

SQUAD 1 FIREFIGHTER IS A DEVOTED COOP FAN!

September 24, 2024



By Hayley Gorenberg

September 24, 2024

James McHugh is a New York City firefighter with Squad 1 and a beekeeper with a taste for the Coop's chipotle mayo. ("And the hummus is very good, too!") He pops by to shop as a member of a unique group of Coop "permanent guest" members—the cadre of firefighters at the firehouse next door, on Union Street.

NOT ONLY DOES THE COOP FEED THE FIREFIGHTERS TODAY, BUT IT TURNS OUT

THAT, A HALF-CENTURY AGO, THE COOP WAS KEY TO SQUAD 1'S VERY SURVIVAL.

McHugh, 37, gave an interview while on the road during vacation. He enthusiastically carved out a bit of time to reflect on how much he enjoys the special relationship Squad 1 has with the Coop.

Not only does the Coop feed the firefighters today, but it turns out that, a half-century ago, the Coop was key to Squad 1's very survival. As Engine 269, the firehouse closed in the early 1970s. Park Slope activists rallied, and it reopened in 1977 as Squad 1. "So, the only reason we really exist," said McHugh, "is because of the community." Now Squad 1 and the Coop are old-timers in the area, he observed. "The only people left on the block that are original are the Coop, the firehouse and Dixon's bike shop!"

A DAY AT THE COOP





James McHugh and his 8-year-old son John shopping at PSFC

Day-to-day, Squad 1 firefighters vary widely in their use of Coop shopping privileges. "Some people never go next door. But a lot of our younger firefighters are aware of good, organic produce and not-garbage food," McHugh said. "The Coop has things nobody else has, which is nice." And McHugh appreciates the quality: "It's all good stuff. It doesn't have filler in it. Where we work, you have good restaurants and you have good supermarkets. In a poorer neighborhood, a food desert, the firemen are in the food desert also."

Though McHugh professed he was "never really much of a chef," he has learned over time. "You pick up on other people's meals. A guy will make jerk chicken; I never had it before!" He was tickled to discover Utica greens from upstate New York. "They're delicious!" he said. "Spinach, escarole, put some bacon in there—it's really good!"

When he's working a shift, McHugh is commonly the Squad's backup chauffeur. The activity level for the day varies. "It could be 20 runs or one," he noted. "It depends on the day. Fourth of July? Lots! Christmas Eve? Fewer. Halloween? Yeah, you're gonna do runs! Park Slope can be quiet, but Bay Ridge can be busy."

He continued, "Park Slope is generally quiet. People go to sleep and that's it. Where

you've got Soho or Greenwich Village, it's two in the morning, and people are out." (Squad 1 reinforces some parts of lower Manhattan.) He added, "More runs, too much to drink and [someone] fell, a fire, etc. The hotter the weather, the more people that are out, the busier you are!"



James McHugh and his son John

If he's working a shift starting at 9 a.m., McHugh tends to get in an hour or so early, and may relieve a colleague who worked overnight. Shifts may run over, but, he explains, "We're not supposed to do more than 24 hours." If there's a fire near the firehouse, Squad 1 is the fire engine, handles a hose, and douses the flame. If they're called to Coney Island, he elaborated, they're a "squad company," filling in as a ladder company, possibly using hand tools. "We go in where the chief needs us to go," he said.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Squad 1 is a “special operations” firehouse composed entirely of firefighters who transfer in with a minimum of five years of experience. Members have more training and know how to work with hazardous materials, weapons of mass destruction, high-angle rope rescue, trench rescue, rescue from collapsed structures, etc. McHugh once worked as an emergency medical technician on an ambulance, which put him on a special track for the firefighter’s test that he was eager to take. He started at Engine 236 in East New York before he joined Squad 1 in 2019.

Squad 1’s engine supplements ambulances that “get dragged all over the city,” McHugh said. Fire engine companies are more localized, and have training to stabilize someone who is hurt, and then pass them to an ambulance arriving afterwards. Tasking former EMTs to engines is “good allocation of resources,” McHugh said. “Amputated limb? I’ve already done that. So you’re getting bang for your buck.”



James McHugh talking to co-firefighters on his day off

With their “special ops” training, Squad 1 firefighters get called to do “a lot of other strange things,” McHugh said. Their expert abilities at handling metal-cutting machinery may result in being summoned to a hospital because an accident victim with a swelling hand needs a ring cut off. More gruesome are impalements—which again require specialized use of metal-cutters that hospitals don’t keep in-house, but that members of Squad 1 know how to wield.

THE “SPECIAL OPERATIONS” CAPABILITIES OF SQUAD 1 IS PART OF THE REASON THE FIREHOUSE SUFFERED SUCH HEAVY LOSSES DURING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

McHugh has developed his own professional specialties. He enjoys teaching a ropes course, drawing firefighters from other companies to learn how they would angle in to approach a problem at a construction site, a high-rise with someone hanging off or at a collapsed building. "God forbid, a 9/11 or Oklahoma City, where you have devastation over a huge area," he remarked. "You can't just walk over that 70-foot rubble; you have to build a rope line."

9/11 AND BEYOND

The "special operations" capabilities of Squad 1 is part of the reason the firehouse suffered such heavy losses during the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. In addition, the initial call came in around the 9 a.m. change of tours. The squad has only five firefighters per tour, but 12 were killed. "A lot of people were going home, and a lot were coming in," McHugh said. Some who weren't scheduled for the day left from home, anyway. "We lost more people than we had."

The last firefighter who was at Squad 1 on 9/11 retired two years ago. The Sitka spruce sculpture of three firefighters raising the American flag, carved by chainsaw artist Nyal Thomas, Jr., and stationed for years in front of the Coop, has been moved inside due to weather damage. It remains a daily reminder, though "like everything else you become somewhat numb to it," McHugh said. "You walk past every day, and you remember the names. We pass stories down, and we try to keep it as alive as we can."

WELL OVER A DECADE AGO, A FIREFIGHTER GLIMPSED A UNION STREET NEIGHBOR HARVESTING HONEY FROM HIVES. MCHUGH HAS BECOME A BEEKEEPER FIREFIGHTER, ALONG WITH A COUPLE OF SQUAD 1 COMRADES.

There's a special firehouse culture around retirement, McHugh said. "It's a very funny organization with some things. It's the only place where you pay for your retirement

party and give a gift to the firehouse. You get a promotion—you give a promotion gift,” he said. Squad 1 has been fortunate on the foodie gift-giving front: “Somebody got promoted and gave us a grill!”



Outside the firehouse

And if the grilled dinner is to be honey-glazed, the harvest may come from Squad 1's rooftop! Well over a decade ago, a firefighter glimpsed a Union Street neighbor harvesting honey from hives on an adjoining building. McHugh has become a beekeeper firefighter, along with a couple of Squad 1 comrades. He's picked up neighborhood tips, read books, and learned from YouTube videos—and now he even keeps a hive at home.

Squad 1 harvests honey a couple times a year, he said. “It's actually pretty cool when you have a change in temperature, and you see a change in the color of the honey.”

He hasn't experienced much trouble with stings from the bees, he said. "They're all very easygoing."

AUGUST GENERAL MEETING REPORT

September 24, 2024



By Sanoja Bhaumik

September 24, 2024

The August 2024 General Meeting (GM) focused on the Coop's two-day-per-week

mask policy on the shopping floor. The discussion led to renewed calls for hybrid meetings so that immune-compromised members could easily attend GMs. At the meeting, there were also procedural questions around the agenda and Coop referendums.

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ PRESENTED THE COOP'S 24-WEEK FINANCIAL REPORT. NOTABLY, THE COOP SAW A NET INCOME LOSS OF \$33,298, WHICH HOLTZ ATTRIBUTED TO SLOWER SUMMER SALES.

OPEN FORUM

In the Open Forum, Coop member Tim Hospodor inquired if merchandise credits, which can expire, could be used as credits towards member investment. Coop secretary Elizabeth Tobier brought up the question of hybrid GMs over Zoom, especially in cases where venues will not rent to the Coop (Brooklyn College Tow Center agreed and then later reversed on their decision to rent a larger meeting space to the Coop earlier this year). Another member noted that an agenda item on the issue of amending the Coop's bylaws to allow for hybrid GMs has been pending for eight months, and there has been no update on when it will be included in the agenda. Dominique Bravo, a member of the Agenda Committee, responded that the issue will be heard: "It's happening," she said.

COOP FINANCES

General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented the Coop's 24-week financial report. Notably, the Coop saw a net income loss of \$33,298, which Holtz attributed to slower summer sales and increased spoilage in the warm weather. During the same period last year, the Coop had a net income gain of \$283,586. When questioned on the difference between the two years, Holtz attributed it to a change in the Coop markup, from 25% in 2023 to 24% this year, as well as to a rise in staff healthcare costs. He concluded, "Nothing I've said concerns me about the Coop's financial health." The Coop has

done almost \$27 million in sales in this fiscal year.

As Holtz explained in the August GM, the Coop raised its markup from 21% to 25% during the pandemic, then lowered it just before the beginning of the current fiscal year; the power to make this change had been given to General Coordinators by a prior GM. Holtz had also explained in August that the Coop's income should bounce back by the end of the fiscal year and that its mission is to make food affordable and break even.

Members also asked about increases in *Gazette* costs and repairs: the *Linewaiters'* *Gazette* needed a software purchase, and the Coop made repairs to the floors in aisles 2 and 3. The Coop also recently converted the childcare room to storage, since the Coop no longer provides childcare as a result of rising insurance costs.

HOLTZ EMPHASIZED THAT FUTURE PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS NECESSITATED A HOME DELIVERY SYSTEM, AND A PILOT DELIVERY PROGRAM WOULD BEGIN SOMETIME NEXT YEAR.

One member asked how the Coop invests its balances to take advantage of high interest rates. Holtz gave an overview of the Coop's investments—the bulk of which is held in Vanguard treasuries, money markets, and CDs—and added that the Coop earned approximately \$136,000 in interest this fiscal year so far. One member asked about a line item for a pilot home delivery program, which had been delayed from January 2020. Holtz emphasized that future pandemic preparedness necessitated a home delivery system, and a pilot delivery program would begin sometime next year.

SUMMER PRODUCE

General Coordinator Joe Szladek gave a produce report, highlighting all the fresh, lo-

cal summer produce available at the Coop, including local cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, melon, peaches, nectarines and apples. Szladek also noted that the first week after Labor Day tends to be one of the busiest at the Coop, as members return from holiday and children go back to school.

One member asked about excess packaging waste. Szladek stated that the Coop considers plastic and wasteful packaging when ordering items, but he acknowledged that excess waste is an industry-wide problem. He also reminded members that the Personnel Committee, which works with the General Coordinators to provide guidance and support human resources and operational issues, is looking for new members. To learn more, read about it [here](#).

MEXICAN MAIZE

A member of the International Trade Education Committee gave a report previewing a piece in this issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* on Mexico's ban on genetically modified corn, in an effort to protect Mexico's vast array of indigenous corn. Mexicans are the largest maize consumers in the world, and maize is the country's staple crop. The US is the second-largest importer of Mexican maize, and Mexico is the largest importer of US corn. This ban would have major effects on US corn exports to Mexico, and the move has since led to a dispute with US trade representatives, who are challenging the ban under the US Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA).

THE MAJORITY OF THE GM MEETING WAS SPENT DISCUSSING A PROPOSED REFERENDUM ON THE COOP'S TWO-DAY-PER-WEEK MASKING POLICY.

MASK UP?

The majority of the GM meeting was spent discussing a proposed referendum on the Coop's two-day-per-week masking policy. The agenda item sponsor, David Bartner, briefly introduced the proposal. Bartner's main point was that the vote on the mask

policy took place at the October 2023 GM, on Halloween night, when many parents could not attend. He described the decision to hold a vote on this night as “joyless.” Instead, Bartner pointed to an earlier 2023 Coop survey on the question of masking sent through email. That survey had over 4,700 respondents, with 68 percent voting against a mask mandate, and Bartner argued that this survey was more representative of members’ opinions than a 100-person GM. This comment sparked discussion around the effectiveness of GMs versus referendums in deciding Coop policy. Several members noted that they had advocated for hybrid GMs for several months in order to expand access to the forum.

A member later added a point of information that the cited survey asked for opinions on a 7-day-per-week mask mandate, not a two-day-per-week mandate as is currently in place on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Thus, the survey was not representative of members’ opinions on the standing Coop mask policy.

The agenda item stated that masking at the Coop should be voluntary and not required two days a week; in addition, any future decision on masking should be decided by referendum. Several members cited concerns around the text of the referendum, which was limited by presenting two choices:

Yes, I agree masking should be voluntary, and any future decision on masking should be decided by referendum.

No, I do not agree that masking should be voluntary. The Coop should maintain its current masking policy.

Members noted that there were many possibilities between the two options, such as a decision to vote on a masking decision by referendum, while maintaining a two-day mask mandate on the shopping floor, altering a mask mandate to one-day-per-week, or adjusting the mask mandate to certain hours of the day. Members asked Bartner if the Coop would retain its ability to implement an emergency mask mandate, as during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bartner replied that the referendum would

not impede emergency decision making.

MEMBERS ALSO NOTED THAT THIS DISCUSSION WOULD BE MORE APT IN A HYBRID SETTING WITH A VIDEO OPTION, WHERE THOSE WHO FELT UNCOMFORTABLE ATTENDING AN UNMASKED, INDOOR MEETING COULD PARTICIPATE IN A DISCUSSION THAT WAS PERTINENT TO THEM AND THEIR SAFETY.

The agenda item also spurred debate around the Agenda Committee's process. As the Open Forum discussion revealed, the agenda item on hybrid meetings had been stalled for eight months. A member asked why the masking agenda item was back on the GM agenda when the issue had been discussed less than a year prior. Agenda Committee member Dominique Bravo responded that the new item considers a referendum, a new subject in the discussion, and the committee was concerned about the perception that the October 31 GM vote was unfair.

Members also noted that this discussion would be more apt in a hybrid setting with a video option, where those who felt uncomfortable attending an unmasked, indoor meeting could participate in a discussion that was pertinent to them and their safety. The Chair Committee then urged members to discuss the content of the proposal and not the process.

Several members commented that they would vote "no" on the agenda item and the referendum. They argued that the two-day-per-week mask mandate seemed like a "reasonable" accommodation for vulnerable members and those with health conditions that required masking, and it was in line with the cooperative spirit. Member Elise Barr spoke about fellow Coop members who only feel safe shopping with two-way masking. She also questioned the posts on the Coop's Instagram account, which promoted the GM discussion around mask mandates with an image of a large trash bag filled with disposable surgical masks. Members suggested that concerns about the excess waste produced by free disposable masks could be addressed by encour-

aging members to bring reusable masks (as members bring their own shopping bags) or even charging a small fee for a disposable mask at the Coop.

Others disagreed. One member suggested that the mask mandate was “offensive, oppressive” and “hateful,” as it reduced individual choice. Member Amir Bar-lev argued that through the mask mandate, the Coop had chosen “ideology over science,” because no government or scientific body has currently urged a mask mandate. Another member responded that government bodies often make recommendations based on expectations of compliance, and the current policy seemed like a good compromise. One member involved in the 2023 survey noted that the two-day-a-week mask policy was based on staff input, and survey results in which 32% of respondents wanted a seven-day mask mandate.

Although a small number of present members opposed the mask policy and signaled their approval of the proposed referendum, the majority of present members appeared hesitant to move forward with the agenda item, both due to procedural questions around the use of a referendum and COVID-19 transmission concerns.

Following this lively discussion, the Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of membership in reference to the minutes of the July meeting. After the vote, the meeting was adjourned.

SHAPESHIFTER LAB CELEBRATES ONE YEAR IN PARK SLOPE

September 24, 2024



By Leila Darabi

September 24, 2024

August marked one year since the music and arts organization ShapeShifter Lab moved into 837 Union Street, just across the street from the Park Slope Food Coop. Before it opened last year, founders and Coop members Matthew Garrison and Fortuna Sung shared their ambitious plans for the space with the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. They had built the ShapeShifter name as a jazz venue in Gowanus. With the new venue, they wanted to continue that work and to expand their nonprofit entity ShapeShifter+. One year since they opened their doors, the space is fully open as a music venue, part-time cafe and studio space.

TRUE TO ITS ROOTS, THE NEW SHAPESHIFTER LAB IS MOST ACTIVE AS A MUSIC

VENUE, HOSTING PERFORMANCES FROM RENOWNED JAZZ ARTISTS.

MUSIC VENUE

True to its roots, the new ShapeShifter Lab is most active as a music venue, hosting performances from renowned jazz artists. August performances included Bill Ware & The Club Bird All Stars performing original compositions from Ware, a popup show featuring DJs from the HELM record collective, clarinetist Ricardo Gallo's project Horse's Mouth, jazz ensemble Joshua Trio Two, pianist Shereen Cheong's group, an Afrobeat-/Afrofusion night and the Indian raga group Mir Naqibul Islam Trio.



Shereen Cheong Muthuraja on keys, Andrew Cheng on guitar, Anthony Muthuraja on drums, Ruber Simbana on percussion and Matt Garrison on bass.



Matt Garrison on bass and Ruber Simbana on percussion at ShapeShifter Lab

“Honestly, the summer was kind of slow, but it gave us an idea of how to navigate summer in Park Slope,” Sung said. ShapeShifter Lab, which has a diversified business model, has seen other successes in its first year.

The space is also available to rent for events, a core part of the ShapeShifter Lab business model, Sung noted.

WORKSHOPS AND CLASSES

The summer gave the team the opportunity to build out programming on their second-floor studio space. Once a yoga studio, ShapeShifter Lab uses the second floor to host a range of classes and to record music.

Stefania Clementi, founder of Allora Creative Cultural Center, used the space to host kids classes this summer, which included cooking classes, play time and other activities as part of a day camp. The classes will continue into the fall as after-school activities.

“We also have SIM, the School for Improvisational Music,” said Sung. “It’s really fun, a whole day of improv starting with learning and including a teacher’s performance.” Those instructors included well-known jazz artists, directed by trumpeter Ralph Alessi, leading 15–20 students.

“The last day was their final performance,” Sung said. “It was quite amazing. People flew in from Switzerland and China for this workshop.”

BEYOND CAMPS AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCES, THE SHAPESHIFTER LAB TEAM IS EAGER TO RESUME YOGA CLASSES AND OTHER MOVEMENT ARTS PROGRAMS IN THEIR SECOND-FLOOR STUDIO.

As described on the school's website: "The SIM experience encompasses ample playing opportunities and discussion of improvisational concepts. SIM is less about teaching through the lens of style and more about the overarching concepts of improvisation, touching on multiple disciplines."

MOVEMENT ARTS

SHAPE SHIFTER +
MOVEMENT ARTS PROGRAM
UPCOMING CLASSES

• FUNDAMENTALS OF
IYENGAR
TUESDAYS
9:30-11AM

• DIVING DEEPER •
(YOGA)
SUNDAYS
9:30-12PM

• YOGA & MUSIC
MEDITATION •
FRIDAYS
5:00-6:30
(PM)

• CARNIVAL MOVES
& MELODIES
FRIDAYS
4-5 PM
(AGES 8-12)

LEARN MORE @
WWW.SHAPESHIFTERPLUS.ORG

Beyond camps and musical performances, the ShapeShifter Lab team is eager to resume yoga classes and other movement arts programs in their second-floor studio. A recent newsletter had a teaser about a new “movement arts program” curated by Maia Claire Garrison, sister of ShapeShifter Lab’s co-founder Matthew Garrison.

Like her brother, Maia Claire Garrison was raised between New York and Rome. Their father, Jimmy Garrison, was the bassist in the John Coltrane Quartet and their mother, Roberta Escamilla Garrison, was a dancer and dance instructor. The music arts program is set to include classes in yoga, music meditation, capoeira and children’s classes in “carnival moves and melodies” and “clapping hands, stomping feet.”

THE CAFE

Long-time residents of Park Slope will remember that 837 Union once housed the famous Tea Lounge. So opening a cafe in the ShapeShifter space was always important to cofounders Garrison and Sung.

A part-time team of baristas now serve coffee, tea and a limited menu of treats. “If you remember the Tea Lounge, it’s a different kind of vibe,” Sung said. “I always tell the baristas ‘don’t get too disappointed if you don’t serve too much coffee’.” She describes the cafe as more of a networking space linked to the musical performances and community gatherings that ShapeShifter Lab hosts.

SHAPESHIFTER+ IS WORKING CLOSELY WITH JOHN COLTRANE’S SON RAVI COLTRANE AND THE COLTRANE HOME FOUNDATION TO HOST SOME OF THE COLTRANE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS.

“We also have the Park Slope Parents’ Meetup. It’s really about networking and people coming in,” Sung said.

In particular, Sung previewed that ShapeShifter+ is working closely with John Coltrane's son Ravi Coltrane and the Coltrane Home Foundation to host some of the Coltrane centennial celebrations that, in 2026, will honor what would have been the musician's 100th birthday.

As the sons of two members of the Coltrane Quartet, Ravi Coltrane and Matthew Garrison are frequent collaborators. "They have continued the tradition of working together," Sung said.

A LAB TO MAKE CREATIVE PROJECTS HAPPEN

Sung describes ShapeShifter Lab as a space where artists can propose projects and get support in producing them. As an example of the unique, interdisciplinary nature of their events, she recounted a panel commemorating "the year of Alice Coltrane", John Coltrane's wife, mother to Ravi and bandleader and composer in her own right. The panel included Matthew Garrison, Reggie Workman (who was Coltrane's bassist before Matthew's father joined the quartet) and Ravi Coltrane. The three discussed and played Alice Coltrane's music.

RETURN OF THE PSFC CONCERT SERIES

Perhaps most exciting to Coop members, plans are in the works to revive the PSFC Concert Series, a long-standing performance series for Coop members. Jay Rodriguez, a Coop member and Grammy-nominated reed player, composer and bandleader, describes the tradition as: "One of the most exciting things we do at the Coop."

Coop member, artist and activist Beverly Grant formerly curated the series, and held it at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. Rodriguez said he and Alexis Cuadrado—a Coop member who is a musician, producer and professor—took on the project of reviving the tradition. Together with Coop Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner, the team has worked to revive a beloved Coop tradition and found a new home at ShapeShifter Lab.

“WE HAVE SO MANY GIFTED AND TALENTED MEMBERS. IT WAS A NATURAL THING TO DO AND A NO-BRAINER,” SAID COOP MEMBER JAY RODRIGUEZ.

“Alexis Cuadrado and I were talking in the membership office about how we were missing community events, specifically the Very Good Coffeehouse,” Weiner shared. “Fortuna, Matt, Alexis and Jay connected. They created a great proposal for bringing the series back, and the General Coordinators approved the reboot. We’re super excited to bring more community-oriented events and fun back to Union Street!”

“We have so many gifted and talented members. It was a natural thing to do and a no-brainer,” Rodriguez shared in an email. “Before the shutdown this was an important ... way to bring us closer together as a community of people that really care about the world around us. Art in every aspect of our human experience is a life-healing force,” he said.

Rodriguez and Cuadrado intend to expand the new series beyond musical performances to include, Rodriguez said, “a platform for freedom of expression for all ... We welcome painters, dancers, professional and amateur musicians, comedians, actors, DJs, poets, magicians, gurus, dreamers and schemers who want to express themselves and share their gifts!”

They closed with a call to Coop members: “Bring us your light!”

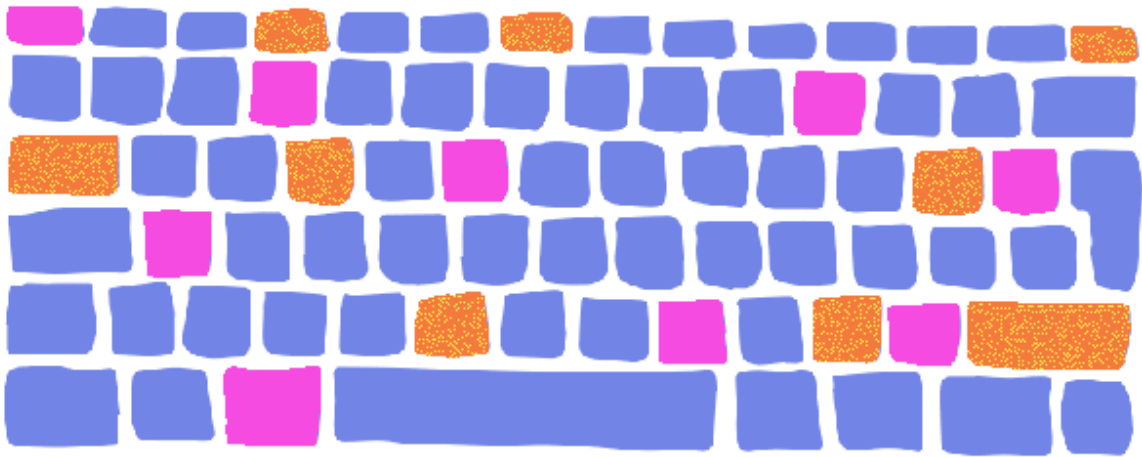


Matt Garrison and Fortuna Sung, the founders and power team behind Shapeshifter Lab

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

September 24, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



JEEZ THE CHEESE IS TOO BIG

Hi Members,

I'm not necessarily a cheese enthusiast, but my partner and son are. They love cheese and love trying new cheeses. Years ago, this was easy to do, as the cheeses

cut were of various shapes and sizes.

For the past many years, however, cheeses tend to be about the same size, which discourages trying different types. I'd love to buy a piece of parmesan, but not a \$10 block of it. I'm hoping we can add a diversity of sizes to the cheeses being displayed which would reflect our members' various needs.

Here's to bringing back small and medium sizes of cheese—let's make cheese great again.

Thanks and hope to see the new sizes soon.

Respectfully in cooperation,
Jesse Farrell

RE: CRITIQUE OF JULY 2024 PROPOSAL ITEM

To the Members:

Three Coop area coordinators brought a proposal item to the July 2024 General Meeting (GM) on behalf of a group of 52 area coordinators. It was posted in the GM agenda notice as "Urgent Resubmission of Personnel Committee Proposal," and was a reworking of a similar proposal that was brought by the General Coordinators to the April 2024 GM and voted down. Both proposals sought to set policies concerning the powers of the Coop committee known as the Personnel Committee, as well as detailing the supervisory hierarchy of Coop staff. The version of the proposal brought to the July 2024 GM was approved by the members.

Both versions of the proposal included language that disenfranchises membership, which I find unnecessary and baffling.

One is the statement:

“The personnel policies of the Park Slope Food Coop shall be the responsibility of the General Manager, GC Team, and/or the Personnel Committee. Those entities have the sole authority to bring agenda items related to personnel policies to the General Meeting.”

Why can't a non-General Coordinator or non-Personnel Committee member bring an agenda item concerning personnel policies if that member thinks it's needed? Very perplexing.

Two is the statement:

“Once approved, the above motions shall replace all other GM-approved motions on matters in the areas specified above regarding employment policies and procedures for the General Coordinators and the General Manager.”

What is objectionable to me about this is that the GM was not provided with the specific policies and procedures being replaced. These documents could and should have been made available to members so they could be fully informed on the matter. Links to these documents could have been posted online or emailed to members before the meeting.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Tobier

RE: “THE COOP IS AT CAPACITY AND CROWDED: CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?”

Dear fellow members:

In reading this article I was struck by the mention of the Second Location Study Committee (SLSC), its rigorous investigation into the feasibility and the community benefits of a second location, and its simple rejection by a close margin of 74 votes to 64 votes. That's 138 of approximately 16,000 Coop members who participated in the vote. The article goes on to survey several other potential avenues for increasing capacity and improving efficiency within the walls of the current PSFC building, none of which sound promising or would benefit the greater Brooklyn community and sustainable vendors at large.

After reading this article, I went back to look at the PSFC's Mission Statement. There are two lines included that I believe support the ideas held within the SLSC's report. Support for that initiative had the potential to satisfy our Mission and would also ameliorate the problem of overcrowding at the PSFC.

Here are the two lines:

"We are a part of and support the cooperative movement."

"We strive to reduce the impact of our lifestyles on the world we share with other species and future generations."

I am familiar with SLSC's report and was one of the 138 voters. I am writing this letter with the hope of stimulating interest in the ideas and information gathered by the SLSC. My concern is that the participation of voting members was woefully small and a good idea was laid to rest prematurely.

A third line from our Mission statement speaks to this hope:

"We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store."

Cheers!

REGARDING REFERENDA AND HYBRID MEETINGS

To the Editors,

With all the controversy about holding referenda and hybrid meetings, a few statistics I obtained from the office may shed some light on these subjects.

It turns out that the total number of members who participated in this year's Board of Directors election out of more than 15,000 members was around 3,800, and this was apparently atypically high, likely due to efforts to get BDS partisans onto the Board; the number of members who vote is usually around 1,000—a tiny fraction of the total.

As for virtual meetings, during the height of the pandemic, after an initial surge in attendance in the spring of 2020, the numbers dwindled and ultimately fell to under 100 by August 2023.

Even the unprecedented and very costly 2012 General Meeting, which required security presence to consider a referendum on joining BDS, attracted fewer than 2,000 members.

It's likely that referenda and hybrid meetings would produce similarly minimal participation since the vast majority of members simply want to do their work shifts and shop at the Coop in a congenial and welcoming atmosphere and aren't interested in subjects outside the Coop's fundamental mission of providing good food at low prices for working members.

Sylvia Lowenthal

BOYCOTT NEXT STEPS: A MODEST PROPOSAL

Dear fellow members,

I'd like to propose a simple, hopefully modest proposal as we look to individually express our views on a boycott of Israeli goods—in short, let us all vote with our wallets as we see fit.

To those that support a boycott: create a list of all products that you believe should not be purchased, publicize that list in a central location (perhaps on a social media page dedicated to the effort), and encourage those that agree with you to not buy those products.

Others who do not support the boycott can continue to purchase products as they see fit.

There is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution to complex issues, especially those as nuanced and emotionally charged as this, and pushing for an entire community to adopt a set of principles is divisive and unnecessary. Let us all be informed and take individual action that aligns with our own personal outlook.

In cooperation, even when we disagree,

Paul Blachar

GENERAL COORDINATORS (GCS) ANN HERPEL AND MATT HOAGLAND RESPOND TO STEPHEN KLEIN'S LETTER, "OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

OF FINDING WORK SHIFTS”:

Dear Stephen,

We offer these answers to help all Coop members understand how complex Coop operations are and the factors that must be considered before changing the labor system.

1. **Availability of Shifts**

As of Sept. 3, there were 12,037 members in the work pool. The six-week shift calendar had 2,184 shifts per week, projecting 13,104 shifts per cycle. The difference between these two figures (work pool and projected shifts over six weeks) is 1,067, leaving a weekly surplus of 177 shifts. In other words, there is at least one shift for every member to work in the six-week cycle, plus 1,067.

Members might feel that there is a dearth of shifts. But from an operational perspective, even with the surplus, the Coop often runs without optimal member-workers where work goes uncompleted or staff step in because the task has to be done.

2. **Expanded store hours are coming soon.** While the start date is TBD, the GCs have decided to expand the shopping hours to 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Sunday hours will remain 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Closing the Coop one hour later, six days per week, will add approximately 30 shifts, meeting at the end of the Coop day, per week.

3. **Reducing the shift length to two hours or increasing the shift cycle length:** Neither would affect shift size, nor reduce demand for popular shifts and start times.

The benefit of reducing the shift length would be to add one more shift-time daily at the END the day, something the expanded store hours will accomplish. However, unlike expanding hours, it would also be burdensome for the operations for many other reasons we can't explain in this brief response.

Increasing the cycle length beyond six weeks would require the Coop to grow around 2,000 members per additional week, far beyond our building's capacity to buy, receive, shelf, and sell groceries to the membership. The impact on the check-out line or queue to enter would be detrimental, to say the least.

4. **Limiting Shift Credits:** Only 3% of the members in the working-pool have 10 or more shifts in their shift bank. Many work on committees like the Gazette or Chair Committee or restricted shifts that need additional training unavailable to most members. Those that do use the shift calendar are more than balanced out by the shift surplus. In fact, the vast majority of members— over 95%—have shift credit banks ranging from -3 to +2 shifts. They are not accumulating enough shifts to crowd out other members from the shift calendar. Note there is currently a two-shift limit on scheduled shifts that helps to prevent shift hoarding.

CLEAN CORN: MEXICANS PROTECT A GLOBAL STAPLE

September 24, 2024



International Trade Education Committee (ITES) Report

By Helen Beichel for the ITES Committee

September 24, 2024

A February 2023 Mexican Presidential Decree banned the growing of transgenic corn, in order to protect the people's constitutional right to a clean environment and native species from cross-pollination by genetically modified (GMO) species.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT AN INDIGENOUS RIGHTS GENERAL EXCEPTION IN ANY TRADE AGREEMENT INVOLVING THE US WILL BE EXAMINED.

The decree included restrictions on GMO corn usage in minimally processed foods, such as masa and tortillas. It set a deadline of March 2024 for the elimination of glyphosates in the country, setting a long-term goal of removing GMOs fed to animals. In August 2023, the US Trade Representative, eventually supported by the Canadian government, opened a case against the Mexican government in the secretive Investor State Dispute System tribunal (ISDS). The case asserted that Mexico is violating the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) by preventing the importation of GMO corn. The U.S. claims that Mexico did not present scientific evidence in its report to back up its claim that GMO corn and herbicides are dangerous to the Mexican people.

This is the first time that an Indigenous Rights General Exception in any trade agreement involving the U.S. will be examined. USMCA Article 32.5 on Indigenous Peoples Rights, which was insisted upon by Canada, allows any of the three USMCA countries to create measures “necessary to fulfill its legal obligations to Indigenous Peoples.” In addition, the Environmental chapter in the USMCA points to the connections between Indigenous People’s rights and biodiversity.

Mexican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) support their government’s policies, saying that they are in line with the USMCA, as well as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade Agreement (GATT)’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. These measures allow taking a precautionary, proactive stance regarding protecting corn as there are no conflict-free scientific studies proving the safety of GMO maize. The involvement of GATT provisions makes this a case with global implications.

GROWING GMO CORN IS DESTRUCTIVE TO THE MILPAS GROWING SYSTEM, A PRACTICE THAT INTEGRATES CORN, BEANS, PUMPKIN, BROAD BEAN, QUELITES AND MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THE RESILIENCE THEY GENERATE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOIL DEGENERATION.

Mexican NGOs point out that in 2020, 40% of the Mexican diet was corn-based. The

average Mexican eats around 432 lbs of corn per year. Mexico also says that by defending itself in front of the ISDS, it is defending its corn biocultural heritage and preserving its native corn species.

Mexico is a gene reserve for 64 different breeds of corn, 59 of which are native, used and preserved for 300 generations by Indigenous Peoples and the ancestral practices of peasant groups. Mexico points out the decree is not a ban on importing corn; it merely regulates the end use of corn for human consumption. Growing GMO corn is destructive to the milpas growing system, a practice that integrates corn, beans, pumpkin, broad bean, quelites and medicinal plants and the resilience they generate in the face of climate change and soil degeneration.

Analysis by U.S. NGOs such as Food and Water Watch highlights that U.S. approval of GMO corn is based on industry assertions, not science. Assessments of reproductive, developmental, neurological, metabolic, microbiome or gastrointestinal-tract-related health risks have not been addressed through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) process. Nor has any other process in the public or private sector addressed those risks. The U.S. government has never done its own assessment of GMOs.

Technical comments coauthored by Friends of the Earth and Food Tank pointed out that the U.S. government's submission to the tribunal lacked information about the toxins expressed in contemporary GMO corn varieties, and their levels. It ignored dozens of studies linking the insecticidal toxins and glyphosate residues found in GMO corn to adverse impacts on public health.

OUR BODIES WERE NOT DESIGNED TO DIGEST THESE NEW PROTEINS EXPRESSED IN GMO SEED STRAINS. THESE TOXINS ARE DESIGNED TO KILL INSECTS BY BREAKING DOWN THEIR DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS.

The toxicity of GMO corn has been increasing since it was introduced 30 years ago.

First, insecticidal toxins, in the form of new proteins, have been engineered into every grain of GMO corn. Early varieties had just one new protein, but today, two thirds of GMO corn varieties have been engineered to have three or more. Levels of these toxins in GMO corn grain now measure 50–100 parts per million (ppm), up from 2–6 ppm.

Our bodies were not designed to digest these new proteins expressed in GMO seed strains. These toxins are designed to kill insects by breaking down their digestive systems. The same seems to be happening to us. The Center for Food Safety's analysis submitted to the tribunal documents increasing allergenic responses to transgenic corn. There are now antibodies against these Cry toxins, which are proteins that attack the gut lining, in at least 8% of Americans. Also, 85% of field corn in the U.S. expressed endotoxins, including non-GMO fields contaminated through wind pollination.

Next, consider the herbicides that are integral to GMO corn. Originally, GMO corn was engineered to withstand just the weed killer glyphosate. Glyphosate usage has increased in the U.S. more than tenfold since the introduction of GMO crops. Now, 86% of GMO corn varieties are engineered to handle two to four toxic herbicides.

Friends of the Earth calls on the U.S. to provide science addressing these concerns in its USMCA response. The tribunal is expected to issue its ruling on the dispute in the fall.

MEMBER SUBMISSION: TIME TO ADOPT THE HYBRID GM MODEL!

September 24, 2024



By William Beckler

September 24, 2024

Like so many other Coop members, I joined the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) not simply for the food, but because I am committed to its premise: that member-owners support each other, and do so by collectively making decisions within the organization built by our labor. In that spirit, we need to update our protocol for convening the

membership in a way that invites broad participation. When, in a Coop of over 16,000 members, monthly GMs regularly attract anywhere between 160 and 240 attendees, that signals a poorly functioning system. When votes on matters that are especially consequential to the Coop require unusual and arduous arrangements just for members to participate, that signals an inadequate system.

Requiring members to show up in the flesh made sense when our bylaws were written. We now have 21st-century technology that we used effectively for our meetings during the pandemic. While many have welcomed the return of physical GMs, the fact that these are becoming *mandatory* for those wishing to participate in Coop governance simply makes no sense to others of us.

As a father of three who was fortunate to work from home when COVID-19 hit, I discovered that work-from-home option made a huge positive difference. I'm thankful that my employer has remained flexible. The failure of the Coop to do likewise reminds me of those authoritarian bosses who make everyone return to the office on the theory that "COVID is over" (although, given the recent summer "surge," it clearly isn't). Our unbossed Coop is supposed to be a place where we seek to accommodate members' personal circumstances to the fullest extent possible. In fact, we currently require masking in the store two days per week to increase accessibility for members who need or want to minimize their risk of infection.

A RECENT GM INCLUDED A DISCUSSION SEEKING "SOLUTIONS FOR WORKING FAMILIES" IN THE ABSENCE OF COOP CHILDCARE. HYBRID MEETINGS WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY HELP TO EASE THEIR BURDEN.

Those utilizing the in-store masking provision are among those likely to benefit from the hybrid GM model. A member I know who is getting chemotherapy has recently attended several GMs while wearing a top-quality mask. With COVID-19 infections soaring, she's not comfortable continuing to do so. Parents are another group that stands

to benefit. A recent GM included a discussion seeking “solutions for working families” in the absence of Coop childcare. Hybrid meetings would significantly help to ease their burden.

Hybrid meetings will be eagerly welcomed by those who can’t fit the required travel time into packed work schedules, or feel unsafe trudging park paths in the dark, or lack convenient transportation, or live far away. Our current model restricts participation to members in largely unburdened circumstances. Hybrid GMs would much more accurately reflect what we proudly call “the will of the membership.”

Let’s remember that we are the Park Slope Food Coop—the vibrant organization that serves as an international model for what cooperation can accomplish. We can do this. We have to do this, to remain faithful to our democratic principles. So, let’s do it! What are we waiting for?

MEMBER SUBMISSION: OPEN STREETS NOT FOR ALL

September 24, 2024



By Denise DeYonker

September 24, 2024

The Open Streets Program is not for all. The program that was once welcomed during the pandemic is now harming businesses and residents and with little to no oversight, accountability or transparency for the nonprofits that run them.

ONLY CERTAIN BUSINESS MODELS BENEFIT FROM THE STREET CLOSURES.
MITCHELL'S SOUL FOOD, A 40-YEAR-OLD BLACK-OWNED BUSINESS, IS NOT ONE
OF THEM.

There is no requirement for community consultation or consent to close down a street, even a critical traffic artery. That has been our experience in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn—with the closure of Vanderbilt Avenue, a major thoroughfare, for six months a year, three days a week. Only certain business models benefit from the street closures. Mitchell's Soul Food, a 40-year-old Black-owned business, is not one of them. The Sunday street closures shuts out their customers who drive or take the bus after church, as they have for decades.



The crowd gathered outside of American Vegan on Saturday, June 26. Despite government officials intervening on that restaurant's behalf, the nonprofit that runs the Vanderbilt Open Streets program won't budge. *BKReader* ran an article in May of this year about Mitchell's. Another restaurant, American Vegan, already closed down, in large part after a series of run-ins with the nonprofit.

Neighboring streets are clogged with traffic when the three-day street closures are in effect, harming businesses and residents in the surrounding area. Prospect Heights is a privileged neighborhood with ample access to beautiful green spaces (including a brand new one, Pacific Park). It is difficult to justify the need for the concrete open space when the harm to many clearly outweighs the few who benefit. A group of neighbors came together to fight back and the United Neighbors of Prospect and Crown Heights was born.