carey, Tom Moore, and I talked about going digital from the get-go," said Rosenberg, a Coop member since 1994. "We wanted a more nimble paper and the opportunity to remake the *Gazette*, which probably had not been substantially reimaged since it was founded in the 1970s. In its last iteration, it contained three separate calendars, lots of boiler-plate and various features that used up ink, but didn't create a dynamic reading experience. Now that I know how much work digitization requires, I'm guessing it would not have happened without the pandemic."

"I supported the digital evolution of the *Gazette* wholeheartedly right from the start," said Eva Schicker, a Development Art Director for the *Gazette* since 2000. "My role was supportive. Nancy, Matt [Landfield], and Midori [Nakamura] were hosting early Zoom talks about the digital implementation. After these Zoom meetings, I talked to all our Team 4 illustrators and photographers and asked them to consider getting on board, and they all did. As a Development Art Director, I immediately loved that we could go to full color on the illustrations and photographs."

During the first six months of the pandemic, Rosenberg added, “we ran on fumes. By the early fall of 2020, people were generally exhausted about everything, and it became hard to keep the *Gazette* going when no one else at the Coop was required to work. Nonetheless, that first iteration was not a wasted effort. That was the period when [Co- Coordinating Editors] Matthew Landfield, Carey, and I basically laid out the foundations for the digital *Gazette*. We took a six-month break before starting once again to figure out how the digital paper could really succeed. Matt guided us toward WordPress as the format that would work best for the most people, he and Midori Nakamura chose the template, and then Matt dove deeply into coding. He had some help along the way, but he was the prime creator. So many unpaid hours went into the workflow creation.”

“Matt Landfield was the key to digitization,” Nancy continued. “Matt was actually sick with COVID when he designed the first iteration of the digital *Gazette*. I don’t know how he managed to do so. But, there were a lot of people eager to keep the *Gazette* going—I think it was a way to deal with the shock of the early pandemic and, perhaps, a denial that things could go really badly. People poured a lot of energy into that first digital version. People were stuck at home, dealing with illness, children, and challenging job situations, but they still wanted to keep the *Gazette* alive.”

“This was a great COVID project,” Meyers added. “It needed to happen, and the pandemic flipped the switch to get it started. It allowed us to rethink every aspect of the *Gazette*, and to be deliberate about how to offer stories and information to our Coop community in fresh and interesting ways.”



ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

What was your experience with the move from print to digital? What was gained and what was lost?

"In a strange way, the online *Gazette* process actually brought our Team 4 together during the pandemic," Schicker said. "We had something to wrap our minds and hearts around. We experimented with styles and iconic art development, and learned a lot about what works best in a WordPress format. It took some trial and error to get the right specs in place, but that turned out all fine."

"I loved the charm of the old *Gazette* and the physical copies I could toss in my cart and read while in line or at home," said Leila Darabi, who joined the Coop in 2015 and the *Gazette*, as a reporter, in 2016. "As a reporter, it always frustrated me that the issues were only available for a two-week period or online as a clunky and hard-to-read PDF that was hard to scroll. With the change to digital, we now have unique links that

we can email and post and that the Coop Instagram and Twitter feeds can share. And we have analytics to see who clicks on the articles. It has also been very cool to see the art and photography team expand what's possible with color and animation."

"Transitioning from print to online was both painful in some ways and very natural in others," observed Landfield, who spearheaded much of the technical effort. "On the one hand, abruptly terminating production of the print version was painful. We definitely all felt a sense of loss in having the *Gazette* go silent. Having the change forced on us by the pandemic was, like so much else, a profound shock. But as the time spent in lockdown extended, it came to seem par for the course that we would put the *Gazette's* stories online. Everything else was online now anyway! Why not the *Gazette*? So that seemed very natural, a no-brainer. "

"In making the transition to an online journal," Landfield added, "for the Coop there were meaningful positives. For one, the Coop is saving money. Second, while readership of the print issue was what it was, many copies of the printed paper would go to recycling. So we are using less paper now. Beyond that, using a digital platform like WordPress gives us much clearer data about readership, which can help inform what kind of content the *Gazette* produces in the future. In addition, we have the potential to reach a wider reader base with the online *Gazette* than we were ever able to do with the print publication, as linewaitersgazette.com is available publicly. That also means that individual stories and the site itself can be shared and accessed via social media.

"What was lost," Landfield continued, "is the tangible, physical object that you can hold in your hand. That does mean that some readers who are not online will miss out. But in a day and age when everything is online and so much of our communication is done via smartphone, it's increasingly difficult not to be represented online. Sometimes I do miss not being able to grab the paper and peruse it while tucking my cart into the pasta aisle, but I also like being able to know about what's going on at the Coop without actually being at the store. "

“The best learning from the pandemic is to always keep open communications,” Schicker reflected. “Everyone is doing such an amazing job. We realized that producing one detailed lead illustration can easily take 8 to 12 hours, and it’s really a lot that the illustrators are giving. And it’s also something that they can be very proud of.”

“The digital *Gazette* is still a work-in-progress,” Rosenberg said. “One of the great things that it has offered is the chance to let our artists shine. We used to have beautiful photographs that would then look like mud once they were in print. Now, the art work is a major feature of the newsletter. We even have GIFs!”

What is your sense of the member reaction to the new digital format, and what can we do to build a broader audience for the *Gazette*?

Darabi offered that the response she has received has been entirely positive. “There are many ways we could build the audience, given the capacity. As a professional communications strategist, if the Coop were my client and the *Gazette* something we wanted to promote, I would do an audit of the existing channels and target audience and suggest we start there. There is a lot we could be doing and that I hope to see us build out over time.”

Schicker added: “My Coop friends who are not on the *Gazette* are very surprised to hear that there is now a digital *Gazette*. In most cases, they don’t know how to access it, on what device, or how to get it delivered without having to do anything. But they are very interested.”

Moving forward, Landfield said, “we are actively seeking to expand the diversity of viewpoints and voices represented on the *Gazette* to ensure that we cover and are covered by a range of voices that represent the membership of the Coop at large. And we are also looking at ways to add new types of content and features of the *Gazette* that will be useful to the Coop membership.

“This has been a long journey,” Landfield reflected, “one that is far from over. We’ve

come a long way though. As we have done thus far, with cooperation, we can continue to build something that will serve the Coop membership well for years to come.”

APRIL GENERAL MEETING: DECORATIVE AND EDIBLE FLOWERS, A SUNNY FISCAL OUTLOOK, AND A CLARION CALL FOR INCLUSION

May 17, 2022



By Zoe Singer

To open the Coop’s April General Meeting (GM), Maribeth Batcha of the Chair Committee introduced herself as Meeting Chair. She welcomed around 100 members to the virtual meeting room and acknowledged that the Coop sits on the ancestral territory of the Leni Lenape.

Before proceeding to the agenda, Batcha mentioned that the Chair Committee is looking for one to two additional members who reflect the diversity of the Coop and are

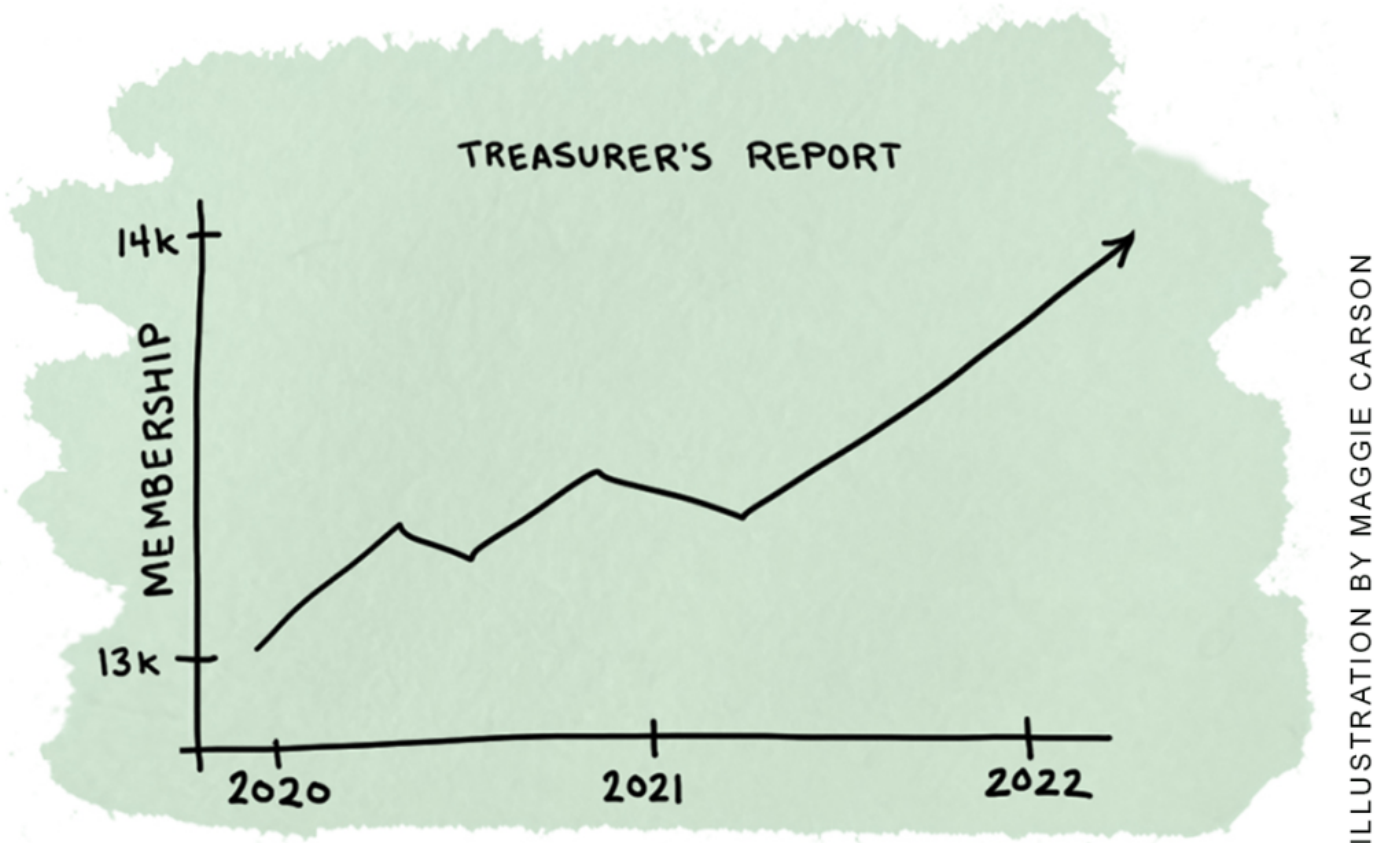
comfortable running meetings. Ideal candidates would be “big-hearted and comfortable speaking and saying no to people.” If this is you, please email psfcchair@gmail.com.

OPEN FORUM: COVID VACCINE MANDATES, APPEALS, TESTING

Members were invited to ask brief questions regarding the operation of the Coop. These questions included: the criteria used to issue exemptions to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for members, the progress of reviewing appeals to denied exemptions, and the justification for requiring COVID testing for those with exemptions. Ann Herpel explained that mandatory testing is in the City Guidelines, and that these questions would be forwarded to Joe Holtz, General Coordinator, since he was not in attendance.

TREASURER’S REPORT: A BRIGHTER FISCAL OUTLOOK

General Coordinator Joe Szladek stood in for Joe Holtz to share the Coop’s financial statement. Normal operations are no longer resulting in a significant weekly deficit (which had peaked above \$100,000 during the pandemic) thanks to the return of member labor, as well as the ongoing, crucial work of staff. According to Szladek, “While we’re not quite breaking even, we’re closing in on this goal, with nearly \$4.3 million in the bank. We’re adding about 100 members a week, which is far greater than attrition, and anticipate reaching 14,000 members by summer, at which point, continuing the current 25% markup (4% of which is the “pandemic special”), we should approach breaking even. This is very good news, especially considering where we were in 2020.”



Szladdek also pointed to the Coop's increased efficiency as a contributing factor to the promising financial outlook, particularly the online member services system which has dramatically lessened demands on staff time. Other improvements include: a new inventory system that has been tested on Coop produce and seems significantly faster; scanners for inventory; and a reduction of redundant paperwork. Such developments add up to meaningful savings of time and expense, and the staff continues working to develop and consider further efficiencies including the possibility of online ordering (which we would likely pilot then bring to a GM for approval, if we get to that point). A lot is changing in the grocery business and these changes help us compete.

GENERAL COORDINATORS' REPORTS

Comings and Goings Report

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky gave thanks to some of those who have provided service to the Coop over many years and are now moving on: Lewanika Forde-Sengor, a Membership Coordinator; Marvin Pique, a Receiving Coordinator; Carline Aure-

lus, a Receiving Coordinator/Buyer; Kamila Nuritova, a Membership Coordinator; and Talia Protos, of the pandemic support staff. Astrinsky also congratulated new hires John Lloyd, formerly part of the pandemic support staff, who joins the Maintenance staff, and Ben Callicott, also formerly on the pandemic support team, who is moving into a full-time role as a Receiving Coordinator focused on produce.

Food Report

Astrinsky, having returned from one of our distributor's food shows earlier that day, shared feedback she receives often about how meaningful the Coop is to the vendors—especially the small farmers—it supports.

In the produce aisle, in addition to plant seeds, our produce buyers have ventured beyond fresh herbs, adding decorative plants and pesticide-free or minimally treated flowers. We also have compost from BK ROT. BK ROT was founded to provide positive, meaningful jobs for young people in Bushwick. Their staff pick up some of the Coop's food waste using e-bikes, compost it in Bushwick, and bring it back to sell.



Lastly, Astrinsky thanked members for sharing requests for special foods we encounter elsewhere via the digital “product suggestion box” found inside each member’s Member Services account by clicking on “Contact Us” and then on “Product Suggestion.” That is how we came to offer some lovely goat cheeses with edible flowers, among the 100-plus choices currently available in the cheese case.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ



Fun Report

General Coordinator Ann Herpel filled in since no members of the Fun Committee could attend to announce plans to gather with other Coop members at the LeFrak Center at Lakeside in Prospect Park for roller skating on April 30th. The committee aims to convene more events and include more people, and can be followed on Instagram @psfc_fun_committee.

General Coordinator's Report: Members Now Work Once Every Six Weeks

Herpel encouraged members to review the board candidates presented at the last GM on the Coop website under announcements. Their board statements are also in the last issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

The new member labor cycle started on April 18th. Every working member is now required to work once within six weeks or to use a banked shift. We've been able to ex-

tend the cycle to six weeks because we're growing. Staff analyzed the number of working members (more than 10,000) and shifts available and found that there were fewer shifts available than people needing them. We also continue to prioritize meaningful labor—versus busy work and standing around—to ensure member time is well spent and contributing to an operationally efficient Coop.

The online Member Services calendar now exposes six weeks at a time, and members can sign up for up to two shifts at any given time. This is a change (from four, previously) made with an eye to equity: 12% of members had been scheduling 21% of shifts available, effectively squeezing others out. Recurring shifts are also coming back, targeted for early July, for those who prefer a regular assignment.

Lastly, Herpel called attention to the new sign at the entrance that flashes green and says "Next Member." This has been successful in further streamlining entry. Members should look up from their phones and pay attention when approaching the first three line positions out front.



Opening the floor to questions, Herpel responded to a request for expanded hours by sharing that we are indeed planning to open earlier on weekends eventually, and at some point will stay open later as well. Unfortunately for those who miss their old work squads, these cannot be reconstituted. We are also unlikely to bring back Terra-cycle since we no longer have the space in our meeting room to store pallets of plastic.

AGENDA ITEM 1: INTERIM AGENDA COMMITTEE ELECTION

Agenda Committee member Allie Esslinger introduced Dominique Bravo as a member with a passion for the Coop, and an ability to understand “the multiple sides, perspectives, and parties to issues, in line with efforts to bring thoughtful, impartial agendas.” Dominique spoke, saying she’s been a Coop member for more than 20 years, has been dedicated to social justice throughout her life, and loves “working in groups to make organizations work.” Attendees voted 69-3 to appoint Dominique, who was uncontested.

AGENDA ITEM 2: DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) presented three members for re-election to serve three-year terms on the DRC. DRC Committee member Helen Koh opened by sharing a brief description of the DRC's role in member and staff complaints. "We field and investigate, we're not here to police anyone, we follow up with procedures approved by the GM. We resolve many disputes each year. Most resolve amicably. Those who are dissatisfied sometimes politicize those disputes, and since we're not able to talk about them, we can't defend ourselves. We welcome new members. We all enjoy being on the committee. Let us know if you're interested: foodcoopdrc@gmail.com." Koh introduced the three members up for re-election, who each spoke briefly. Grace Protos, Melinda Daniels, and Deb Magocsi were all reinstated to the DRC by votes of 66-2.

AGENDA ITEM 3: COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

The PSFC approved a proposal to create a Committee Oversight Committee on January 25th, 2022. In keeping with Coop regulations (Structure and Reporting Requirements for New Coop Committees), item sponsor Rachel Porter gave a presentation on the new committee's scope, composition, governance, and reporting to membership. Her purpose was to share with attendees her answers to the stipulated questions, which are intended to provide basic structure and principles when a committee is created. Her responses can be viewed here: [Answers to Structure and Reporting Requirements for New Coop Committees](#). Porter explained that attendees would vote on whether she had sufficiently answered the questions.

When the floor was opened for questions, these focused on Porter's affirming that "racial/ethnic diversity within the members on the committee would be addressed." Porter responded by describing various types of diversity: "societal, cultural, age, intellectual, age, racial...." She then said, "In some ways, I think that's philosophical... some committees have noted their priority. It's routinely noted. One could argue the path to diversity is by active recruitment. I can't commit to active recruitment. One obvious way is to include the [Equity, Access and Community Committee], to give ad-

vice about how to recruit, and I intend to do that.” Others asked why Porter had indicated that committee decisions would require a supermajority, and Porter responded that this method has precedent in the GM and “feels more cooperative.”

Some members dissented, pointing out that in a committee of three proposed members, a required supermajority and closed-door voting seem “less progressive.” An important question was raised: “Is there a way to make space for non-cis white people for this committee?” The questioner went on to say that “supermajorities are good for preventing random bad things from happening but also prevent people in a minority from being able to put forth diverging ideas.” Porter’s response and ensuing conversation pointed to a critical need for fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion more systematically in Coop practices and systems, including committee formation. Porter resolved to consult with the Equity, Access and Community Committee. The need for further dialogue and attention to these tensions was palpable even over Zoom.

Voting ensued for the official filing of paperwork to form the Committee Oversight Committee, which was accepted 36-27.

WRAP-UP

The standard Board of Directors vote was held, resulting in approval of the prior GM minutes and of this GM’s elections, all by votes of 5-0. The meeting adjourned with the click of a mouse.

Zoe Singer is a former food writer and recipe developer turned grant writer. She is a lifelong Brooklynite and longtime Coop member.

BOARD CANDIDATES: WHO THEY ARE AND WHY THEY RUN

May 17, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

From the Editors

The Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors plays a crucial role in running the Coop. The Board makes its decisions based on the advice of members who attend the monthly General Meeting. There are five seats on this Board, and each term lasts three years. Members submit their applications to run for open seats in March each year, and then candidate statements are published in the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Thanks to the pandemic, members will now have the chance to start voting online via a Coop-wide email that will go out in late May, and results will be announced at the Annual Meeting in June.

There are six candidates for two open seats. Here is the 2022 slate:



IMANI Q'RYN

I was elected to the Board of Directors nearly 17 years ago and have continuously served in this capacity. I have served on the Board longer than any other elected member. I am also a member of the Chair Committee and have been so throughout my service on the Board.

Our Board of Directors is not a typical board. It was required by state law that the Coop have a Board of Directors. As a co-operative we liked our town hall style of governance, that every member has a say, every member has a vote. We wanted to continue that tradition. The Coop's attorney at that time came up with the idea that the Board should take the advice of the members on all subjects as a means of limiting the powers of the Board. It was written into our bylaws; most of the Board members that we've had since the Board was instituted decades ago have accepted this policy.

"I take the mandate to trust the membership and take their advice as a sacred duty. It's not my opinion or my position on an issue that is important. It is vital that I respect and trust the voice of the membership. The membership guides my vote."

I wrote those words three years ago in my bid for candidacy letter. I take the opportunity to state that again. These last three years have been the most challenging for me as a Board member and most dangerous for our form of governance and possibly the Coop in general. We had to do things as a Board that we had never done. We never meet outside of the General Meeting. During the beginning of COVID so much changed for the Coop and we were in uncharted territory. We got advice from our general counsel. We not only had to meet but we did so every week for hours! It was exhausting. We wanted the membership to have their voice, to weigh in and decide the direction that we would go as a co-operative. It is in crisis times like those that we could have lost what we had worked over 50 years to protect.

I was so proud and honored to be with that group of Board members: Bill P., Allen Z., Rachel A., Sukey T. and Joe H. We went through that fire and kept our word, our promise to the membership.

I ask for your vote one last time. I hope that more members will step up and choose to participate in our form of governance. It's easier now to come to our meetings—they are on Zoom! All the Coop laws are made here. I also hope that those that really understand our kind of board will consider running next time we have an opening.

I love the Coop and hope that it exists for generations to come!



TIMOTHY HOSPODAR

In October 2020, when our Coop introduced a new phase of member labor, we met with an online scheduler deployed to support it. I showed up on that very first day to contribute in a way different than I had ever worked before—on a truck-unloading

shift. Despite advance scheduling, a hiccup in the system prohibited me from working that first morning. And so, I showed up again on the very next morning, as scheduled, and I worked on the sidewalk at 5:30 AM. I was surprised to like the shift, as there was a reason that I had never tried the shift before, counter to my history of working a variety of FTOP shifts, from CHIPS to childcare to cashiering. Well, here's an inconsequential fact about me: I greatly detest predawn roll calls, not to mention my distaste for cold outdoor activities in general. Be that as it may, I made truck-unloading shifts a weekly practice and showed up 27 times across the eight months before the broader phase of member labor began in July 2021.

There's an analogy here as it relates to one thing fatherhood helped me learn. Early morning hours, before the babe awakens, are sometimes the only chance to devote one's free time to the things that matter most. The Coop—as a market and as a community—has mattered so much to me, since joining 12 years ago and certainly in the last two. And its future, following these complicated times, is of grave importance. While my optimism helps me trust that survival is a given, I expect that our future state features exciting changes. I'd like to pledge my work shift to the Board and our membership at large, because I understand the General Meeting (as a whole) comprises the stewardship of change.

If granted the opportunity to serve our community in this role, I commit to employing several fair tactics I have learned in other roles. In the effort to mitigate bias, I'll exercise sensitive feedback tools of active listening, to ensure that the Board clarifies and validates as appropriate in addition to echoing the majority message. I'll help the Board identify any unsatisfied concerns to acknowledge disagreement around consensus. My prior work as a facilitator in decision-making sessions for executives has prepared me to promote a diversity of voices while encouraging dissenting opinions be taken into consideration. I respect that any upcoming changes can only result from an array of debate, and I am equipped to support the process. The timing is right, I believe, for me to support the Coop in this capacity.



AMY CAO

Fellow member-owners, my name is Amy Cao, and I humbly submit my candidacy to the Coop's Board of Directors. My growing passion for good food—its origins, its impact, its accessibility—I owe to the Food Coop. I was drawn to the Coop for the promise of delicious, affordable food, and over the years, I find myself becoming more and more attached to the less tangible aspects of what makes our community a true

collective—and how to nurture this spirit to help ensure its lasting success.

In my professional life, I am a communications strategist for nonprofits, schools, professional organizations, and public and private companies. This often positions me as an advisor to executives, faculty administration, public officials, and even board directors, to help them plan for growth opportunities, manage crises, and minimize risks. Previously, the City contracted me to work alongside social workers as a financial empowerment counselor. This brought me face to face with struggling New Yorkers, as I helped them navigate scarce resources in unforgiving situations.

These experiences have exposed me to unique and diverse challenges at all levels of an institution. This formed an inclusionary perspective that informs my daily life. As a liaison to stakeholders at many levels, I am a good listener. I do my best to understand differing points of view, encourage dialogue to solve problems, and respond thoughtfully and decisively when the situation commands it. As a Board Member, I would do this by leaning heavily on my member community.

I believe an elected Board Member has a duty of responsibility to the membership. Over the years, I've had the privilege to speak with many of you over the course of countless shops, while stocking shelves, scanning your IDs, and walking your groceries home with you. I am immensely proud of the Coop community, and I am committed to working together with you to secure its financial health and future sustainability, in service to our founding Cooperative principles. With your confidence in my ability to take your lead by heeding the advice of the membership to act in the best interest of the Coop, I hope to earn your vote.



BRANDON WEST

My name is Brandon West, I have been a member since 2009, when I first moved into the neighborhood, and soon after became a squad leader for stocking and receiving. I also recently ran for City Council in the community, in 2021. For a career, I'm currently a labor organizer for local journalists and have worked in voting rights and organizing. I have always been very close to the Coop and its mission. It is incredibly chal-

lenging to maintain large membership-led organizations. I have experienced that fact, not just as an active member of this Coop, but in other collective processes and while working in government.

As the pandemic put an incredible strain on the Coop, and some challenging decisions were made about how to plan for the present and future, I wished I had an avenue to be more directly involved with the Coop. Not just as a way to be more directly connected in a community important to me during a time when “community” is harder to find, but also so that we can bring more member input into some of the seriously important decisions this Coop will have in the future. My goal and intention of running for this position is to mainly focus on decision-making, and helping work to build participation in the general meetings, which were once much larger.

We all remember the more contentious, but better-attended meetings in the past 10 years. While we have progressed a lot in this time, I think the challenge our Coop faces as being large but also democratic is critical, especially when our membership numbers have dropped in light of the pandemic, and that we are in a more vulnerable state financially than we were before it started. I also pledge to work to make sure that members are brought more into major decisions in the future and support developing a process for how we rethink our democratic processes in the face of so much change to the Coop. Our leaders made several tough decisions quickly, and I believe the Coop is much better for it, but I think more tough questions are ahead, and there are a lot of unknowns. I think it’s important to try to bring as many folks into these decisions as we can, and make more members aware of the challenges we face as a Coop.

I think our mission is strong and widely felt and believe the next few years in the City will be challenging with a shift towards living with the pandemic. What that does physically and financially to the Coop remains to be known. We must make sure that our members who are most negatively impacted, and who struggle financially, should be centered as much as possible.

In addition to this, I think the fiscal health of the Coop is incredibly important, and I will also work to make sure that the relationship between coordinators and staff is always a focus and highlighted. The Coop needs to be a great place to be a member and to work, and I will use my background in conflict negotiation to help mediate any issues if they come up, and contribute to mitigating conversations if needed.



GEORGE SARAH OLKEN

I knew the Park Slope Food Coop was magical when I saw the red sign-in books at La Louve Coopérative in Paris, which is not only built on our model but copied our store down to the color of the binders. There is a special pleasure in our rituals: calling out over the intercom “What are those little mushrooms in miso soup?” (enoki); the line painted on the backyard wall to indicate how high to stack compost buckets; walking a member and their cart up Seventh Avenue and learning how they came to New York in the 1960s—or last month. The Coop is my happy place, I’ve made friends there, I run into friends there, I want it to flourish.

I would like to join the Coop Board of Directors to be a voice for that flourishing. I believe Board members, like coordinators and committee members, can use their position to influence discussions and decision-making in a positive direction, especially because the Board is our one elected leadership body. With a mandate from the membership, I will use this position to emphasize working together and building community.

Recently the Coop has had to make difficult decisions: How to run the virtual GM? How to re-organize member labor? How to support members struggling from the pandemic? There is no abstract entity “The Coop” to address these questions. We must address them through cooperation as members.

We need to re-educate ourselves about how our Coop functions and re-imagine our role within it. As we become more reliant on technology (goodbye red binders), we must find ways to make that technology accessible so that every member can learn how it operates. As our finances fluctuate due to unforeseen crises—the next pandemic or future supply-chain breakdowns—members need to take an active role in the decisions of how we react.

This is work I’ve tried to do on an individual level as a squad leader, by bringing items to the GM, by joining with members of the unofficial Coop Study Group, and by speak-

ing with staff and community elders: What was the Coop like before we owned the building? How do we resolve disputes? How do you pick the perfect melon?

Since joining in 2007, I've worked on the shopping floor, in the basement, and in the office. In 2018, I became a shopping squad leader. I was heartbroken when the pandemic severed the relationships with my fellow squad members and with the members of the Coop staff who supported us. These relationships are as important as the smooth operation of our grocery store—they are what make the Coop what it is! I believe the GM and management should be guided by the goal of fostering greater connection among cooperators.

Outside the Coop, I drive the Bookmobile for Brooklyn Public Library, bringing library service to communities all over the borough. I live just south of Prospect Park with my partner, Jenny, and our cat, Tahini (who never does her work shift). I look forward to answering questions at the March 29th GM and I hope I can continue to serve the Coop as a member of the Board.



JESSE ROSENFELD

A member since 2004, I have worked as cashier, cheese and olive bagger, FTOP stock boy, babysitter, and in second-floor guest registration. My paid profession is that of Addictions Counselor on the Lower East Side. My free time has been galvanized by the 2016 elections; I have joined Get Organized Brooklyn and regularly do phonebanking to support voter-expansion drives.

Demonstrably supporting our cooperative goals of shared success, I have brought products to our shelves and successfully brought a proposal to the approval stage at our GM. Pre-pandemic, my work slot was Secretary for the General Meeting and I took the minutes every month. Our meetings are one special set of gears in the whole enterprise, and I was proud to have been re-elected yearly for eight years straight. I consider myself very familiar with the GM and AM processes.

I love it at the Coop. I meet people here I wouldn't usually encounter and discuss things I wouldn't ever know about. I shop every couple of days because of its warm familiarity, and I like being part of an organization that is a standard-bearer for food and environmental justice. The Coop is my chosen community and I feel a part of it every day when I walk down Seventh Avenue, seeing fellow members on their way to and from the store.

With a proven record of support for the health of our enterprise, I am running for the Board of Directors because I see the Coop as a business first. As such, the Board is obligated to remain alert to the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the Coop rather than maintain advocacy for any particular issue. Members at the coming election will likely ask a version of, "How will you improve the Coop as a member of the Board?" My answer will be, "There is nothing that a Board member should do outside of taking the advice of the membership on how to vote for proposals, which they have always done."

For any proposal that is problematic, I will ask myself the same questions as any Board member: Will a proposal ratified by the General Meeting put the financial and legal health of the Coop at risk? Does the proposal violate the spirit and letter of the Coop's own bylaws or NYS articles of incorporation, and our own mission statement?

Thank you and I look forward to your vote.

WHEN WILL CHILDCARE RETURN?

May 17, 2022

To the Editors:

I'm here to say that it's time to bring back childcare as a work-shift option and as a much-needed relief to members who have been going through the pandemic as parents or guardians of children.

Since work shifts came back, my wife and I have been doing our best to schedule them, but it's definitely been a stress-inducing challenge at times. As working parents with an 8- and a 5-year-old, weekdays are busy. Weekends are sometimes our only time to get chores done. Needless to say, we're currently in the hole.

So, I must ask. What is the reason childcare has not come back? I'm a teacher. The school I work at in Manhattan has been in-person for the past two school years. At this point, masks are optional and COVID-related restrictions are minimal. Same goes for the school our children attend.

Why must the Coop make it that much harder for parents and guardians to get their work shifts done now, when in the past, the childcare option was a staple to the overall member work program?

Before the pandemic, my wife and I had more flexibility knowing that one of us could work our shift while the other had something else scheduled. The kids could enjoy time in the childcare area while one of us got our shift done.

I can't even imagine how single parents are dealing with this. Do they need to hire babysitters just to put in their required shifts?

Childcare has always been an essential aspect of the Coop that enabled parents to be part of the community in the first place. I know several families who have since quit the Coop, with work shifts being reinstated and childcare not brought back.

If childcare is a thing of the past and the number of work slots for parents/guardians isn't going to change, the Coop needs to ask itself if it really is an institution that is friendly to working families.

Thanks,

Brian Russ