

COOP FOUNDER, GENERAL MANAGER, TREASURER JOE HOLTZ SUSPENDED WITHOUT PAY FOR 30 DAYS, BARRED FROM ENTERING FOOD COOP

July 25, 2022



By Hayley Gorenberg

Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, who helped found the Coop in 1973, was suspended for 30 days without pay and barred from the Coop premises until July 31 for breaching COVID protocols by returning to work while awaiting test results.

Contacted for this article, Holtz spoke openly and related that on May 22 he lunched with a friend, who called the next day to report a positive COVID test. Holtz took a rapid test, which was negative. He decided to get a PCR test when he noticed that his usual seasonal cough might be taking a different turn. He went to work early the morning of May 26 wearing an N95 mask and left work to get tested when a nearby test site opened that morning. He returned to work, and asserted that he remained

masked throughout the day.

Overnight Holtz learned he had tested positive for COVID, notified the Coop, and began to isolate. He started taking the antiviral COVID medication Paxlovid and quickly recovered.

Holtz said he had forgotten that, per Coop policy, he ought not to have returned to work while awaiting PCR results. He said that during his isolation or soon afterwards he noted that the Coop's online screen-by-screen guidance for staff members exposed to COVID did not include instructions on what to do if one were to develop symptoms in the absence of a positive test, and that he suggested modifying it to do so.

Following a complaint, on June 17 Holtz met with the Coop's Personnel Committee, a group of members who have the power to hire, discipline and fire top Coop staff. He said he readily acknowledged erring in returning to work while awaiting results from his PCR test. About two weeks later, on June 30 around 3 p.m., Holtz was called into a meeting with a member of the Personnel Committee and a General Coordinator and informed that, effective at midnight, he was being suspended for 30 days without pay. During this period he could not access his email or enter the Coop for any reason.



Joe Holtz, in a photograph from earlier in 2022

Holtz asserted that he is very committed to Coop COVID safety. “I care very much about health policies. I back up staff about the policies,” he said. He related that he had recently been enlisted by staff to personally enforce Coop masking policy when a member repeatedly refused to wear a mask properly while shopping. In that instance, he said he offered the member “a mask that would stay up over their nose and mouth,” and told them, “You can leave without groceries, or put on a mask and leave with the groceries.”

Holtz characterized his penalty—banishment from the Coop and loss of about 8 percent of his annual salary—as “coming down with an incredible sledgehammer.” He expressed concern that he was being regarded as a “COVID cowboy” after a single policy violation, and posited that it could be related to other disagreements among leadership.

BOARD, COMMITTEES GET NEWS

Coop Board members and some member-run committees learned about Holtz's suspension from Holtz himself, in a 4:37 p.m. email on June 30 that stated, in part, "In regard to the absurdity of planning for this administrative leave between now and midnight there is a good chance that things will be coming my way that need my attention and that the Coop will be hurt as a result....It is punishment for me but also for the Coop since I cannot adequately plan to protect the Coop in such a time frame.... Not giving me adequate notice to plan prevents me from attending to important things for the Food Coop."

Rachel Porter, who has been a Coop member since the mid-1990s and has worked with Holtz on the Coop's Revolving Loan Committee, received Holtz's email and immediately wrote to Board members, the Personnel Committee, and members of other committees—and attempted to email all staff—stating, "The secretive, disproportionate and vindictive punishment of Joe Holtz is deeply uncooperative and contrary to the Coop's principles....I believe that the decision should be widely disseminated and discussed, ideally by all members and staff."

Porter authored a proposal passed by the General Meeting earlier this year creating a Committee Oversight Committee "to provide modest oversight of all PSFC committees" through reporting, updates to the General Meeting, and other structured communications. (The July 26 General Meeting agenda includes elections for members of the Committee Oversight Committee.)

Minutes before his suspension kicked in at midnight, Holtz emailed the Personnel Committee:

"The punishment you have meted out is enormous compared to the mistake that was made by me. The purpose of punishment should be to help a person realize that a mistake was important and should not happen again....Given that I had already learned from my mistake and you have no reason to think otherwise, I realize that it

is still possible that a punishment would still be in order just to help make sure that I learned. But 30 days as a pariah without even being allowed to shop. That is ridiculously heavy handed and unfair on a personal level.

“THE PUNISHMENT YOU HAVE METED OUT IS ENORMOUS COMPARED TO THE MISTAKE THAT WAS MADE BY ME.”

—JOE HOLTZ, PSFC GENERAL MANAGER AND TREASURER

On the corporate level, to give the GM of the Coop about 8 hours (indeed racing against time as I type and think) to get his affairs in order is absurd....Your timing shows wanton disregard for the health of the Coop and the many contingencies that may occur during my forced banishment....

All in all I find this decision of yours totally unacceptable. You should reconsider.”

They did not.



Holtz's desk sits empty.

SEEKING POLICY INFORMATION

On July 13, after multiple requests from the *Linewaiters' Gazette* for the Coop's COVID testing policy, General Coordinator Ann Herpel provided the *Gazette* a "Dear Staff" letter dated July 12, almost two weeks after Holtz's suspension, which noted that high local COVID infection rates showed that "It is critical that we continue to take all the necessary measures we can to reduce the likelihood of transmission among the Coop staff." The notice emphasized that "[m]asks must be worn at all times on all floors unless you are working alone in a room" and closed with a statement in red type that tracked the violation cited for Holtz's disciplinary penalty: "We want to reiterate that one protocol has not changed since the onset of the pandemic: If you experience COVID-like symptoms, get tested immediately and stay home while you wait for the results. Please do not come to work if you have symptoms."

The letter included links to a "close contact form" and a "tested positive form" to fill

out online, and said, “After answering the questions in either form, you will be provided with the protocols you are to follow at the Coop” via a subsequently emailed attachment.

Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi, who has worked at the Coop for 15 years, said she believed the letter was issued “because several of us said, ‘Where is this policy? Where is this stated? Policies that you say are abundantly clear—can you show us where they are?’ And that’s the email that was given in response.”

Chi said that the protocols are not visible unless a staff member clicks a link indicating they have already been exposed or tested positive. “I’ve gone to the [staff] home page, and it is not clear,” Chi said. “You have to click on a link saying ‘I was exposed, and what do I do next?’ You have to click on a survey, and based on the survey you get an email saying what to do next. So you have to actually be the person in that situation to actually find out what that policy is.”

Chi did not want to address Holtz’s suspension without pay for the *Gazette*, but reacted strongly to what she termed “banishment” from the Coop. “Banning [Joe] from the building for 30 days is just astonishing to me. It is excessive. It is unnecessary. It is vindictive. It’s personal. It’s a personal attack. It’s like a public shaming. It’s like a shunning.”

She was not alone among staff in her reaction, Chi said, noting that 16 staff had agreed to sign a possible letter of objection to the Personnel Committee, and that even though staff were not all in agreement, those who object are “definitely not a small number.”

Chi deemed the apparently unchecked Personnel Committee “a possible flaw in our system,” saying, “There has to be a way to appeal, to challenge what they’ve done. It would be kind of shocking if there was no mechanism for anyone to ever question the decisions that they make. Let’s say they were tired of all the General Coordinators and wanted to fire them all and bring in a new crew. At the very least we definitely

need more transparency about their authority and what we do if their decisions endanger the social, emotional health of the Coop.”

Chi, who noted that she has vociferously disagreed with Holtz on significant issues in the past, including when to have member labor return after the pandemic hit, said she decided to speak up because “I feel like if I’m silent on this, I’m complicit. If I don’t stand up for him, I can’t respect myself. And because I care about the Coop, I don’t want the Coop to be doing these insane things.”

Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso stated, “I’ve heard rumors that there are people who want Joe to retire. I have no idea if it’s true or if this was an attempt to push him out. Regardless, I think the membership and the rest of the staff deserve to know more. We are talking about the man who co-founded the Coop and has devoted his life to its success. This situation affects the entire Coop.”

GENERAL COORDINATORS MUM

Aside from the emailed staff letter dated July 12, the General Coordinators refused to comment for this article—despite requests by phone and in person at the Coop office—directing questions to the Personnel Committee’s general committee email address. *(Editors’ note: The General Coordinators also directed us not to publish this article.)*

In response to a dozen specific questions posed to the Personnel Committee seeking clarity on the Coop’s policy for staff testing (including consequences for violating protocol) and asking whether there had been any previous violations; the range of any penalties imposed; the committee’s specific charge; guidelines for deciding penalties; any limits on penalties; and anything further the committee would like members to know, the committee responded on July 8:

“In response to questions regarding the Coop’s policies and prior application of them, you would need to speak to the General Coordinators as they create and implement

personnel policies at the Coop.

With respect to the role of the Personnel Committee, 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. The Personnel Committee was created in the 1980s through decisions of the General Meeting. In addition to its advisory role, the Personnel Committee is empowered by decisions of the General Meeting with the authority to handle personnel issues relating to the General Coordinators. That authority extends to decisions about GC hiring, salaries and discipline.

Any decision that the Personnel Committee makes regarding hiring, discipline or terms of employment for the General Coordinators is always made in consultation with the General Coordinator team. This is necessary to ensure that, for example, the Committee's decisions regarding hiring of a General Coordinator fulfill the needs of the Coop. The same is true of disciplinary decisions the Committee makes regarding General Coordinators; the Committee ensures that any disciplinary actions will not affect the functioning of the Coop by working in consultation with the other General Coordinators.

With respect to the role of the Board, the Personnel Committee is distinct from the Board. We would recommend you speak directly with the Board to get a better sense of their mandate and authority."

When pressed for an interview, the Personnel Committee emailed on July 9, stating,

"In response to your request to speak with a member of the Personnel Committee, we appreciate your desire to learn more about this personnel decision. Given our role, however, we feel it would be inappropriate for us to comment publicly on disciplinary measures involving any of the Coop's staff. As we are sure you understand, it is our obligation to respect the privacy of the staff and members who were involved in this personnel decision, not only those on whom discipline was imposed but also those

who participated in the underlying investigation.

If you have further questions you would like to send in writing, we would be happy to review and respond where we can."

There was no response, in the five days before the *Gazette* deadline, to additional questions posed on July 9: "What is the guiding philosophy or framework for the committee's choice and exercise of discretion with regard to disciplinary measures you impose? What is the goal of disciplinary measures? How do you decide what is enough, and not too little or too much? What are the considerations for fairness and effectiveness?"



A name tag hangs on a wall

BOARD REFLECTS

Coop Board members interviewed for this article confirmed that the Board did not know the Personnel Committee had sent the Coop's General Manager and Treasurer packing for a month without pay until Holtz himself sent word.

When the Board learned of Holtz's disciplinary penalty, it took the highly unusual step of convening outside of the General Meeting. Though Board members freely expressed concern that the month-long unpaid suspension took effect precipitously and might be out of proportion, their only official action was to assess whether the Coop could function with Holtz gone. They said they constrained their probing because of the PSFC Board's special hands-off relationship where, by design, the Coop seeks to have the General Meeting govern the corporation.

"We have a very specific job," said current PSFC Board President Imani Q'ryn, who has served on the Board for 17 years and on the Chair Committee for 20. Q'ryn referenced the Board's limited role—to ratify the decisions of the General Meeting. "Ours is not to make policy or decide what's going to happen."

Thus Q'ryn did not consider it unorthodox that neither the Personnel Committee nor the General Coordinators alerted the Board in advance of taking action. "In light of the fact that the Personnel Committee and the General Coordinators had put everything in order to take care of the Coop, I'm not sure that we needed to find out," she said. "I think that there are a lot of things that have happened that we haven't found out about. We find out in the meetings. You all are watching the Board meet. We listen to the items that come through the Agenda Committee, listening to the advice of the members, and ratifying those votes. That's why we need to have more members at those meetings. Here's the way we make the rules, y'all! This is our governing, and all you have to do is come to the meeting. You can say whatever you want. You don't have to sit around and say, 'They're not doing this,' and 'They're not doing that.' It's us!"

Nevertheless, when Holtz emailed the Board, “We had our concerns because Joe is the General Manager of the Coop, and one of our duties is to make sure that the business of the Coop is safe,” Q’ryn said. When the Board learned of the suspension of the Coop’s General Manager and Treasurer, it conferred with the Coop’s general counsel and believed it was justified in meeting and communicating with the Personnel Committee, the General Coordinators, and Holtz. “It was very serious, us even thinking we had to talk, because generally the Board doesn’t meet outside of the General Meeting,” Q’ryn said. She said the General Coordinators provided extensive plans, assuring the Board that the Coop could continue unharmed in Holtz’s 30-day absence.

Q’ryn expressed personal concern about the severity of the penalty, but opined that the Board had no place considering it. “Without having all the information it seems harsh,” she said. “It seems uncooperative. And it made me sad. They didn’t mention giving him a warning, a reprimand,” she said. “I wonder about impacting someone’s finances and...I think as a cooperative, and being cooperative with each other, I was looking for the love in the situation.”

“I THINK AS A COOPERATIVE, AND BEING COOPERATIVE WITH EACH OTHER, I WAS LOOKING FOR THE LOVE IN THE SITUATION.”

—IMANI Q’RYN, PSFC BOARD PRESIDENT

“I think most of us were thinking that 30 days was a long time,” Q’ryn continued. “It just seems punitive in terms of what we were told the issue is. But one of the General Coordinators said to us without having all of the information from the investigation that they did, it’s hard to say what’s really punitive. Even though many of us thought it was unfair, based on looking from the outside like everybody else, the Board is not the decider of what’s fair and unfair. It’s not our job to interfere in something that’s just unfair—just things that are illegal or going to harm the Coop.”

“If you have lots of ideas about how the Coop should be run, the Board is not the place to be,” Q’ryn said. “I have total faith in the membership themselves,” she said. “Fourteen thousand as opposed to six—I think there’s a lot of wisdom in that body. I think the membership, upon hearing what happened, may look at issues like, ‘How does the Personnel Committee work?’ ‘Should there be oversight?’”

Q’ryn urged members to come to the General Meeting to address concerns raised by the Personnel Committee’s actions. “If you want to see change, come to the meetings,” she said, noting that she joined General Meeting leadership because she wanted more people of color visible in Coop leadership. “We don’t have to complain about how things are run; we can come in and change things. We have this amazing experiment, this cooperative experiment where we have to work with each other in this very interesting way.”

Q’ryn’s longtime Board colleague Bill Penner, who has logged about 20 years at the Coop and 14 on the Board, aligned with Q’ryn on the importance of having the GM address issues involving the Personnel Committee; its mandate; and questions about terms, term limits, accountability, and elections.

“I feel like there were a lot of things that weren’t handled very sensitively during this process, but I want to walk away at the end of the day so we can pick up the pieces and be productive,” he said. “Clearly we need to start to have a dialogue here about the Personnel Committee and how they’re making management decisions, essentially. I think it’s also maybe beneficial to look at how complaints against senior management are handled. Right now they’re handled amongst basically themselves, in a way. Maybe there’s a different way to deal with that that would be helpful for everybody, maybe a bit more impartial.”

“The Coop is a business like any business, and we want to be able to have really good people work at the Coop, and we want it to be a good place to work,” Penner said.

Penner expressed concern that the Personnel Committee could “operate unilaterally”

in ways that could affect leadership succession, for example. As for exploring this particular situation, while he agreed that the Board should look to the General Meeting for advice and decision-making, he called doing so “more nuanced in this scenario,” noting that a member had already tried to go to the Agenda Committee regarding issues raised by Holtz’s suspension, and was rebuffed for purportedly trying to raise a confidential personnel issue.

Penner said he expects any further personnel action regarding Holtz would again come to light only after the fact, without Board consultation. “I don’t know that the Board would try to get out ahead of it,” he said. “Right now there’s not a mechanism that would be written down that would say that we would be notified. I would hope that we would be in the loop about that. But right now I think the process is undefined—to the Personnel Committee’s advantage.”

Penner expressed some disbelief with regard to rumors of Holtz’s potential termination – a concern that Holtz expressed when speaking to the Gazette. “It just would seem so negative. I guess I would have to cross that bridge when it comes,” said Penner, continuing, “I don’t know how realistic it is. I’m not sure. I would be very surprised—and yet I was very surprised at this!”

Penner called losing 8 percent of annual salary “a big penalty,” adding, “It’s also a strong statement, a COVID statement, but I think from my perspective I wanted to make sure it was a measured statement. I’m not sure. I think in some ways it’s judgment. We all have our different lenses on COVID.” The punishment raised questions in his mind, such as, “Was it a just punishment? Was this handled in a way that maybe was befitting the way we should be operating as a coop, as a community?”

“WAS IT A JUST PUNISHMENT? WAS THIS HANDLED IN A WAY THAT MAYBE WAS BEFITTING THE WAY WE SHOULD BE OPERATING AS A COOP, AS A COMMUNITY?”

—BILL PENNER, PSFC BOARD MEMBER

Asked about the Coop's philosophy on what disciplinary measures should achieve, Penner exclaimed, "Unknown! I don't think that was clearly articulated to us by the Personnel Committee," he said. "I would have liked to see a lesser punishment. I think that would have been productive for everybody—Joe, the Coop—which really is the bigger picture."

Penner highlighted Holtz's renown in his field, calling Holtz "one of the foremost authorities on this range of cooperative business of anyone in the country." He added, "He's really given his life to this, and so I think that how the Coop treats Joe as we move to a different place is really important."

Hayley Gorenberg joined the Coop in 1993 and became a Gazette reporter soon thereafter.

PSFC ANNUAL MEETING

July 25, 2022



By Travis Hartman

The Park Slope Food Coop held its Annual Meeting on June 28, 2022. In a meeting that lasted almost three hours, the Coop reviewed the audited financial report and elected two members of the Board of Directors and four officers of the Coop.

The audited financial report was presented by Salvatore Vicari and Zanna Masko, certified public accountants and advisors, of the firm Cornick, Garber & Sandler. Vicari went through every page of the report, analyzing where numbers were up and where they were down, while noting that cash is up from 2021. “The driving factor behind that is the PPP loans,” said Vicari. Inventories were consistent from 2021 and prepaid expenses and other assets have risen since last year, as has total member equity. “It’s a healthy balance sheet, it looks great,” said Vicari.

Board member Bill Penner noted that without the PPP loans the Coop would have been operating at a loss, and Masko said, “That was the purpose of those federal

grants—to help businesses to survive in those difficult situations. A lot of businesses went out of business, but the Coop was able to survive.” The audited financial report was accepted, and it was decided that Cornick, Garber & Sandler would produce the audited financial report next year as well.

“A LOT OF BUSINESSES WENT OUT OF BUSINESS, BUT THE COOP WAS ABLE TO SURVIVE.”

—ZANNA MASKO

The second order of business was the election of two members of the Board of Directors. According to foodcoop.com, when the Coop was incorporated in 1977, a Board of Directors was legally required. The Board’s role is not to overshadow or replace the member initiative, discussion and decision-making; that is the purpose of the General Meeting. Board members are elected once a year, for terms of three years on a rotating basis, at the Annual Meeting, which is always held on the last Tuesday in June.

Members were able to vote for the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting or by using the advance ballot that all members receive by email. Each of the candidates present were given one minute to speak and three minutes to answer questions posed to them by members attending the meeting. In the end, Imani Q’Ryn was elected with 495 yes votes, followed by Brandon West with 317 yes votes.

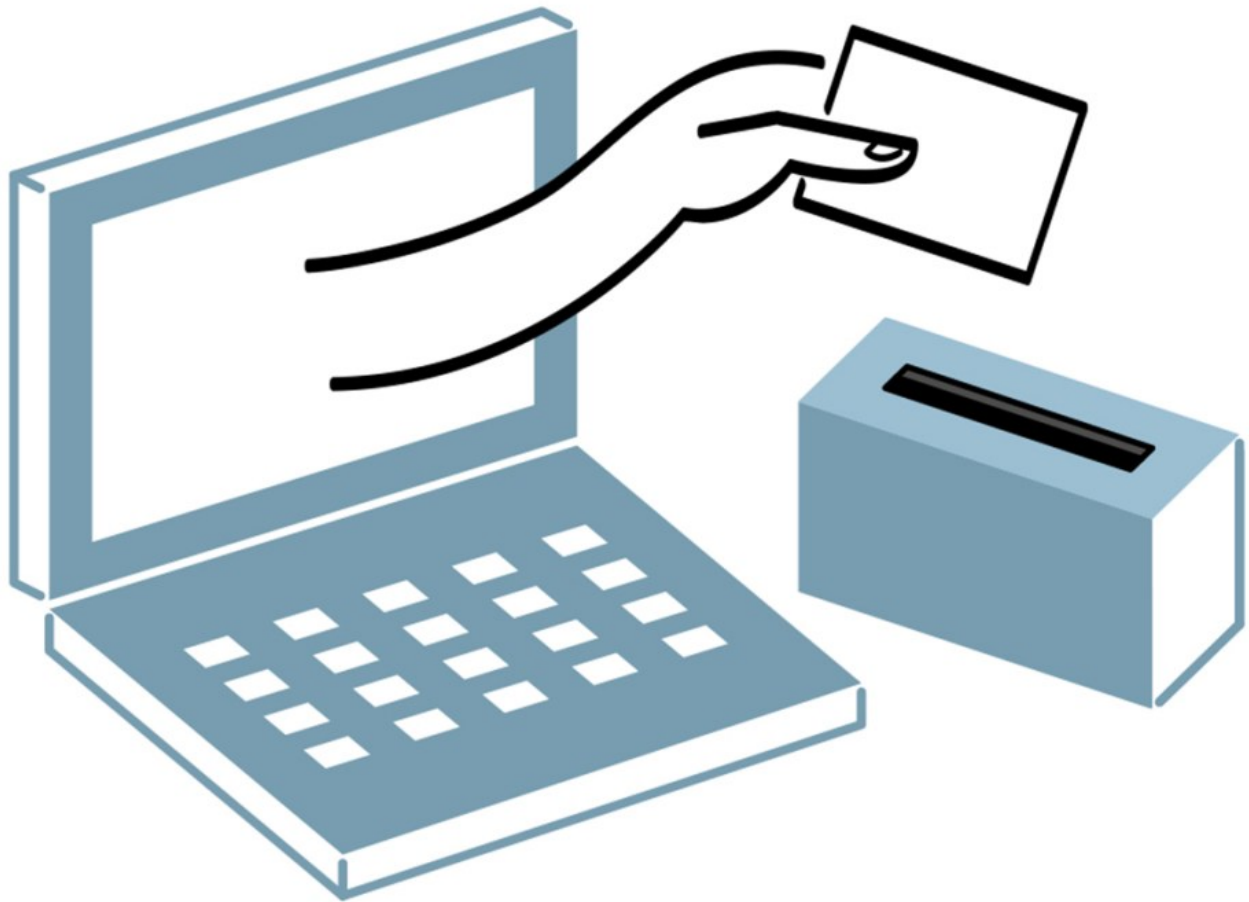


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

During the tabulation of the votes, which included both online voting and paper ballots, several committee reports were delivered. Members in attendance learned that the International Trade Education Squad will be issuing their findings between four and six times a year via their YouTube channel. It was also announced that the Committee Oversight Committee is looking for new members.

There was also a lively discussion about potentially granting credit to members who

attend General Meetings via Zoom, and discussion about uncovering what member labor is actually worth in financial terms. David Moss of the Chair Committee spoke about the impact of the pandemic, and of new hires to the Coop. “I think it’s safe to say that everyone on the Chair Committee believes that we should probably start offering credit to people for attending the Zoom meetings—that the numbers of people attending are too low—obviously someone could attend and not participate, and some people will do that, but we’ll get a lot more participation if we invite people at the cost of losing a few shifts. I’ll throw that idea out there for others to consider,” Moss said.

“EVERYONE ON THE CHAIR COMMITTEE BELIEVES THAT WE SHOULD PROBABLY START OFFERING CREDIT TO PEOPLE FOR ATTENDING THE ZOOM MEETINGS.”

—DAVID MOSS, CHAIR COMMITTEE

This topic was discussed by many of the attendees, and suggestions were offered on how members could potentially get credit for attending meetings virtually. One person suggested limiting shift credit to twice a year, as was the case with in-person meetings.

Susan Metz then asked about the possibility of tallying up the financial value of member labor. “We understand that 75 percent of the work in the Coop is done by members, and that member labor keeps prices down, and yet we never have a monetary value of what member labor is in any audit report, and I find this very disturbing,” Metz said. “What is the amount of money that member labor represents?” Metz then asked the auditors if it would be possible to create a system to report what member labor is worth.



Coop members at an earlier General Meeting, in 2019.

Joe Holtz responded, “It’s a good question, but varies from every single member depending on what they buy. There are some who love the Coop but barely ever shop, so how much do they get paid, quote unquote? It’s hard to monetize that. Members should each figure out what the Coop means to them, and figure out if it makes sense. If it does, they should tell their friends to join the Coop. The accountants have no basis to do what you’re asking.”

The meeting then moved on to the last item on the agenda: the election of the Board of Officers for the Coop. After a series of nominations for the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, the voting was engaged. Imani Q’ryn was elected President, Shayna Moliver was elected Vice President, with Elizabeth Tobier elected Secretary and Joe Holtz to serve as Treasurer. After the last round of voting the meeting was adjourned.

SIGN UP FOR THE JULY 26 GENERAL MEETING!

July 25, 2022



Sign up to attend the next General Meeting here, on July 26 at 7 p.m. **You must sign up in advance!**

The agenda is here. Topics include the General Coordinators' reports, committee reports, electing members to the Committee Oversight Committee and the Coop's mask mandate.

YOU GROW, GIRL!

July 25, 2022



By Liora Fishman

As a child growing up in the suburbs, gardening was a thing that my parents did for fun and a chore that I got roped into. My mom espoused the idea that there was “nothing better than the feeling of dirt beneath your fingernails.” On the contrary, I’d say, as I begrudgingly de-weeded flower beds in our backyard, there were quite a few

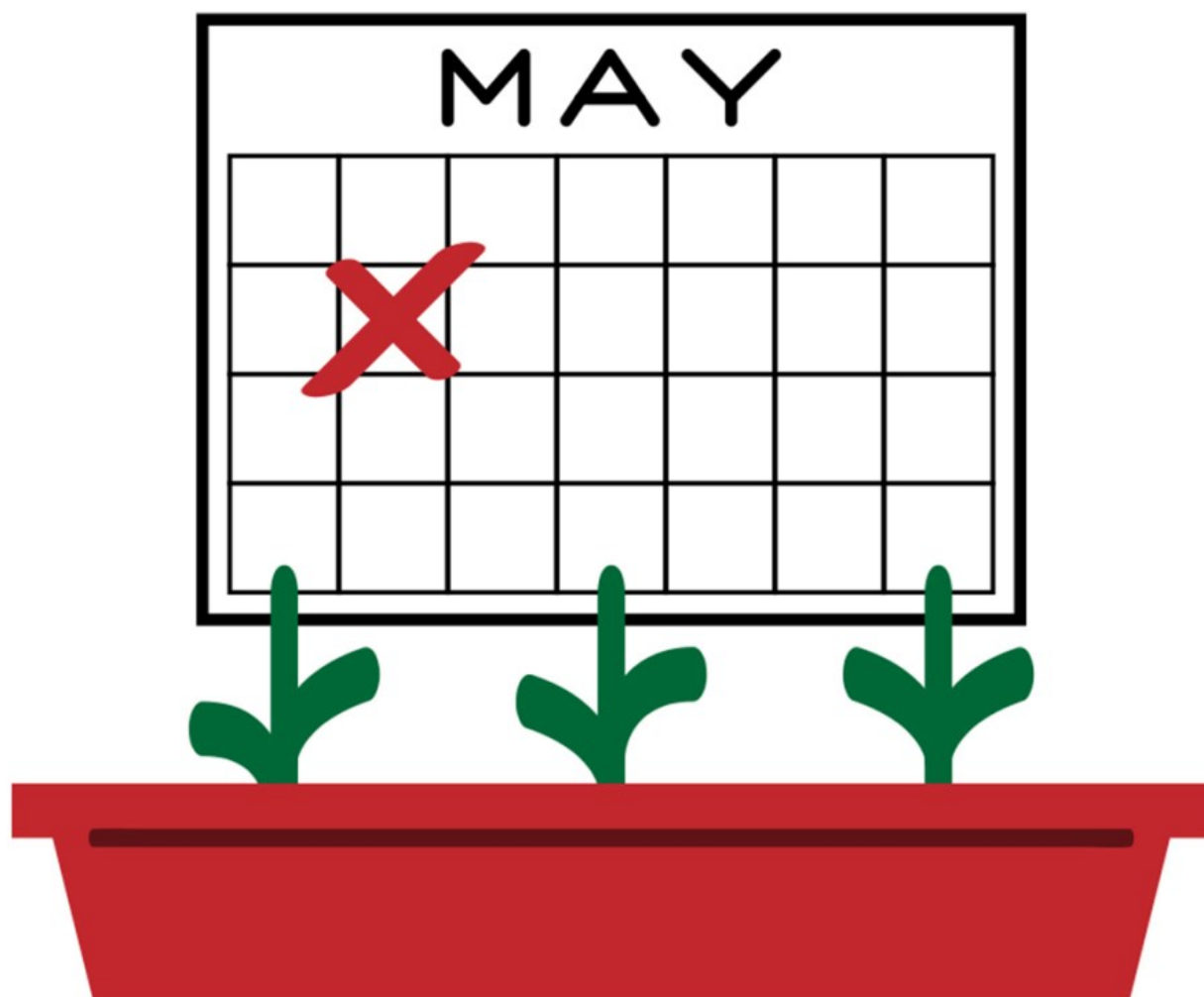
things I could think of that were better than that: clean fingernails and air conditioning, first and foremost.

Then the pandemic hit. I was lucky enough to find myself in an apartment with outdoor space that looked particularly lonely without the greenery my mother championed. So I bought some flower beds and soil. I planted some seedlings. I was sure that in a couple of weeks I'd have my own little urban garden. It couldn't be that hard, right?



A plant on a windowsill overlooks a city street.

I learned quite quickly that there was such a thing as too much sun for some plants—even for sun-tolerant outdoor plants. My lavender plant died within a week, though I refused to give up on it until I was quite certain I was watering decomposed leaves. For other plants, the New York sun would never be enough. After suffering a few plant losses, I decided to retroactively do some research, and learned about the importance of native plants and zone planting schedules.



Climate conditions are variable across the United States and there's a numerical zone system that dictates when one ought to plant, for example, squash versus broccoli. New York City is in Zone 7, meaning that most of the planting season spans May to September. Native plants are those that have, according to the National Wildlife Federation's website, "formed symbiotic relationships with native wildlife over thousands of years," and therefore offer the most sustainable habitat. "A plant is considered native if it has occurred naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, or habitat without human introduction." For New Yorkers, this includes strawberries, wildflowers like milkweed, dogwood and native sunflowers.

Luckily for Coop members, the Produce team considers both the local growing zones and native plants when it curates the plant selection each season. Coop Produce Buyer Cecelia Rembert explains, "This year we added a new nursery that we worked with for our plant selections, called Glover Perennials, 'a family-run nursery specializing in plants that are native to the Northeast and perennials, based in Long Island.'"

Not only are all the plants from Glover Perennials native to the New York City area, they are also intended for long-term ownership: "Everything we got from Glover Perennials is going to come back every year—that's what a perennial is," says Rembert. "We're in Zone 7 and all of the plants we got aligned with Zone 7, too."



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

That is, of course, contingent on you being able to keep your plants alive. And if you're like me, you've already killed your tomato and basil plants. "Gardening can be a real challenge in the summer in New York," Rembert said—a validating thing for a plant-killer to hear from a produce professional.

Despite giving off an air of leisure, gardening in New York City requires quite a bit of discipline and consistency. One must always take into consideration the sun exposure

your plants are getting. And if you got your plants from the Coop this year, it's likely that they need quite a bit of sun and regular watering. "Your plants need to be watered every day," explained Rembert. "When we were ordering the plants, we tended towards getting full-sun plants—so everything that everyone purchased from the Coop is sun-tolerant," which should, one hopes, last you through those 90+ degree days of New York summer.

Unfortunately, if you missed the early, cooler days of summer and spring, you may have also missed peak planting season. While that's not to say that you shouldn't try planting some sunflower seeds, the ideal time to do so is after Mother's Day, when the nighttime temperatures are generally above 40 degrees—why the Coop only offers plants for a limited time, beginning around April and ending in mid- to late June.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

A pot of bright green herbs, including basil, sage, mint, thyme and lavender.

“You don’t leave anything outside overnight until after Mother’s Day in New York,” explained Rembert when asked about the timing of the Coop’s plant season. “We do offer seeds prior to that, but the small plants will start coming in towards the end of April and can go into the ground once the nighttime temperatures are above 40 degrees.”

So what to do if you’re hoping to try your hand at plants this year? “Spring is the time that you should plant new plants. Gardeners can plant again in the fall, but we probably won’t provide any more plants in the fall,” said Rembert.

Timing the purchase of these plants can be quite tricky. The Coop works with partner farms like Glover Perennials to identify when plants have reached a stage where they haven’t quite flowered yet, but are ready to be uprooted and sold.

Given the fleeting plant season at the Coop, I asked Rembert if she could tell us some favorites we should keep an eye out for next year—or perhaps a sneak peek into next year’s plant selection. “We had really great peonies, and clematis. Clematis is one of my favorites that we offered,” said Rembert, referring to a lesser-known, purple flowering vine.



Sunlight shines through the leaves of a small potted plant.

And while the Coop will continue to prioritize native plants, you may see fewer florals next year. “We were a little heavy-handed with the native flowers, like meadow flowers, and that was a learning experience,” Rembert reflected.

But some things will never change: herb garden staples like basil and cilantro will return each year, and in fact, can be grown in the same pot if you’d like all your cooking herbs in one place. Rembert herself says, “It’s nice to have a selection of herbs—I grow them all in the same pot, and they come back every year. I’ll snip them as I’m cooking.”

While this year’s growing season has certainly been a tumultuous one for me (Rest in Peace, My Basil Plant, early June 2022 to mid-June 2022), Rembert left me feeling armed with the knowledge to succeed next year, and make do with what I haven’t killed for the remainder of the summertime.

Here's the thing: whether or not I excel at it, I actually *enjoy* gardening and intend to continue doing just that. Come spring, you'll find me immersed in the plant selection of the Coop, while Googling just how difficult it is to kill whatever plant is in stock that week.

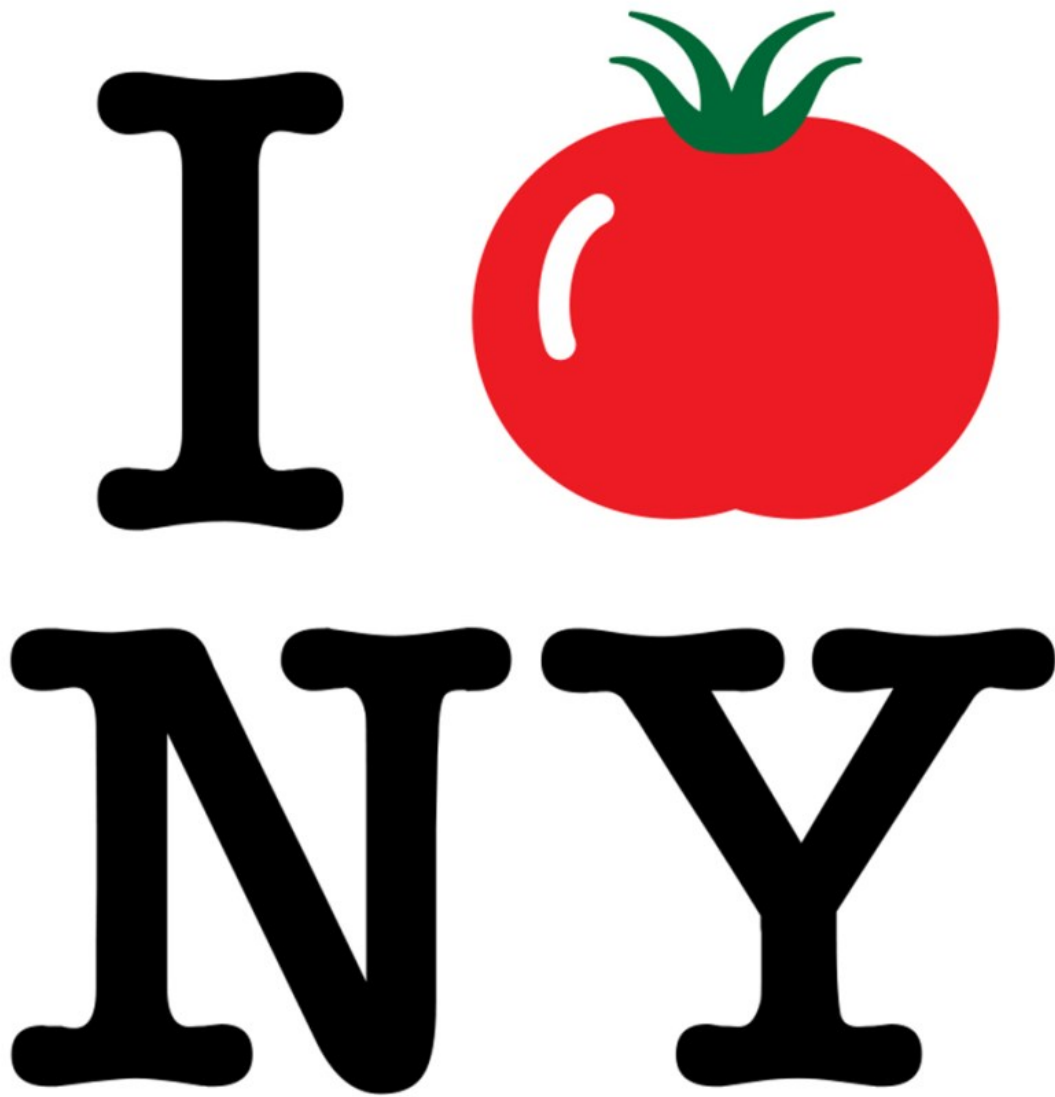


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

In a time when our phones demand more attention than the outdoors do, it's refreshing to have a project that requires patience and consistency. Planting and growing a

garden lacks the instant gratification of social media and requires a kind of jovial discipline and commitment that's become harder and harder to come by. This, of course, means that I have to speak the words that just about anyone with parents is loath to say: my mom was right.

Liora Fishman joined the Coop recently, in December 2021. She lives in Prospect Heights and has a wonderful dog, Ollie, whom she loves very much.

THE HUDSON VALLEY FARM COOP COMMITTEE REPORT: UPDATE AND CALL FOR NEW MEMBERS

July 25, 2022

By Jonathan Farber

The Park Slope Food Coop Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee is recruiting new members. This is an exciting venture and an opportunity to join a diverse team creating positive change in our food and farming systems. Committee members receive PSFC shift credits for their work. Agriculture and food-related business experience are not required to join.

The Coop voted at the April 2021 General Meeting to become the original sponsor of this new and separate cooperative business. Our website is under development at hvfarmcoop.com. PSFC members interested in joining the committee may contact us at info@hvfarmcoop.com.

The HVFC is a proposed enterprise that will acquire, improve and operate fifteen farms in the mid-Hudson Valley for the benefit of its shareholders and the wider community. The start-up budget for this project is \$30 million. The Farm Coop will raise funds through a unique financial mechanism called a Direct Public Offering. The HVFC will provide its members the rare opportunity to own a stake in socially progressive

and ecologically regenerative farms. Their investments will help to recreate, sustain and protect this wonderful corner of our threatened and critical agricultural region.

Our immediate needs are in three broad areas. First, we are looking for experienced accounting, business management and finance professionals. The tasks at hand include refining the business plan, preparing our financial model and proforma statements, establishing the cooperative corporation, and structuring the direct public offering. Second, we need professional planners and geographers to round out our design team. And third, we need seasoned marketing and sales pros to help us sharpen presentations to attract project cosponsors in the public, private, and not-for profit sectors—and, eventually, individual Farm Coop shareholders. Community organizers and public relations professionals will further hone and deliver our message.

Most recently, HVFC members have participated as a client in a semester-long Engaged Learning Project of the Cornell University Cooperative Enterprise Program, SC Johnson Business College, Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management; presented the Farm Coop at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs Sustainable Finance Seminar; enrolled in a four-session module of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Agricultural Workforce Supervisory Leadership Course titled, “Organizing Farm Work for High Quality Results”; met regularly with the Hudson Valley Devon Cattle Community Breeding Project; participated in a hands-on workshop at the SUNY Cobleskill Meat Processing Lab; and corresponded about the Farm Coop with numerous farmers, agricultural specialists, organizers, and others.

GUN IMAGERY IN THE PRODUCE AISLE

July 25, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Coop Community,

We were shocked and appalled to find, when trying to buy blueberries for our toddler, that we are stocking blueberries called “Bangin’ Blues” featuring a prominent label of two giant rifles over an American flag. The extreme gun violence in our country is unconscionable. We do not need to further promote this toxic culture with guns on blueberries, of all things. We implore the Coop to cease buying this product immediately

and redirect our purchasing power to farms that do not promote gun culture as part of their product.

With concern,

Brit and Jon Schoepp-Wong