

MASK MANDATE, DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, CHILDCARE DOMINATE DISCUSSION AT OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

December 6, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

By Christopher Cox

The October General Meeting (GM) of the Park Slope Food Coop, held on October 25, 2022, was another in a series of tense gatherings since last summer. It was a busy night: David Moss of the Chair Committee noted that it was “the most heavy agenda we have had since we switched to the Zoom format.” The proceedings were contentious from the start, when the meeting’s open forum almost exclusively addressed the General Coordinators’ recent decision to keep the store’s mask mandate in place.

In September and October 4,615 member-owners responded to a survey about whether the Coop should continue to require masks for workers and shoppers. The results, released a week before the GM, showed that 51 percent preferred to make masks optional for all; 43 percent wanted masks to be required for all. Several members spoke during the Zoom session about feeling frustrated that the general coordinators overruled the majority. “There was a questionnaire and the general coordina-

tors didn't like the answer to that questionnaire, so they just decided to disregard it," said member Dani Liebling. Another member, Meilin Mehri, agreed: "The majority vote was disrespected. It was not honored." One member compared the decision to the election denial of Donald Trump and his supporters, calling it "Mar-a-Lago-esque." The general coordinators who spoke in defense of the mask mandate said that the poll was too close to warrant changing the policy. Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, speaking for the other general coordinators, held that the "vote" was actually an "advisory survey."

As with the uproar over the disciplinary action taken against Holtz several months ago, members seemed surprised that the Coop doesn't always work in a transparent—and transparently democratic—way. Until the GM specifically instructs the general coordinators otherwise, they have the power to run the Coop as they see fit. "We must decide things for the Coop where this [meeting] has not directed us," Holtz said. Because the process of bringing an agenda item to a vote takes so long, the coordinators' decisions tend to stand for a long time. That arrangement itself has been a source of tension at the General Meetings.

WE MUST DECIDE THINGS FOR THE COOP WHERE THIS [MEETING] HAS NOT DIRECTED US.

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ

The Holtz affair came up again during the October meeting's open forum. Several members asked why the proposal to reinstate Holtz's lost wages was not on the agenda. Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi, who had said at the last GM that she would be sponsoring the proposal, said that she had withdrawn it after some of her fellow coordinators had talked her out of it. Chi read a statement to that effect at the October meeting: "After listening to my co-workers, I no longer believe that that proposal was the best path forward. And I never [want to] go against the wishes of the majority of

the staff and...[T]he opinion and the needs of the staff, to be honest, matter more to me than the opinions of membership because we're the ones who work there 40 hours a week.... I never meant to make any of my co-workers feel disrespected," Chi concluded. "I was trying to do what I believed was right and I realized that in many ways I was wrong."



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

The rest of the meeting took a more positive turn when the treasurer reported the state of the Coop's finances to the member-owners, and several votes were taken. The Coop's finances are better than they were last year, Holtz reported, but the Coop still has not reverted to a break-even level of revenue. The upshot: the Coop will not be returning to the 21 percent markup anytime soon. General Coordinator Joe Szladek also informed the meeting about the Coop's Halloween plan to give out apples to trick-or-treaters.

In her report from the Committee Oversight Committee, for whom "transparency is the sole focus," Rachel Porter noted that most of the Coop's many committees had been forthcoming with information about their activities, with the exception of the Agenda Committee and the Personnel Committee, who were stonewalling.

The Agenda Committee had a chance to respond to Porter's complaint during the

next part of the meeting, when members voted on elections to the Agenda Committee, the Dispute Resolution Committee and the Hearing Officers Committee. David Warren, up for a two-year term (his first) on the Agenda Committee, explained why they were often slow to respond to questions from the membership: the committee's policy is to only respond to emails on the Tuesday following the GM. Warren was elected to the Agenda Committee; Lee Bantle to the Dispute Resolution Committee; and Marian Hertz, Andrea Hirshman, Liam Malanaphy, Julie Vasady-Kovacs to the Hearing Officers Committee.

Next there was a discussion and vote on a proposal sponsored by the Equity, Access, and Community Committee (EACC) to collect member demographic information in a survey. EACC members Paul Warren and Isiris Isaac spoke in favor of the proposal. The survey had been years in the making, Warren said: "The committee has worked since 2016 to develop this demographic survey, where we would be voluntarily collecting demographic information about Coop members." The goal was to create a "demographic profile of who the Coop membership actually is."

Isaac stressed that collecting the information would allow the Coop to serve its members better, especially people of color and those with disabilities. She called it "a snapshot of the population of the Coop." The survey would be anonymous, and the committee promised to protect the confidentiality of those who filled it out. It was a way to find out "who we are, essentially," Isaac said.

COLLECTING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WOULD ALLOW THE COOP TO SERVE ITS MEMBERS BETTER, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE OF COLOR AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES.

Most of the members who spoke after the presentation were in favor of the proposal. Beth Ann Mastromarino asked how the committee would ensure a robust response rate. Cheyenna Weber assured everyone that this kind of survey was in line with best

practices of food co-ops nationwide. Beth Ruck said she wanted the survey to become part of the orientation process of joining the Coop.

The proposal passed, by a vote of 83 to 42.

The final agenda item was a vote on returning childcare to the Coop. The childcare room on the second floor had been closed since the start of the pandemic. Recently, that room has served as a space to prepare some of the bulk items for the shopping floor. Now members Lauren Belski and Brian Russ offered a proposal to open it to families again.

Belski and Russ, who are both schoolteachers, began with an economic argument. Hiring a babysitter during a parent's Coop shift negated the cost savings of being a member in the first place, they said. If the Coop needed all the members it could get, then reopening childcare was a surefire way to get families to come back—and to attract new ones. “The word on the playground,” Belski said, “is if you bring childcare back, I'll come back.”

“Many members who quit will come back,” Russ added. “And honestly, where did they go? They went to Fresh Direct, they went to Jeff Bezos, they went to this corporate model of grocery shopping.” Belski and Russ closed by submitting their proposal: to reopen childcare within 60 days of the vote.

The debate that followed again broke down along staff vs. membership lines. Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner, worried that disrupting the bulk-item bagging before the holidays would be too disruptive. “How do you think that the Coop is supposed to operate during the busiest holiday period, which is from November to January?” he asked. “How are we supposed to stop all operations in order to resume childcare, which serves a very important but small percentage of membership?” One member, Maya Solovey, replied, “The Coop has done it before and it knows how to do it again.” Another member, Juliette Kennedy, said that restoring childcare was an equity issue.

The difficulty of the 60-day timeline came up again and again. Receiving Coordinator Craig Roberts, said that he was in favor of childcare returning to the Coop, but that more time was needed to figure it out. “It’s a short-term process that needs a long-term solution,” he said. The debate seemed to be reaching an impasse—and the possibility of a failed vote loomed—until Holtz suggested a revised proposal. Rather than bringing childcare back within 60 days, members could vote on a timeline that he described as “as soon as possible during 2023.”

That deadline, with its combination of flexibility and rigidity, appealed to Russ and Bel-ski, who quickly adopted it as their own, and the motion moved to a vote. After a tallying delay, the results were announced: 134 in favor to 18 against.

In 2023, the Coop will have childcare again.

Christopher Cox’s book, The Deadline Effect, is now out in paperback.

WHAT ARE WE READING? MEMBER BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

December 6, 2022



By Juliet Kleber

As the days grow shorter and colder, few things seem more appealing than hunkering down with a good book, so the Gazette caught up with a few Coop members to hear what they're reading. Taking a moment from their shopping or their shifts, members were gracious enough to share their thoughts and recommendations for the winter nights ahead.



David Hockney: A Rake's Progress by Christopher Simon Sykes, Nan A. Talese/Double-day, 2012

Christopher Simon Sykes's biography focuses on the beloved English artist's early life and work, from his birth in 1937, to 1975 when he completed the stage design for the Stravinsky opera from which the book takes its title. In addition to the overarching biography, Sykes gives detailed accounts of the conception and completion of a few particularly notable works, highlighting the artist's process and the context his life offers.

Waiting in line to enter the Coop, Danae Oratowski—a member for over twenty years—told the *Gazette*, "If you love David Hockney, this is a great way to find out how he thinks about things and how he approaches his paintings."



Parable of the Sower and *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia Butler, Grand Central, reprint 2019

Octavia Butler's works are some of the most treasured in contemporary science fiction. The Nebula Award-winning *Parable* novels are no exception—they have become genre classics since their releases in 1993 and 1998, respectively. Set in the 2020s, the books follow a “hyperempathetic” Black teenager’s coming of age in a dystopian United States ravaged by climate crisis, wealth inequality and capitalistic corruption. Butler is famously incisive on racism and injustice, and the duology has remained remarkably relevant—if not somewhat prescient.

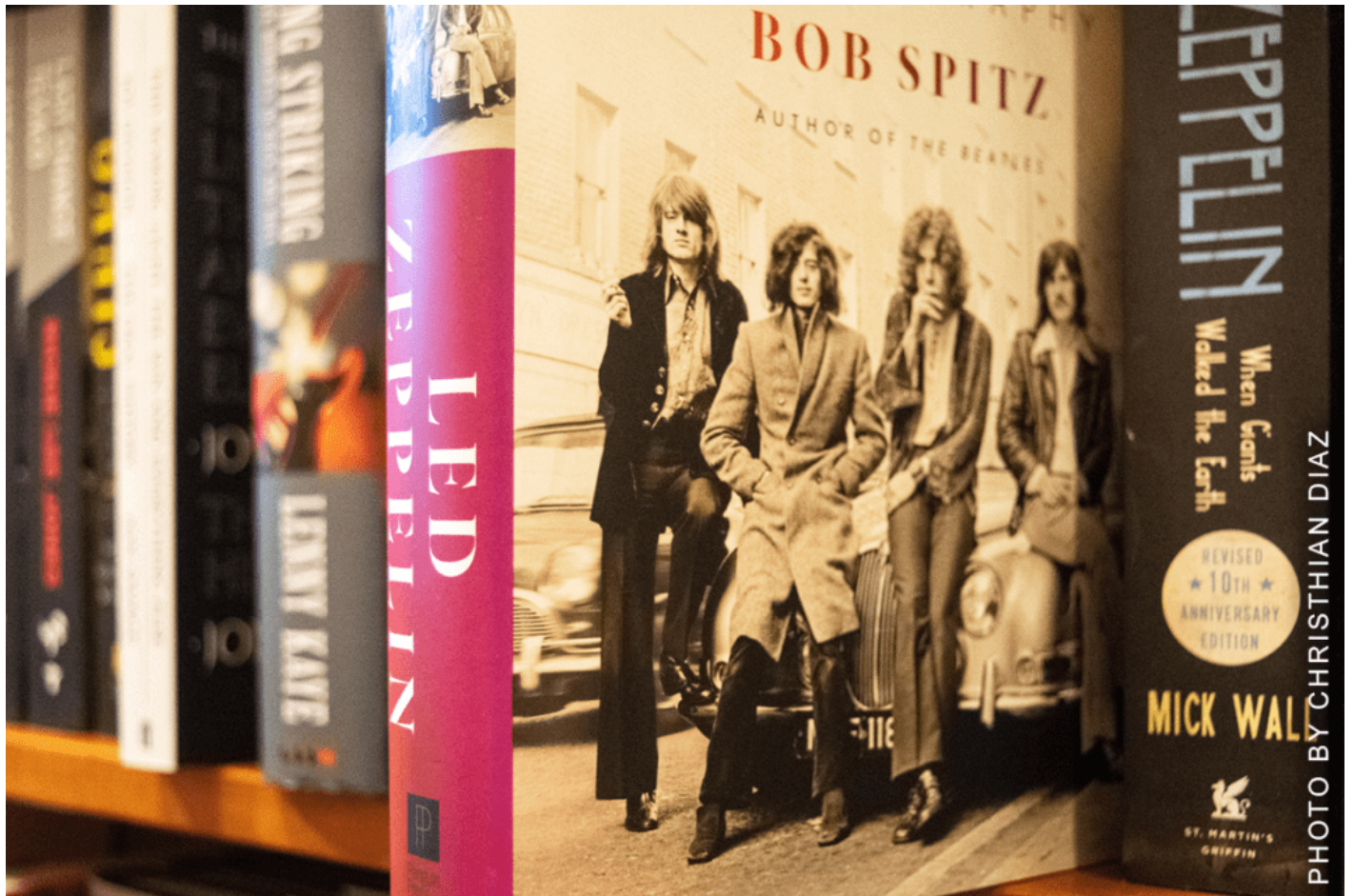
Coop member Chelsea Watson recently finished the duo and recommended them enthusiastically. When asked what she appreciated about the novels, she told the *Gazette*: “I like climate sci-fi stories because I work in climate change and imagining some responses to disaster is really helpful.”



Strangers to Ourselves: Unsettled Minds and the Stories That Make Us by Rachel Aviv, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2022

Phillip Stafford, a Coop member since 2014, recommended this new release by *New Yorker* writer Rachel Aviv, an exploration of mental illness and how popular narratives about it affect our lives. Aviv uses her own personal experience as well as detailed and intimate retelling of others' struggles to construct a nuanced and compelling narrative of the state of mental health in our time. Using a mix of memoir and reporting, Aviv examines the currently accepted tenets of psychology and psychiatry, the infrastructure and industry that's been born of them, and their consequences for individuals.

According to Stafford, the book "shows how the stories and diagnoses we use to talk about mental health can be so destructive."



Led Zeppelin: The Biography by Bob Spitz, Penguin Press, 2021

Journalist and biographer Bob Spitz has written extensively on the classic rock legends of the 1960s and 1970s with books about Woodstock, Bob Dylan, and a 2005 bestseller on the Beatles. Last year's *Led Zeppelin* is a characteristically hefty (nearly 700 pages) and authoritative history of the British rock icons, from their early influences to their one-off reunions, with a thorough accounting of their often unsavory exploits in the intervening years. *The Washington Post* described Spitz's retelling as "admirably unsparing, without being egregiously harsh."

Yosef Brody, a Coop member since 2016, recently finished the biography and recommended it with the caveat that his reading experience was "enlightening and then ultimately very depressing."

In a slow moment on his walking shift, Brody also recommended the book he's currently reading:



How to Be a Dictator: The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century by Frank Dikötter, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019

Dutch historian Frank Dikötter makes the case for a kind of consistent performative style among modern dictators, a worthy subject for some post-midterm contemplation. Dikötter explores not only the histories and policies of figures like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, but more specifically their use of language and image to manipulate public opinion.

“I just read about Mussolini and learned about how much of his regime was about performance art,” Brody told the *Gazette*. “He learned about D’Annunzio in Fiume, Italy, and you can see a direct line from D’Annunzio to Mussolini to Trump—they’re all doing the same thing, basically.”

Juliet Kleber is a writer and editor based in Bed-Stuy. She serves as a member of the editorial board of n+1 magazine.

THE COOP'S NEW ORIENTATION PROCESS

December 6, 2022



By Frank Haberle

The NEW New-Member Orientation: Something Lost, Something Gained

Before COVID, the Coop had a system for acculturating new members: a two-hour, in-person orientation meeting and a basement-to-attic guided tour of the facility. Organized and led by a committed Orientation Committee of approximately 20 seasoned members, the orientations often welcomed anywhere from 20 to 50 new members and included a PowerPoint presentation, Q&A and opportunities for incoming

members to learn about the structure and the culture of the Coop from long-standing members.

The Coop has changed in many ways since the COVID crisis first swept through Brooklyn and across the globe in March 2020, and the orientation requirements have necessarily changed as well. Currently, the in-person orientations are a thing of the past. After a pause on bringing in new members, the Coop had to develop an orientation system that is largely self-regulated and begins online. New members read a summary of general expectations about work slots, shopping practices, household requirements, pricing and ways to become involved. They watch a three-minute video and agree to sign a document covering the essential tenets of Coop membership. New members then make an appointment to come to the Coop office, fill out an application and get a Member Services tutorial; they can begin shopping the next day.



New members come into the office, fill out an application, sign up for a shift and they can begin shopping the next day.

Like all facets of Coop membership, something has been gained—a more streamlined system for orientation and entry that, on paper and online, certainly covers the expectations and considerations of membership. Because we are still facing a public health crisis, waiving the requirement to sit in a conference room with 30-plus people for two hours is certainly safer—and finding a conference room in the newly-reconfigured upstairs offices of the Coop is, in itself, a challenge.

But has something also been lost, notably in terms of the human interaction and direct connection with members, in this new orientation system?

TEN YEARS AGO WE USED TO PACK 50 PEOPLE IN THE UPSTAIRS CONFERENCE ROOM; THEN WE LIMITED THEM TO ABOUT 20 TO CONTROL THE SIZE OF THE COOP.

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR KAREN MANCUSO

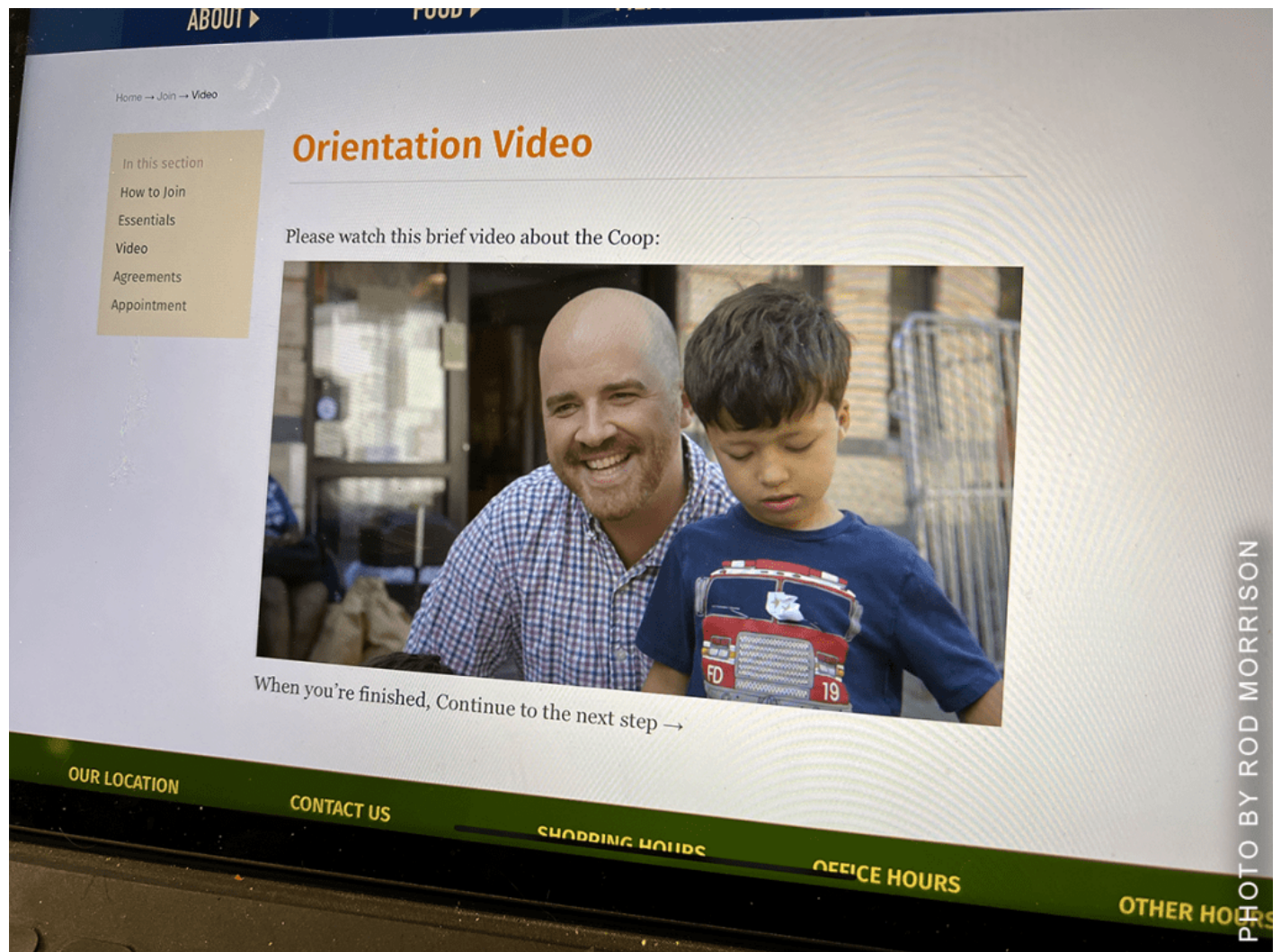
Before the Storm: The Orientation Sessions

“From the staff perspective, a lot of things have shifted since the pandemic started,” Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso, who was the staff liaison to the Orientation Committee, said recently. Before the pandemic, Mancuso remembers that orientation sessions were extraordinary because of the commitment and experience of the 20 squad members who led the sessions. “Ten years ago we used to pack 50 people in the upstairs conference room; then we limited them to about 20 to control the size of the Coop. The people presenting led discussion and used a PowerPoint, not just to cover rules and requirements, but also to explain the Coop’s culture, how members can be involved in the Coop as owners, how they can participate in general meetings, how they can learn from the *Gazette*.”

“Members definitely got more out of this exchange,” Mancuso added. “In 90 minutes

some people might have zoned out, but they still got the general impression, the tone of Coop membership. They then got to tour the basement and the shopping floor. This in-person orientation practice was a casualty of COVID. When we were ready to admit new members again after a year or so, we had already lost over 5,000 members in that time frame. The current system [which has operated for roughly one year] was set up as an interim orientation system.”

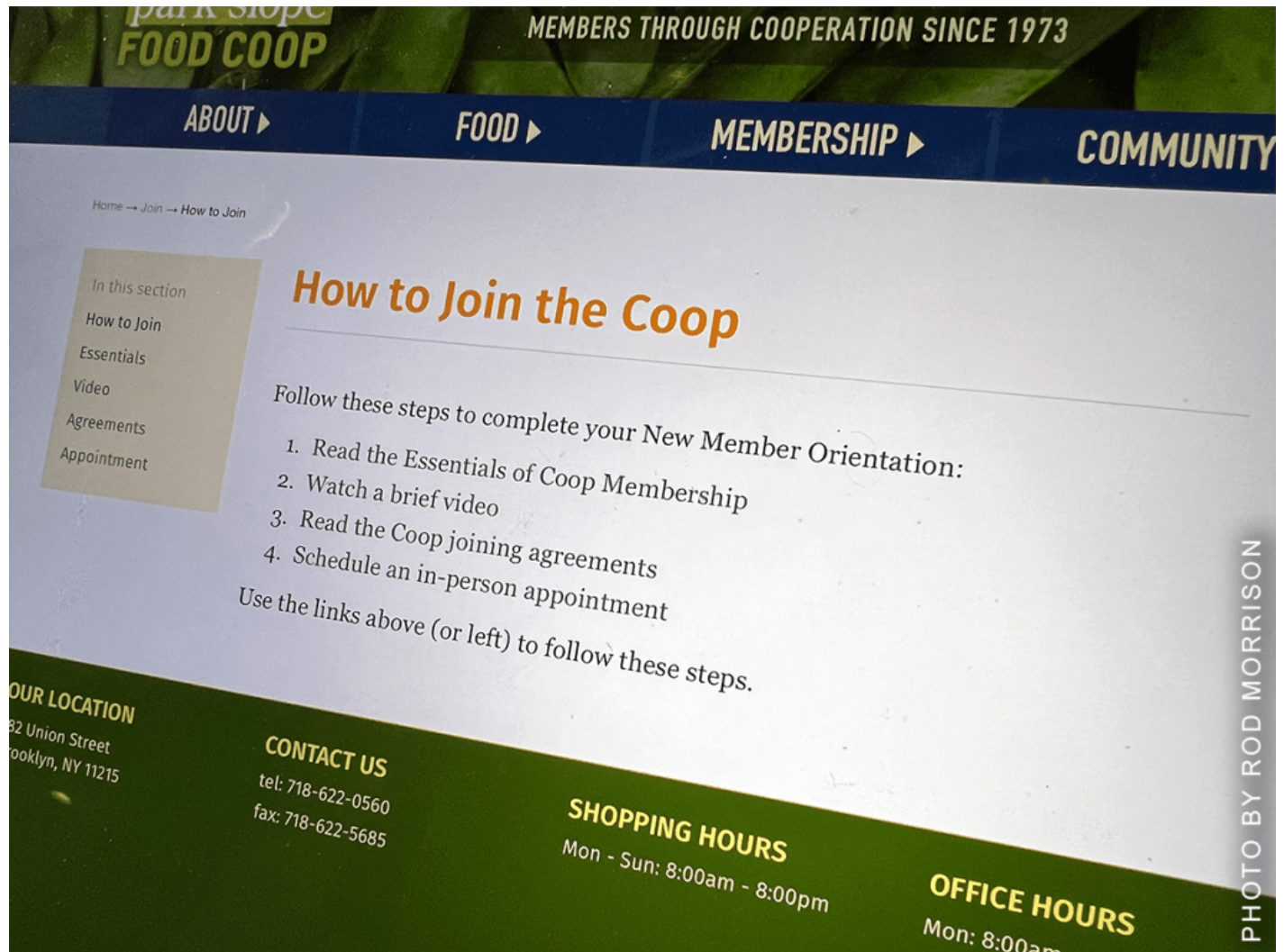
The New Orientation System



The Coop's amazing on-line system keeps new member sign-ups running smoothly. There's even a video to watch.

Mancuso believes that the Coop needs to move back toward some sort of in-person orientation process, even if by Zoom. “Today you hit the ‘join’ button on the website,

and you read a summary of how the Coop works. Then you make an appointment to come to the office and enroll. You sit down with an office worker and fill out the application. They show you how to sign up for shifts in Member Services and then they take your picture. The whole thing takes 15 to 20 minutes.”



The online application to become a new member is simple, you hit the ‘join’ button and read a summary on how the Coop works.

Mancuso has observed that some of the people who come into the office don’t open the video or read the website very closely. “We rely on people to read what we wrote. The problem is that the new members are not always really getting it. They don’t understand how to participate in a General Meeting, or they don’t understand how to shop, or they don’t see the difference between the regular line and the express line. They don’t understand or are surprised by the first-time member payments when

they check out, or they get suspended and don't understand how or why."



We want new members to be excited, feel engaged and buy into the Coop, says Coop Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso.

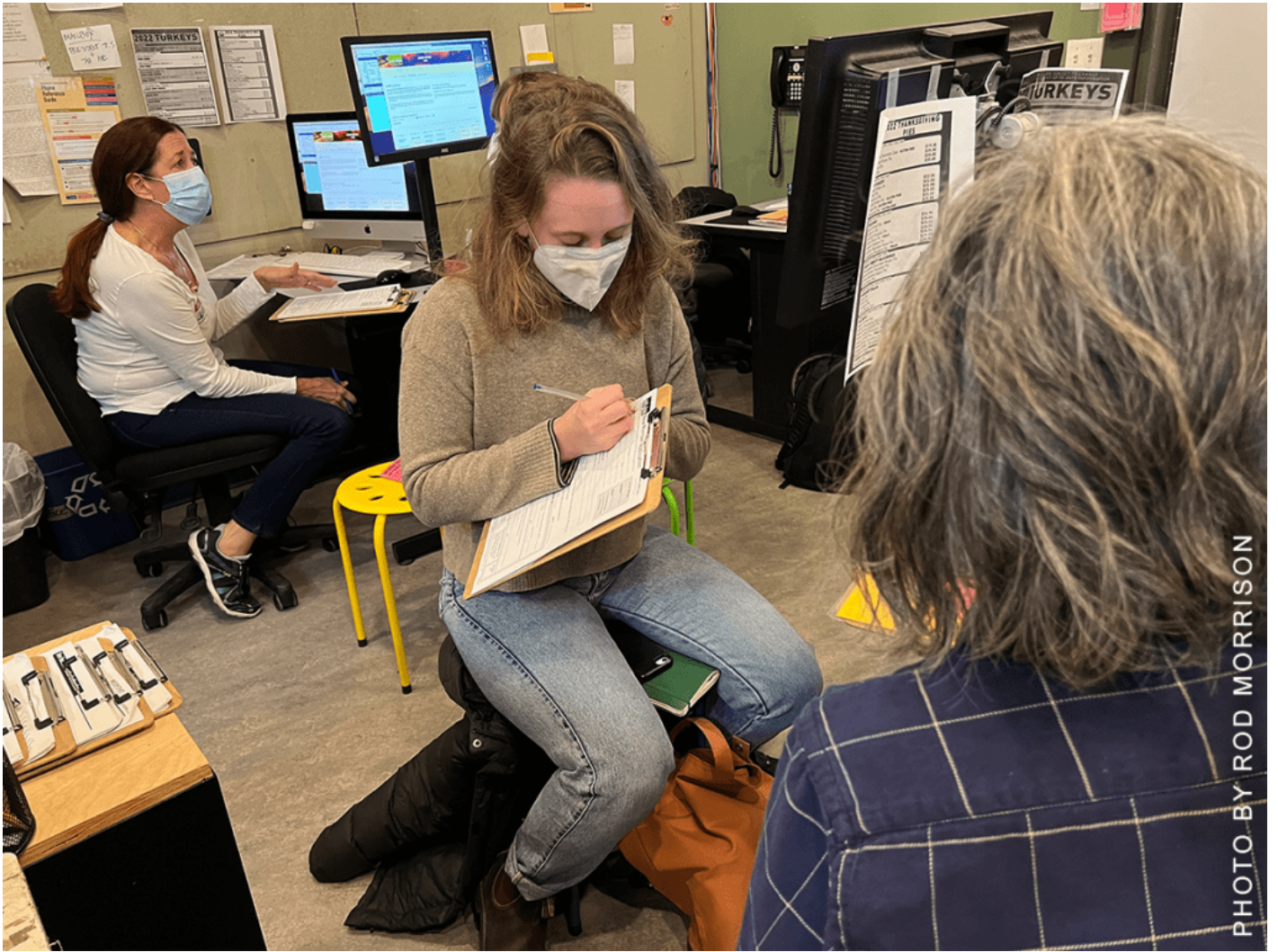
"We're just not able to spend enough time with [new members] to help them understand the ins and outs when they come in to enroll," Mancuso added. "We all have a big stake in their success—older Coop members, the staff, the Coop itself. Currently, we don't refer to the process as orientation; we refer to it as 'new member enrollment.' But bringing back orientation is definitely on our agenda. Space is an issue, with the upstairs meeting rooms pressed into service for packaging and the return of child-care. The current system is an interim system; we hope to bring a full orientation system back into place."



Member-worker Cathy Elton with new member Arne Zeidler reviewing potential Coop squad work assignments.

Looking Forward

Some of the post-COVID changes have been very beneficial. “The IT work has been amazing—we have a great online system that has everything running smoothly.” Mancuso also cites the gradual return of processes that can help support members’ sense of ownership and connectivity. “We’ve returned to recurring squads. And childcare will be back in 2023.” As new systems blend with traditional ways that the Coop has relied on for decades, there is an opportunity to re-introduce orientation practices that support new members as they join the Coop community. “We want them to be excited when they join the Coop, to feel engaged, to feel like they are a part of something,” Mancuso says. “We want them to buy into the Coop.”



Lucy Haskell seen signing up for membership overseen by member-worker, Dulcy Israel.

Frank Haberle has been a Coop member for nearly 30 years. He works for New Settlement in the Bronx and is the author of the novel Shufflers.

COOPERATION, AN UNDERRATED VALUE

December 6, 2022



By Cynthia Blayer

Last January, when the local temperature hovered around ten degrees, my building and several others were affected by a nearby water-main break. No water for several days, the DEP outside drilling round the clock—first trying to locate the break and then fix it. We brought them coffee and donuts at night and thanked them. We learned that our local representative was posting updates on Facebook, through a group called Park Slope Together. I joined.

The situation was resolved and I continued to check Park Slope Together from time to time. Questions about physical therapist recommendations, restaurants, housing, lost pets and injured family members were met with numerous helpful answers. Someone wrote about their neighbor, a recently widowed woman who was deeply depressed by the loss of her husband, hadn't had a job in many years and had not handled her own

financial matters. Within minutes people chimed in—one person recommended a widows' support group, another offered to craft the woman's resume. Another time someone posted about an injured street cat they wanted to help but had no car to get to a vet. Soon several people with cars asked for the location and volunteered to stop by. Someone had a cat carrier—help was on the way.

It's a good feeling to be part of a community that tries to help one another. Park Slope Food Coop was started for this reason. Almost 50 years ago, 12 friends and neighbors began the Coop, so that people in the community could work together to have healthy food available at reasonable prices.

At a recent General Meeting, some of that cooperative spirit was evident in the vote to bring back childcare, which passed 134 to 18. When some staff members expressed concern about the additional work this would create for them, the couple who presented the issue—both teachers, and parents of two young kids—volunteered their time and that of other parents they knew to make it work. They would help in any way they could—cleaning and setting up the childcare room, staffing it and starting a committee to oversee things.

When some pointed out that people needing childcare at the Coop were in the minority of the overall membership, General Manager Joe Holtz said that “as a cooperative all voices count, even when they are not in the majority.”

And we do all get to have our say—at General Meetings, in letters to the *Gazette*, by voting. But then we have to put aside our differences and cooperate and come up with a workable solution for the greater good. The effects of lack of cooperation can be seen regularly in the outside world—mass layoffs and millions without health insurance, pollution rather than sustainability, war. But we can do better. In our relatively small community at PSFC, we can put aside polarizing anger and work together cooperatively. In the end, only cooperation will save the day.

Cynthia Blayer, a longtime coop member, has served on the Environmental Commit-

tee and as a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Food Cooperative Alliance (MAFCA).

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: WHEN TOMATOES MET WAGNER

December 6, 2022

WHEN TOMATOES MET WAGNER



Safe Food Committee Report

By Adam Rabiner

When Tomatoes Met Wagner takes its peculiar title from a quirky experiment to see if the organic tomatoes grown by Alexandros Gousiaris in the tiny farming village of Ilia, in central Greece, will do better when exposed to classical music rather than the traditional Greek music that usually plays for them over several speakers arrayed in the fields. Alexandros, the central character and heart of this film documentary, is a tinkerer, entrepreneur and risk taker, which can be seen in his decision to return to his home village, a place most young people seeking economic opportunities had fled, after studying mathematics at the university in Heraklio in Crete. In 1996, he founded Odysea, Ltd. to produce and export honey, and added tomato production in 1998.

Alexandros works with a cadre of elderly women, two of whom, Agathi and Katina, are his aunts. The small team of employees democratically creates and tests a new sauce and other recipes, spending up to two years adjusting herb and spice ratios. Based on feedback received from a business trip to Brussels visiting local retailers, Alexandros decides to substitute more fashionable quinoa and barley for traditional rice in a stuffed tomato “meal in a jar.” He even considers exporting his tomato sauce to England in beer bottles to appeal to its pub-loving citizens.

Though his willingness to be dexterous as a businessman shows he is not held back by the way things have always been done in the past, in the main, Alexandros is hewing to tradition. His great-grandmother and grandmother both bred bees in their backyards and his family’s roots in beekeeping go back to the 19th century. As an organic and small-scale artisanal producer Alexandros’s production costs are higher than conventional larger-scale operations, and he struggles for profitability. In a town of only 33 residents, half of them working for the company, there is a lot staked to Odysea’s success.

The tensions between Alexandros’s desire to live, farm, and create community in his moribund ancestral town and the economic challenges he faces are the central theme of the film. He discusses these existential questions with a colleague and answers someone who asks why he returned to the village after college: “What does education have to do with a job?” Alexandros, who likes to regale his co-workers with stories

and myths, particularly one about Christopher Columbus's journey to America and return to Spain with tomato seeds, is himself a kind of mission-driven Odysseus, beset by travails, answering to a higher calling, and trying to reassert his place at home.

The village of Ilia has seen better days. It once had two coffee shops, but they have both been long shuttered. When Alexandros arranges a French student exchange and fills the local school with visitors (while giving the village a temporary dose of energy, youth, and life) we learn that the building had been closed thirty years earlier for lack of children. His aunt Agathi, the town's former top student, now always wears a widow's black attire. One of her friends comments that she has acquired a black soul by constantly dwelling on her memories and old times. When Agathi harvests with a sickle, she looks like the Grim Reaper. One of the ladies predicts that when the remaining older generation finally dies off, their children will also flee the town, as their grandchildren had done.

This remains to be seen. On that business trip to Europe, accompanied by several of his co-workers, Alexandros was informed by one manager that there was virtually no information on the labels. Discerning consumers want to know: what town is this from, what kind of tomato is it, who are the people that made it? A born storyteller and educator, Alexandros can easily and compellingly answer those questions. And once he does, Odysea may not simply continue to win awards for taste and quality in international and domestic competitions. With any luck, this food backstory could generate the same excitement in a new generation of Greek youth as it did for the curious and enthusiastic French visitors, or the back-to-the-land younger generation of farmers coming up in the United States, and spur much needed renewal, growth and economic development. Just like those tomato seeds Columbus brought back from the New World did.

When Tomatoes Met Wagner: Tuesday, December 13th, 2022 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com>

INTERNATIONAL TRADE EDUCATION SQUAD (ITES) REPORT

December 6, 2022

By Willy Naess

The squad's mission is to keep members informed about international trade issues and how trade agreements can impact our ability to maintain our values and realize the goals of the Park Slope Food Coop, as put forward in our mission statement. Members of the ITES take responsibility to study and share with Coop members information that can lead to individual and/or collective action.

The squad meets every four to six weeks and regularly writes articles for the *Gazette*, offers committee reports at the General Meeting, maintains an online blog and organizes four public education forums per year that are open to the public.

WHERE IS THE LOGIC?

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

To the Editor:

I have compassion for parent members who miss free childcare. However, I am asking the households who are threatening to leave the Coop without a reinstatement of childcare to consider the following, please:

1. Where is the safety? We are at the beginning of flu season. A large number of children are hospitalized, and worse, due to a mysterious child-respiratory illness, accord-

ing to ABC, CBS and NBC news broadcasts.

2. Where is the logic? Non-Coop food is more expensive, and they'd still have to pay for a babysitter.

3. Where is the commitment? Please read/reread the mission of the PSFC and think about why they made the decision to join the Coop and why they may turn their backs on that commitment.

May blessings be upon all who are suffering, with the hope they will be able to find peaceful, positive methods to minimize/end their suffering and create happiness.

Respectfully,
Rochelle Killingbeck

JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Hello fellow Coopsters,

I was perusing the fantastic *Linewaiters' Gazette* website and read about the suspension of Joe Holtz. I don't understand the logic behind deciding to punish a working member by suspending and withholding pay for an entire month. We all live in the most expensive city in the United States. We're in an economy with rising inflation. Housing costs are through the roof. I don't know what Mr. Holtz's financial situation is,

but I do know that if my employer withheld my salary for a month I would be financially devastated.

I hope the members who decided that this was an appropriate action will reconsider whether this drastic punishment matches the crime.

Thanks, and happy shopping.

Pete Limon

UNREST UPSTAIRS AT THE FOOD COOP

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

To the Editor:

During the September General Meeting discussion about the penalty General Manager Joe Holtz faced for violating staff COVID protocols, Personnel Committee member Jean Callahan defended the actions of her committee, clarifying that it is a body elected to advise on hiring and firing matters. It did not act on a whim and consulted with a labor lawyer, she said. “We considered a full range of responses. We decided [the

punishment] was a fair and proportionate response.”

“Some were fearful of Joe’s power,” Callahan said. “At the moment there are some deep and painful divides. Individual staff members feel silenced and unsafe.”

We appear to have disharmony between the members who make up the paid staff at our “Cooperative.”

Callahan tells us the personnel committee consulted with “a labor lawyer” when thinking about taking action against Joe. I’d be more impressed if she told us they had brought in a labor mediator!

General Coordinator Ann Herpel said, “I’m really dismayed that people are saying that the members have the final say on personnel issues.... That could have a chilling effect.... I’m angry. I’m dismayed. I’m appalled. I feel unsafe.”

Within the context of the Joe Holtz saga, Ann’s feelings are understandable but the discord there seems to be amongst the staff is intolerable, and that is of concern to all Coop members!

What is the personnel committee doing to bring a healthy atmosphere of working together to the Coordinators?

The personnel committee doesn’t publish reports about its private work. But given what’s transpired, all we know that they’ve done to bring peace is to deliver punishment.

As an NYC Family Court Mediator, I know a thing or two about disputes. Are we to just stroll the Coop aisles while a bad situation festers upstairs, wondering what if anything is being done to resolve it?

Andy Feldman

SHOUTOUT TO NOVEMBER 16 MIDDAY SHIFT AND MEMBERS

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

I really want to thank the cooperative and kind spirit of the shift that I worked with Squad Leader Alex on Wednesday, November 16, and some Coop shoppers.

1. The cashier was patient as my new debit card—which I was nervous about using—didn't work. He explained that he could suspend the order and how I could get help after straightening things out with that nifty desk in the corner by the window.

2. Alex, saw that I was losing it because I couldn't get ahold of my bank and straighten out my debit-card PIN, as the fresh salmon grew warm, etc. and the \$300 worth of groceries seemed in limbo. She asked me if I could use help and then she said she could page out and a Coop member could pay with a debit card and I could Venmo that person back the money at the same time. I said, "no way, no one's going to do that."

3. TWO members volunteered! Right away! (I only needed one ;-)) Problem solved! (And PIN eventually fixed.)

Thank you, everyone who helped. It meant a lot. Thirty-five years a PSFC member, I hugely appreciate it.

Jessica Greenbaum

JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

I have just had the opportunity to learn and read about Joe Holtz's suspension.

As another member of the Coop since almost the very beginning (1974), I feel I must write my first-ever letter to the editor.

I remember my first days at the Coop, trudging up the long flight of stairs with my two-year-old tugging on my pants, to pick up the pre-ordered box of whatever vegetables were available at Hunts Market.

I feel there is no greater admiration or respect for the leadership that Joe has shown for this community-minded and groundbreaking business and organization. He has led us through so many challenges, both business-wise and ethical, that it is impossible to recount.

I cannot imagine how the committee came to the conclusion that Joe deserved to lose an entire month's pay for making a mistake that hurt absolutely no one. Even not knowing the results of his PCR test, he wore the appropriate mask during work.

To me, this feels like there is some underlying agenda, a very uncomfortable feeling for someone who has supported and relied on the Coop for almost fifty years.

Correct this mistake, if it hasn't already been done, and keep the integrity of the Coop vital!

Roni Schwartz

IN SEARCH OF HOUSING LISTINGS

December 6, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Hello,

Is there any update on when a real estate section of apartments for rent/housing exchanges available will return to the Coop?

If there is a list, or people requesting such an item, please add my name to the list.

Thank you,

Jessica Corriere

“LIFE BEHIND A MASK”

December 6, 2022

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ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

To the Editor:

In breathing, we typically inhale a fair amount of airborne pollutants floating in the atmosphere, along with oxygen and other gasses that constitute air. The pollutants can include dust particles, chemical pollutants, motor-vehicle exhaust, and free-floating bacteria and viruses. Some will be breathed right back out with the next breath. Some will gain further access up the nasal passages but will normally be trapped by the mucus membrane linings and worked back out over time to eventually be expelled through simple exhales or occasionally more forceful nose-blowing.

That process of expulsion goes on even after we don a mask, but the expelled matter now collects on the inner surface of the mask, fouling it, so that now some of that waste is breathed back into the lungs. O₂ and CO₂ travel through the masks fairly freely, but some small amount is nonetheless blocked by the mask material. Over time, for example the now three years we have had these mask mandates to put up with, we have been paying the price with some indeterminate measure of reduced health. This is in addition to the other harms imposed by the lockdowns, closures, lost jobs, vaccine-adverse events (a minute percentage of which has been tallied in the CDC's Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System) and other restrictions we've been subjected to, to say nothing of the psychological damage inflicted on the population, from the very young to the very old. Were these overreactions worth it? Have they reduced deaths? Statistics from other states, countries, and entire continents that have not locked down belie that notion.

David Barouh