

MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

June 24, 2025



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

June 24, 2025

By Kim Velsey

The May 27 General Meeting was well attended, with a large number of members coming out to voice opinions, concerns and frustrations about what happened at the April 29 meeting, when the Board—for the first time in Coop history—adjourned the General Meeting without discussing the published agenda, went straight to the board meeting and voted to allow a Coop-wide referendum on hybrid meetings. Supporters and opponents of the Board’s move both turned out, many of them wearing buttons, and used every opportunity to speak up about the situation. There was also an extended discussion of hybrid meetings following Coop Secretary Elizabeth Tobier’s proposal to amend the bylaws to specify when Coop meetings could be held remotely.

Open Forum

The Open Forum segment was dominated by questions and comments on the events of the April meeting. Someone asked what would happen to agenda items from the last meeting—would they be carried over? Jaime Principe, commenting that the “standard procedure that has been around for as long the Coop has been completely disregarded,” wanted to know the name of the legal counsel who had advised the Coop that a referendum could be held after the last meeting—a demand echoed by several others, including Noah Potter. Potter also withdrew his name from the running for the Board. Someone else said that board members who voted to adjourn the GM and move on to the board meeting and referendum vote without public discussion should resign. A number of people in the audience applauded until the meeting chair told members to hold their applause.

One member asked, as she put it, a “less serious” question about why there weren’t peanut- and almond-butter grinders at the Coop as it seemed like it would be sustainable and affordable to have them.

Treasurer’s Report

Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, first noted that the Coop would be closing early, at 5 p.m., on Juneteenth (June 19).

Holtz then addressed what had happened at the April meeting and the Coop’s decision to allow a referendum on hybrid meetings to move forward: “We received a legal opinion that it was OK for the Board to take the action they did at the GM meeting. We’re not saying it’s right.” Holtz noted that they had deviated from the Coop’s general bylaws for the first time in the Coop’s history; the one other time the Board deviated from the membership’s advice, during the 1990s, the agenda was followed and advice was given. Holtz said that before the April GM, a message was sent out by members of the pro-Palestinian group, which led to what he called a “curated group” attending. “We have not had such curated general meetings in the Coop’s past,” said Holtz. Though what happened, “is legal,” he added, “we do not believe it is right or in the best interest of the Coop. The boards in the past have been trustees of the demo-

cratic process.” He noted, however, that “elections have consequences.”

Holtz said that the legal counsel was a firm that has a specialty department in cooperative law and that there was no written opinion; he felt he could not share the firm’s name without consulting them and speaking with the General Coordinators. When asked by a member what the cost of the legal advice had been and if the advice of membership was sought before seeking legal advice, Holtz responded that the Coop had not received an invoice yet, but that legal fees were a line item in the financial statement, to be used at the General Coordinators’ discretion, and that there was not “a history of micromanaging the staff.”

Asked how many times meeting venues had been cancelled because of an email campaign that threatened violence—referring to City Tech cancelling the Coop’s venue rental—Holtz said that he didn’t think violence was ever threatened, rather that people had called the venue and predicted it. “I wish we were at City Tech on April 29—that would have been the best thing, in my opinion,” he said.

Holtz then presented the highlights for the income statement for the 12 weeks ending April 27—the full eight-page document was sent to members via email. Compared to the same period last year, net sales were up: \$14.91 million this year vs. \$13.52 million last year. The gross margin is up 19.61% from 19.23%, and operating income went from \$2,000 negative to \$85,000 positive. These numbers were likely impacted by changing the base markup from 24% to 25%.

Alyce Barr asked about the legal expenses for the Unity council lawsuit initiated last year. Holtz said that total legal fees last year came to \$2,513 and this year so far are \$3,412, and that the Coop has a robust insurance policy for suits brought against it, but has to pay out \$35,000 before the insurance kicks in.

Member Committee Reports

Steve Jenkins of the Personnel Committee announced that General Coordinator Joe

Szladdek had been selected as the Coop's next General Manager. The Coop, with the help of the Carlyle Search Group, reviewed over 1,200 resumes, interviewed five candidates in person, did another round with three candidates, then a final round with Coop staff members. Szladdek's dedication to the Coop and his vision "made him a natural choice," according to Jenkins.

After that, Szladdek got up to speak, starting off with a joke that Coop members "got another Joe." He said it was an honor to be stepping into the role given how special our Coop is: "It's proof that a member-owned co-op can thrive on a large scale. We've thrived, with members providing over 80 percent of the labor." He added that he'd been a staff member for the past 15 years and a member for five more and "felt very lucky to be running this store." His top priority, he said, "will be the stability of the Coop."

"I DON'T THINK THE COOP WOULD BE HERE, AT LEAST NOT IN THIS FORM AND THIS SIZE, IF NOT FOR JOE [HOLTZ]."

INCOMING GENERAL MANAGER JOE SZLADEK

"We're employed by membership to help run our shared business," he added, which meant being "transparent when it matters, navigating disagreements, keeping the health of the Coop front and center. I think we significantly agree on more than [we] disagree on." Thousands of members, he said, rely on the Coop, unaware of the flyer-ing and debates, and while their voices don't often show up at these meetings, they are important for the Coop to take into consideration. He also thanked Joe Holtz for his leadership and tireless work on behalf of the Coop "I don't think the Coop would be here, at least not in this form and this size, if not for Joe."

Szladdek also said he would be looking into ways to keep the Coop competitive: offering more prepared foods, building on the success of Court Street sandwiches, and

even possibly adding home delivery. Asked whether the Coop would be hiring another General Coordinator to replace him, Szladek said they are considering different options.

Bart DeCoursey of the International Trade Information Squad then gave a short presentation on Trump's tariffs, describing the havoc they were wreaking on the market while making projections difficult. He added that the committee has room for new members.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Revolving Loan Committee Election

Kathy Martino, the only current member of the Revolving Loan Committee, and Joe Holtz, the staff liaison to the committee, were up for re-election and election, respectively. Martino explained that the committee oversees a fund, which currently has around \$67,000, that gives low-interest loans to new worker co-ops like the Greene Hill Food Coop in Clinton Hill. Greene Hill received two loans, one of which was paid

off, another which has about \$7,000 left, and the committee is in the process of evaluating another loan application from them.

Martino described her background working at the New York City's Comptroller's Office. Then Holtz explained the origins of the fund: It was created in response to the many inquiries the Coop received asking for guidance and help—the Coop would mail out information packets but felt that it was not enough, particularly for groups who wanted to start worker co-ops, which largely fell out of favor in the 1970s. The fund, which sits in a 501c3 (or non-profit) foundation, is a donor-advised fund, with the Coop serving as donor and supplying advice through the Revolving Loan Fund Committee. When loans are repaid, they are returned to the fund.

The Revolving Loan Fund Committee now has two members—one, who was not at the meeting, still has time on her term and therefore is not up for re-election. As Holtz explained, the committee often goes a long time without work, during which period members do not receive work credit.

One member suggested adding a third member to the team who could learn from their institutional knowledge, which Martino replied was a great idea.

The vote followed, with Martino re-elected and Holtz elected to the committee.

Pension Education and Reporting Committee Election

Nils Mellquist and Avi Fisher, both up for re-election to the Pension Education and Reporting Committee, explained their qualifications briefly, then, in response to member questions, explained at length that the committee helps manage the Coop staff's \$12 million pension fund by interfacing with the investment manager and keeping tabs on its performance. "We try not to advise, just make sure it is adhering to the mission statement," said Fisher. There was some confusion among audience members between the Coop mission statement and the pension's mission statement—which are different—and whether the investments were in companies that were socially respon-

sible. “I’ve been on the committee since 2019, and I’m surprised it’s taken someone that long to ask that,” said Fisher, explaining that there were no socially responsible carve outs, but that members could introduce resolutions to make them. One member suggested that staff members, but not the larger membership, have a say over whether the investments were socially responsible. A staff member got up to say that while they do not currently have a say over the pension fund, they do have control over their own 401Ks.

Both Fisher and Mellquist were re-elected.

Remote Meetings

Coop Secretary Elizabeth Tobier presented a proposal to amend Article VI of the by-laws to add a paragraph specifying under which circumstances a GM can be held remotely using a videoconferencing application. Speaking on the benefits of in-person discussion and engagement, she argued that remote meetings should only be held when the Coop cannot locate a meeting space in which to hold a scheduled meeting, either because of anticipated member turnout and/or a politically charged topic on the agenda. “There is this myth that the GM is the decision-making body of the Coop. No, it isn’t,” she said. “It’s a place where members come together. Working on ideas together is the actual work of the General Meeting. This is best achieved by getting together in person.”

She also presented graphs on hybrid meetings held during the pandemic, showing that while meeting attendance started out exceptionally high—around 500—it fell to levels comparable to or even lower than average GM attendance, around 100.

“THERE IS THIS MYTH THAT THE GM IS THE DECISION-MAKING BODY OF THE COOP. NO, IT ISN’T.”

COOP SECRETARY ELIZABETH TOBIER

A number of members then spoke in favor of and against the proposal. Several members spoke of their positive experiences with hybrid meetings in other groups, including community boards and unions. Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham recommended not only making meetings remote, but recording them and delaying voting until the next meeting to accommodate people who were not only unable to attend in person, but working or putting kids to bed during the meeting time.

Another member said that if an issue was so divisive that no one would rent the Coop space to discuss it, it was better to “let the issue lie” because “we don’t want to overturn what we’ve created.”

Chair Committee Goodbye

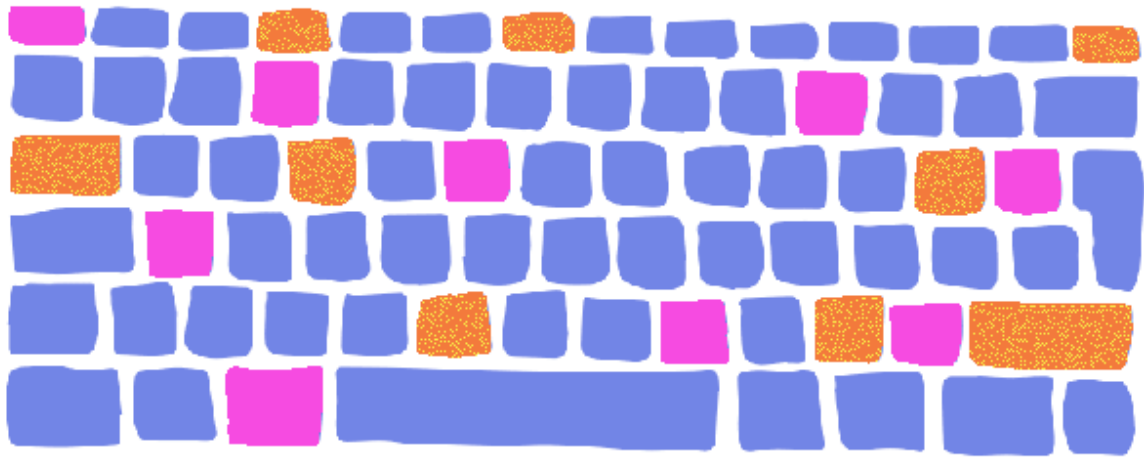
Imani Q’ryn announced that it was her last board meeting as a member of the Chair Committee after 18 years on the Board and 20 years on the committee. “It’s been an honor being on the Board and working with my fellow Chair Committee members,” she said.

Kim Velsey has been a Coop member since 2020. When she’s not writing for the Gazette, she’s a staff writer at New York magazine.

JUNE 3, 2025

June 24, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



REQUEST FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Coop members:

I am a long-standing Coop member and urge the Coop to put in place hybrid general meetings.

A large percentage of Coop members are simply unable to attend in person meetings due to family and work obligations, and long distances to travel. I currently care for my elderly parents in Maryland and am in Brooklyn infrequently and randomly, but I still shop at the Coop and fulfill all my work obligations. Many members are in similar situations. Not to mention elderly or disabled members who may have health or physical issues which prevent them from attending in person meetings easily. Hybrid zoom meetings have become standard throughout both the public and the private sectors in this country. The Coop has embraced the digital age in many ways, far too many to list here. Hybrid GM's make common sense in 2025 and would allow more members to participate in the Coop's democratic process.

I have read the Jan. 7 Coordinator's Corner article *Our Coop at Risk* in the *Gazette*, encouraging members to oppose the hybrid meeting proposal. I find this baffling. Only offering in-person meetings essentially disenfranchises all but a handful of our many thousands of members. It flies in the face of all common sense. With regard to the BDS boycott, lowering the boycott threshold to 50% is unacceptable. No boycott of any kind should be enacted without at least a two thirds consensus of Coop members, and in-person meetings should be allowed to proceed in a hybrid fashion. This would be a good compromise and uphold the democratic values of the Coop. But discouraging a more democratic, easily accessible GM process is not a good look, and gives the appearance that the general coordinators and the board are against member participation on controversial topics.

Sincerely,
Becky Burrows

ISRAEL OBSESSION

Dear Coop members:

I'm a long time Coop member and I joined to be part of a cooperative workplace devoted to healthy food. The idea that the Coop should be a place to fight the problems of the Middle East is simply not an appropriate or fair use of member time and resources. I think that the discussion of Palestine and Israel should be banned from the agenda of the Coop and people who cannot leave this alone should have their membership revoked.

Sincerely,
David Sher

ARE COOP STAFF OUT OF TOUCH?

Dear *Linewaiters' Gazette*:

I have been watching the evolution of the issue of hybrid meetings. I feel like the staff is trying to do what they think is right for the Coop, but they are out of touch with the democratic process and the actual will of the members. Blocking votes and overriding the board's attempt to reinstate the membership's voice is a sign that you're doing it wrong.

Sincerely,
Bill Beckler

UPHOLDING DEMOCRACY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN OUR COOP

To the Editor,

As a longtime member-owner, I am deeply concerned by the ongoing delay in issuing a referendum on hybrid General Meetings, despite a clear directive from the Board. The Board, elected by and accountable to the membership, has called for this referendum to give members a voice on an important issue of accessibility and participation.

The continued postponement—now stretching to 18 months—prevents us from exercising our democratic rights as members and undermines the cooperative values of openness, equity and democratic member control that are foundational to the Coop. Seeking further legal opinions at this stage appears to be an unnecessary barrier, especially given the Coordinators' previously stated opposition to hybrid meetings. As member-owners, we expect our paid staff to respect the decisions of the Board and the will of the membership.

I urge the General Coordinators to follow the Board's directive and issue the referendum by the end of May. Anything less is a disservice to our Coop's principles and to the rights of its members to participate fully in our governance.

Sincerely,
William Clark

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

Dear Editors,

Many thanks to the Board members who listened to the requests of the membership expressed at the April General Meeting and voted to move the long-delayed hybrid meetings proposal to a referendum.

For me the General Meeting was a hopeful exercise of democracy. The chair committee extended the open forum time enabling more voices to be heard; a Board mem-

ber, a member of the agenda setting committee, and many members shared their perspectives. The lively response to a member's motion to provide a path forward engaged the whole room in thinking about how Coop decisions are made and who makes them.

I came away with a new understanding that every General Meeting is a portion of a Board meeting "that is devoted to receiving the advice of the members" (Coop's Bylaws, Article VI, 2). Soon we will all have the chance to vote on a proposal to allow more members to give our advice to the Board through hybrid meetings.

In cooperation,
Kathy McCullagh

REMOVE ROGUE DIRECTORS

Dear Members:

The April 29 General Meeting was an exercise in mob rule and a rejection of the rule of law, a fundamental principle of democracy.

The Coop is a corporation governed by the laws of New York state. It operates under its bylaws and governing documents, including the Guide to the General and Annual Meetings, which states:

When the Coop incorporated, the members decided that the Board of Directors (BOD) would be required to meet openly and vote only on issues that were taken up and voted on by the membership.

The Guide affirms the role of the Agenda Committee:

IV. Agenda of the General Meeting

A. The Agenda Committee impartially sets the agenda of the General Meeting.

C. The Agenda Committee will assemble the items, prioritize them, and submit them for publication in the Linewaiters' Gazette 5 to 12 days prior to the General Meeting.

The bylaws further state:

ARTICLE VI – MEETINGS

The membership shall be given notice of each such (Board of Directors) meeting prior to such meeting. The directors shall inform those members who shall be present of the nature of the business to come before the directors and receive the advice of the members on such matters. The portion of the Board of Directors meeting that is devoted to receiving the advice of the members shall be known as the General Meeting.

On April 29, Directors Tess Lavoie-Brown and Keyian Favai conducted a board meeting that violated these governing rules. Without proper process and member input, they authorized a referendum to change the bylaws. Director Tim Hospodar voted in support of this breach.

These Directors failed to uphold their fiduciary responsibility and violated members' rights.

They must resign—or be removed.

Voice your opposition. Please sign the recall petition.

Barbara Mazor

coop4unity.org

FINDING “VALUE” IN THE COOP’S COLLECTION AND AGGREGATION OF PERSONAL DATA AND OPINION

To the editors:

Why take the Coop’s demographic survey?

I oppose efforts like this and think them unlawful.

The PSFC survey email reads: “organizations like our Coop regularly find value in collecting such information in order to assess needs.”

What needs?

Where is the need for “value,” if that value works to divide us?

It’s needless surveys like this and the hunt to gather, aggregate and mine “value” from intrusive data collection among individuals in voluntary community like ours, of race, sex and the like that speak of identity, that trouble me. All this surveying has divided us, has got our country into the hands of an alliance of clever despots who feed on occasions like this, in organizations like ours, to denounce voluntary communities who accrue social data from individuals, without inner aim, without clear purpose. And it’s intrusive, divisive and needless. Of what value then?

Respectfully submitted,
Allen Tobias

A BIG THANK YOU

Dear Coop Members:

Because there were so many members wanting to speak during Open Forum, I never got a chance, so here goes: I'm 71 years old, and my husband is 76. We're both immunocompromised but make it to almost every GM (wearing masks) because we love our Coop and want to participate in democratic community gatherings. We risk our safety every month so that we can attend.

It was enormously gratifying to learn that the Board authorized a vote by our ENTIRE membership online about finally ratifying having monthly GM's online and in person!!

A big thank you to those who helped make this vote possible after 17 months of delays!! Democracy is messy but it works!!

*Sincerely,
Carol Wald*

THE TRUTH COMES LIMPING AFTER

To the editor:

I could give you my legal perspective of the April 29 Board of Directors meeting (I'm an appellate attorney well versed in corporate governance disputes), but I will let the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine speak for themselves. Here is their Instagram video and email telling you exactly what happened: PSFCM4P were so angry that they took over and ended the meeting; Directors Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai discussed an issue that was not on the agenda; and they decreed that the Coop will issue a referendum on hybrid meetings because the PSFCM4P demand hybrid meetings now.

The General Coordinators implored Tess and Keyian to stop because their action was illegal under the Coop's bylaws. The bylaws are the rules the Coop follows when mak-

ing decisions as a cooperative corporation. Why was their action illegal? The word “illegal” means against a law, and bylaws are laws.

Our bylaws require Directors to make decisions at a Board meeting, but the PSFCM4P ended the scheduled meeting. Our bylaws also require that the entire membership be informed of “the business to come before the directors.” Our Guide to the General Meetings (rules clarifying our bylaws) require a minimum five days advance notice of an agenda item so all members can decide whether to come “give advice to the directors.”

Tess and Keyian, leaders of the campaign to boycott Israel, gave **no** advance notice of their agenda—not even to their fellow Directors Imani Qryn and Joe Holtz. PSFCM4P proclaim their takeover was “democracy” in action. It was great political theater, but not democracy. Democracy requires following laws. The PSFCM4P letters here are also not democracy. They are words of an *activistocracy* taking totalitarian control—over you and our beloved Coop.

Sincerely,
Zara Watkins

OUR RIGHT TO DECIDE

Dear Coop Members,

I am a longtime Coop member who has occasionally dipped a toe into PSFC governance. When I did so, I experienced firsthand the undue influence that the General Coordinators often exert. Thus, I appreciate the way in which the group Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine has worked alongside other democracy-minded members to make our General Meetings hybrid.

I was angry when I read the GCs' latest column, where they try to argue that caring about the fate of people who are being bombed and starved by a country heavily supported by our own government somehow equates to being the vessel of an ideology, driven only by a single issue. *Even if* PSFC4Palestine's only motive for supporting hybrid meetings was to make it easier to vote on a boycott, wouldn't that still be a good thing? But that's not all they care about, as I know from conversations with a few of them. It's just that they reject the GCs' effort to define "cooperation" in narrow, apolitical terms.

In the most recent *Gazette*, I read that the General Coordinators have refused to say whether they will issue the referendum on hybrid meetings as directed by the Board at the April GM. Now I find out that Joe Holtz says they are getting legal advice about next steps. Once again, employees of the member-owners are acting like bosses or corporate CEOs who can do whatever they please. I am grateful to those on the Board who stood up for the membership and our right to decide this question via referendum.

Sincerely,
Winston McIntosh

PETITION TO RECALL MEMBERS OF THE COOP'S BOARD

Dear Coop,

We are collecting signatures for a recall of three members of the Coop's Board of Directors: Tess Brown-Lavoie, Keyian Vafai, and Tim Hospodar. These board members voted "yes" when Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine illegally forced through a referendum on hybrid voting at the April GM. They did so without notifying membership, as required per our bylaws, thus stealing yours and everyone else's

vote.

Please add your name to the Recall Petition [here](#).

Sincerely;

Jesse Rosenfeld

BDS VS. COOP(ERATION)

Dear Coop members:

I understand why BDS wants to isolate Israeli companies from selling their wares in the US and elsewhere, like I understand why Hamas exists. Without a doubt, Israel's war on Gaza is horrendous beyond words, as has been violent aggression toward the Palestinians since even before the founding of the state of Israel.

However, what I don't understand is that BDS is spending its time and efforts on achieving the goal of getting Israeli products boycotted from the Park Slope Food Coop of all places. You don't resolve a severely polarized conflict by sabotaging the essence of a non-political entity that actively strives for inclusivity and diversity, and has done so successfully for 50 years, with great effort by many.

Take your fight to the corporate world of commerce instead. That's where your fight gets the ROI on your time and efforts you're looking for by upping reach and scale. And if a difference can be made, it's on the scale of corporate profits.

So again, don't pick on a Coop that embraces, models and nurtures cultural understanding and collaboration. Taking the BDS fight to the Coop defeats BDS's purpose on two fronts—fighting a fight where it shouldn't be fought, and not fighting the fight where it could make the difference BDS seeks. Fighting the Coop is a waste of many

people's time and energy, not in the least of those who support BDS and its mission.

Thank you!

Erik Schurink

BDS IS TOO TOXIC FOR EVENT SPACES—AND FOR US

Dear fellow Coop members:

I was one of dozens of members who couldn't get into the April general meeting due to capacity constraints. It was a frustrating but enlightening experience, as it became clear in talking to fellow members on the line that many are missing the plot. There was anger about the cancellation of our contract for the theater at City Tech, and rage at an apparent move by an unaffiliated NGO that led to City Tech backing out, but zero reflection on why City Tech would take such a push seriously.

Why such drama about a process issue at the Coop? For anyone not following along, the animating force for the push for hybrid meetings is to make it easier to vote on boycotting Israel at the Coop in alignment with the BDS movement. No matter our feelings about the wars in the Middle East and the terrible plight of people there, the BDS movement is widely perceived as toxically antisemitic. It is so toxic that many city institutions want nothing to do with it, whatsoever. That's why it's been hard to schedule large venues to hold such meetings, and that's why Coop BDS activists are pushing so hard for virtual meetings instead.

So, I pose the question to my fellow Coop members: if even a whiff of association with BDS is considered too toxic for public spaces in the city, why isn't it for us? We wouldn't—and certainly shouldn't—tolerate affiliation with racist and hateful outside groups of other sorts; why are we putting up with this? There are many ways to support the Palestinian cause without aligning with outright anti-Semites.

I can only hope that my fellow Coopers don't realize who they are trying to get in bed with. Time to wake up.

Sincerely,
Josh Suskewicz

THAT "OTHER" ISSUE

Dear Coop members:

Why has there been such controversy over the hybrid meetings proposal? It's a virtual no-brainer that such meetings would be a boon for greater participation in the Coop's democracy, so why has the proposal been on the table for so long without a vote? But of course we know why; we know that the reason has nothing to do with the subject of hybrid meetings itself, but rather that such meetings might facilitate a vote on that *other issue*—the proposed Israel boycott, and the drive by certain Coop factions to prevent that vote from ever happening, lest it succeed. All else has become secondary to that goal, come hell or high water. Larger venues have been difficult to find, and when one has been found, it has been mysteriously sabotaged and called off. Thus, the hybrid meetings vote has become a casualty to that *other issue*.

But a solution is evident, and easy to implement. During the COVID years, when in-person meetings were thought to be dangerous, meetings were held online. The coordinators are responsible for arranging General Meetings, and simply interpreted online meetings to be the equivalent of in-person ones. Thus, meetings continued to take place. Nothing in the bylaws prevents that. By the same logic, controversial proposals judged to demand larger venues can simply be held online. Coordinators need not spend time and money searching for a large in-person venue, only to see it cancelled, victim to specious arguments and dirty pool. They can simply notify the mem-

bership via their normal email announcements of the coming General Meeting, that it will be held online, and send along the links announcing the agenda and setting up the voting. So why is this charade that a venue cannot be found going on?

Sincerely,
David Barouh

CASTING ASPERSIONS INSTEAD OF VOTES

To my fellow members and General Coordinators who've tried to stop the referendum on hybrid voting:

You tried, but failed, to inhibit our democracy as a way to avoid engaging in an honest conversation and vote on the issues of BDS.

I am a Jewish descendant of Holocaust survivors. In the 1930s, there were Americans who saw my people's plight as their burden, and helped get my grandpa out of Germany. When genocide is happening, neutrality is impossible; we are either complicit or opposed. Today at the Coop, we can do our part by standing in solidarity with the people of Palestine by boycotting goods from Israel, the state committing genocide against them.

Instead of engaging on the issues, I have mostly seen anti-hybrid/BDS campaigns simply cast aspersions on us as a group. There are baseless rumors that we are violent. We have been doxxed. One member in a previous *Gazette* letter wrote that we are "holding the Coop hostage"! At the 4/29 GM, we were even scolded by a Board member for acting dangerously because, the reasoning went, by demanding that the Board issue a referendum on hybrid voting we were not letting our own voices be heard. We've waited over 18 months for the Board to allow a vote on increased accessibility to voting; I trust everyone can see the rhetorical gymnastics here.

I am proud we won a referendum on hybrid voting. We have a governance that clearly does not wish to have this conversation, but we still succeeded. Ultimately, we need a robust conversation and vote on these issues. For example, does supporting a state that is intentionally starving an entire population uphold our mission to “oppose discrimination in any form”? Don’t change the subject; let’s discuss and vote about it.

Sincerely,

Rosie Lopeman, artist, teacher and member of PSFC For Palestine

REFLECTIONS ON HYBRID GENERAL MEETINGS

Dear Coop members:

“More people will attend a Hybrid General Meeting than one at the Picnic House.”

Surely this is the thinking of members who are vehemently demanding that we establish permanent Hybrid Meetings.

Based on the evidence below, this may not always be the case.

Elizabeth Tobier’s April 22 letter gave the attendance at 35 Zoom GMs during Covid. Every Coop member was free to participate in these meetings while eating dinner and doing household chores.

The average attendance from May 2020 to August 2023 was 150. Attendance was highest the first few months but then dropped precipitously.

In September 2023 the GM returned to the Picnic House. Minutes of 17 meetings through March 2025 are posted on our website. They tell how many members voted, when there was a vote.

The average number of votes cast in these elections was 159.

This shows that MORE people have been attending GMs at the Picnic House since we ended Covid Zooming!

Picnic House attendance was greatest in October 2024 when there were Personnel Committee and Masking Mandate votes. Were these members attending a meeting for big decisions?

I am left considering what effect the issue of boycotting Israel is having on the extremely intense Food Coop conversation about whether or not to establish permanent hybrid meetings. In my opinion the boycott issue is the MAIN impetus and this gives me the creeps.

I have no doubt that if hybrid meetings were established and there was a vote on a boycott, a record number of members would chime in, even if the voting system was put in place hastily.

IF, and I repeat IF, members sanction hybrid meetings, we'd better take our time setting up a flawless system free of fraud potential, that will also give members sufficient time for considering issues.

*Sincerely,
Andy Feldman*

HIDING GEHIND "DEMOCRACY" FOR STAGING A "COUP"

Dear Coop members:

The monthly GM has typically about 200 attendees, or only a bit more than one per-

cent of the membership base. Whatever decisions are made on that day reflect the will of that motivated and engaged one percent; in no way does it reflect the will of the 99% members who do not vote. To call it democracy and the will of the membership is a farce.

The lack of engagement of 99% of the membership is a shame, but understandable, and not unexpected. After all, people lead busy lives, and schlepping to a two-hour evening meeting in the park to discuss the formation of a work-rules or recycling committee is asking a lot.

The lack of participation in our Coop's governance becomes particularly worrisome, however, when a small group of highly motivated actors coordinate their activities with an outside group to take over the control of the Coop. Indeed, it only takes 100-150 people to gain the majority vote during those monthly GMs.

The Coop must rethink its governance, to protect itself from bad actors!

*Sincerely,
Bruno Grandsard*

150 MEMBERS LEFT WITHOUT A VOICE

To my fellow members —

An article from the May *Gazette* describes how, at the April GM, board member Imani Q'ryn spoke to attendees about the risks of the board issuing a Coop-wide referendum on hybrid meetings. She warned that “what we’re doing right here is very dangerous... hold your power. Do not give it to us.” Sadly, I was among those excluded from the Picnic House due to capacity issues and couldn’t hear her statement from my spot near the front of the 150-person long line of members who had hoped to get

in. A tall room divider blocked our view of the meeting through the windows, the shut doors prevented us from hearing what was said, and we were told that if we did anything beyond quietly standing in line, someone would call the police.

Respectfully, Q'ryn's statement frustrates me. "Hold your power" rings a little hollow to those of us stuck outside. What power should we hold? The power of the first 250 people who show up to make decisions for the rest of us? If "the Coop is built on discussion" as Joe Holtz says, then why are there over a hundred people waiting in line who can't make their voices heard? I don't see any danger in issuing a Coop-wide mail-in ballot to make a decision, especially on a matter that has already seen so much discussion and faced so many logistical hurdles.

I agree with Q'ryn that the membership should hold our power and not give it away—and hybrid GMs are exactly how we can do that.

Sincerely,
Robert Lord

LET THE REFERENDUM ON HYBRID MEETINGS HAPPEN!

Dear Fellow Park Slope Food Coop Members,

I just sent the following message to the Coop General Coordinators:

I am horrified to learn that rather than carrying out the clearly demonstrated will of the membership of the Coop to hold a vote on whether or not to allow hybrid general meetings, the GC's are hiring lawyers!

This is ABSURD! Let the members vote on the question.

I was at the GM at the end of April and the twisted logic expressed by Joe Holtz and Imani Q'ryn arguing against the decision by the Board to go ahead with a referendum was astounding.

How on earth can stopping a referendum from happening be described as a defense of democracy?

LET THE REFERENDUM HAPPEN!

In solidarity,
Judith Loeb

DISENFRANCHISEMENT IS WRONG

To the editors,

If what has been reported is true, and the General Coordinators are seeking legal advice on how to prevent members from attending General Meetings virtually, then we have truly arrived at a moment of crisis.

To spend Coop resources (our money) disenfranchising members who otherwise can't attend and have their voice heard for reasons like physical disability, lack of childcare and needing to work is an outrageous dereliction of duty.

We should be better than this.

Thank you for your attention,
Walter Kaplan

REFERENDUM AS THE ULTIMATE VOICE OF THE MEMBERSHIP?

To the Editor:

It seems reasonable that a vote impacting members incapable of attending General Meetings (GMs) must happen in a way that allows for the votes by those otherwise excluded. Increasing the capacity of an in-person venue by fourfold only responds to one of the myriad factors that prohibit the membership-at-large from deeply participating in the cooperation of this organization. Allocating a new space for only ~6% of membership remains imperfect to survey, respect and understand the thousands of voices that cannot reach our community as easily. Yet we promise each other equal voting rights in principle.

As a data guy, I wrestle with the fact that science can theorize using small samples, but this runs counter to ICA's Statement on the Cooperative Identity (1995) which defines equal voting rights as "one member, one vote." More to the point, why is this clause truncated from the ICA's Cooperative Principles as they appear in the About section on foodcoop.com—who removed it from our website? Honoring that our Coop has a unique governance structure, as a member of the Board of Directors I acknowledge that I require the advice of every member willing to vote in favor of or against innovating the meeting structure in a way that impacts our governance structure. I recognize it is inappropriate to vote on this topic at a Board meeting without first welcoming the voice of every member. Sample size of N , in this case, will not suffice.

In a way, it's ironic the scheduled vote, of which the membership was notified, did not happen at the April 2025 GM. Although I have studied the advice of hundreds of members via email, dozens of articles in the *Gazette*, and in discussion and Open Forum at many GMs, only a referendum will provide each member one vote.

Sincerely,

Tim Hospodar, Member of the Board of Directors who accepted the advice of the members present on April 29 to commence the Board meeting without further discussion in an expedited effort to solve this conundrum

DON'T MOURN—ORGANIZE!

Fellow Members,

I grew up knowing the deep and lasting harm of political and identity smear lists. My father was jailed in the US for labor organizing, then captured and locked in solitary confinement in Spain, for fighting Franco. In a deal to gain his freedom, he was forced to silence his political voice.

On a list of Jewish teachers, my mother faced a quota system that prevented her from working in her own town. Her brother was similarly denied access to engineering school.

Fast forward to 2025: the US is again collecting names, lists, and punishing speech. Here at our Coop, General Coordinators—people we pay to lead—are using labels like PMP* to marginalize anyone who speaks in favor of hybrid meetings, condemns genocide or advocates boycotting products from an apartheid state. They publish names of Board candidates to vote for (or not), based on the spurious assumption that members who voice ethical objections to crimes against humanity are “ideologically driven” and therefore unconcerned with the good of the Coop.

In GM comments and Coordinators’ Corner editorials, GCs are creating a narrative in which anyone who advocates for a system that allows more than 250 of us at a time to participate in governance—or condemns forced starvation—is somehow less a Coop member than those who work to avoid a vote on hybrid meetings, block discus-

sion of a boycott or remain silent.

All member-owners have the right to equitable treatment by the GCs. All member-owners deserve respect and a system of governance that enables their ideas and proposals to reach the wider Coop membership for discussions and votes. All member-owners have the right to share individual thoughts and to gather in groups to express support for their ideas. Organizing in this way should not put anyone in the GCs' crosshairs.

*In their May 13 Coordinators' Corner column, General Coordinators used the acronym PMP in referring to Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine

In Cooperation,
Alyce Barr

GCS DON'T APPEAR TO WANT THE MOST QUALIFIED CANDIDATES FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear Fellow Members:

In reading statements from the candidates for our upcoming Board election, I was favorably struck by the following:

Taylor Pate joined the Central Brooklyn Food Coop because she "was interested in organizing with other black folks and creating a grocery store that was built for those that have historically lacked access to fresh food in Central Brooklyn.... With inequality and lack of access to quality food in NYC," Taylor believes "it's crucial to keep the Coop affordable, and for members to have access to information about the food supply chains that impact the food that we buy."

Dan Kaminsky has “worked on campaigns, in nonprofits and in the office of a state senator” and in addition serves on Community Board 7. Cooperatives have been a central part of Dan’s adult life, including “a cooperative tour company called Social Justice Tours and... Bluestockings, a collectively run bookstore in the Lower East Side.” Dan participated in a cooperative bike messenger company and in housing cooperatives throughout Brooklyn.

In my eyes, these statements reflect cooperative values, period. Yet in the latest post from the General Coordinators, I read that these people represent “ideologically--driven member groups” that they are hell bent on advancing one issue, that they couldn’t give a hoot about the overall welfare of the Coop. It’s as if we were talking about members of some fringe sectarian political group—you know, the kind you see at rallies handing out newspapers dripping with rhetoric that reflects their current party line. What does this caricature have to do with a food justice advocate or a Community Board member?

Let’s maybe set aside the GCs’ (very self-interested—they are afraid they won’t get to run the whole show anymore) scare-mongering and evaluate the candidates on the merits?

In cooperation,
Annabel Bruno

COOP LEADERS SHOULD HELP, NOT HINDER, OUR DEMOCRACY!

Dear fellow Coop members:

After reading publications in the *Gazette* casting unfair suspicions on my board candidacy, I’d like to share my response with the membership.

I've valued creating friendships, building relationships with staff and being part of a Coop that aligns with my values, in particular to support an alternative to grocery corporations, encourage democratic decision making and have access to high quality and affordable food. This is an inherently political act. Some of the first cooperatives in this country were instrumental in the Civil Rights movement and the end of slavery. Cooperatives are political institutions by design.

I'm running for the board because I believe in coops as ways to build economic power, create community and effect change. I'm highly qualified to act as a board member to serve the will of the membership, as you can see in my board candidacy statement.

Members have exercised their democratic power, for example, by voting to ban Chilean grapes during the Pinochet regime. I'm proud to echo the thousands of members calling for a ban of products from Israel, a country that is perpetuating a genocide.

I've been devastated by the efforts of a few members to ostracize and harass those who wish to exercise their member power by putting a boycott to a vote. I've received unwelcome emails and threats, and have been publicly doxxed. It's disappointing that GCs have used bureaucracy to hamper members exercising their democratic rights.

All members, including myself, should feel safe in exercising their rights. If certain members—supported by the GCs—continue to suppress efforts to allow membership to vote for hybrid meetings and any form of a boycott, this sets a dangerous precedent by obstructing the will of members to take part in democratic decisions about an organization in which we're all deeply invested.

In solidarity,
Taylor Pate

THE APRIL GM WAS A SUCCESS FOR DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP

Greetings:

I attended the April 29 Coop general meeting. I did not know what to expect after the cancellation of the City Tech venue and the agenda committee decided to strike the hybrid meeting vote from the agenda. Along with the majority of the people in the room, I was outraged that an outside group, with the support of a pro-Israel minority in the Coop, are strong arming the Coop from exercising the right to vote.

The Board's vote to issue a referendum reflected members' will and it was only enabled by active participation in the April's General Meeting. The membership is fed up with 17 months of delays on this important issue. Hopefully, the General Coordinators, the Agenda Committee and Joe Holtz will not drag their feet or, worse, overturn the decision to have a direct mail-in vote on a hybrid vote meeting. Let us sustain the Coop's tradition of membership democracy by facilitating, instead of resisting, a membership vote on the right to boycott Israeli or foreign companies that profit out of Palestinian oppression.

Sincerely,
David Diaz

IS THIS WHAT "DEMOCRACY" LOOKS LIKE?

Dear Coop members:

My partner and I hired a babysitter at \$25/hour for four hours to attend the GM on

4/29/25. Usually, one of us stays with the kids when attending meetings and working shifts because we can't afford childcare otherwise. One must give up our right to vote so the other can attend, since proxy voting isn't allowed. We both planned to vote for hybrid so both of us could finally vote and not waste \$100 on childcare. Since City Tech was forced to cancel, we attended the meeting anyway. Here are my experiences:

- I approached the chair committee to request that the proposed motion to adjourn the GM be rephrased in accessible terms because it was very confusing for many members. The chair responded very condescendingly. He should have known to present the vote in a neutral way.
- The chair and staff weren't honest that City Tech was sabotaged by "End Jew Hatred."
- A group of people in the rear alcove loudly heckled speakers. No one silenced them. An older white woman from that group approached a Black mother to ask her to quiet her toddler's laughter. I called her out on her racism since she never once told her white friends to quiet their shouting, which was far louder and angrier.

As a Black woman and a mom, I felt unwelcome and unsafe and left the GM in tears. I have no time for haters. I'll only attend future GMs when they're hybrid. At least the Board agreed to a referendum so we can finally vote on hybrid. But why do we even need to vote? Why can't all GMs be hybrid so that we can all vote? The Coop should be an example of what democracy can look like, not emulate our dysfunctional two-party political system.

Sincerely,
LaShaun Ellis

SOME QUESTIONS FOR PSFCM4P

Dear Coop members: Explain to me how it works, Part 1

Members 4 Palestine wants the Coop membership to join the BDS movement. I've tried communicating with M4P about how the BDS agenda will bring about resolution to the "Israel-Palestine conflict" but the BDS belief system seems to prohibit dialogue with anyone who asks questions.

Here are some questions I'd like to discuss with M4P concerning the three main BDS demands:

1. Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands

Focusing only on the West Bank:

Does BDS expect that Hamas will take control when the Israeli military leaves?

What will happen to the Palestinian Authority?

What is necessary to prevent a State of Palestine in the West Bank from destabilizing Jordan?

2. Full equality for the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel

What categories of inequality need to be addressed?

Does BDS support organizations that are fighting discrimination in Israel?

Does BDS propose reform legislation?

3. Right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.

What's the number of people who want to return?

If Israeli law does not provide a procedure for transferring property title from current owners to returners, does BDS propose legislation?

What if property was in a town that was razed and is now under a national forest or a new neighborhood?

How long will this process take and who will pay for it?

Some general questions:

If you support a secular democratic State of Palestine, do you repudiate Hamas?

What kind of Israeli coalition government could implement the BDS agenda?

I've seen no indication that the BDS movement offers serious policy proposals.

I've seen no indication that anyone in M4P has thought through how the demands they want the Coop to adopt can be met. Maybe that's why they refuse dialogue.

*Sincerely,
Noah Potter*

HELP FEED PEOPLE IN GAZA

Dear Coop Members,

If you are Jewish and are at all bothered by the atrocities Israel is committing against the people of Gaza, you might want to sign this statement by Jews for Food Aid for People in Gaza:

It's obviously no substitute for the long-obstructed vote for BDS at the Coop, but it is a little something.

Thanks,
Robert Rosen

LET US VOTE!

To the Editor,

Let us vote!

I want to thank the Board of Directors for voting to issue a referendum on hybrid General Meetings. It should never have taken this long. Member-owners shouldn't have to fight this hard just to participate in our Coop democracy.

Which begs the question: When did voting become so controversial at the Coop?

This April, after an outside harassment campaign targeted (and thereby canceled) the venue secured for the hybrid GM vote, Coop leadership moved the meeting to a smaller space and quietly removed the hybrid GM vote from the agenda. This vote had been secured for this GM after more than 15 months of member democratic efforts. At the meeting, there was no explanation, no accountability and no mention of the disruption or the agenda change in the General Coordinators' report. Again, where is the accountability for our member democracy?

If we want accountability and a stronger Coop democracy, then we need better visibility of member voices. One way to do this is by restoring the Coop Bulletin Board—a physical space where members could share ideas, stay informed and engage. That board was essential for transparency and connection.

Since its removal during COVID, we've been pushed into isolated conversations—just those on our shifts or whoever we happen to bump into in the aisles. That's not a community—that's a silence. And with that comes apathy, confusion and a loss of accountability.

We need hybrid meetings. We need a bulletin board. And we need leadership that represents, not overrides, member voices.

Vote YES on the referendum. This is about access, accountability and whether we still have a member democracy.

*In cooperation,
Rosa Palermo*

THE COOP'S TEN COMMANDMENTS (A.K.A BYLAWS)

June 24, 2025



By Anita Bushell

September 4, 2024

In the 26 years I've been a member of the Coop, here's something I'd never stopped to do: sit down and read the bylaws.

Last spring I was covering a General Meeting for the *Gazette*, and the bylaws came up. Apparently, they said that the Board of Directors of the Coop had to meet once a month. I wondered what else it stipulated. So I decided to get my hands on a copy of the bylaws, and find out what else they said. These regulations dictate the way the Coop is run. Embedded in the articles were answers to some of my greatest Coop-related questions. (PSFC bylaws can be read [here](#), on the Coop's website.)

I've often heard Coop members refer to the Coop as a “grocery store.” Is that accurate, though?

No. At a grocery store, one simply trades money in exchange for groceries. At the Coop, one becomes a member, makes a monetary deposit and investment and agrees to trade labor for the ability to shop for groceries. (See Article One)

Am I truly a “member/owner”?

Yes. Article Two states that the terms “member” and “owner” are interchangeable and mean the same thing. (See Article Two)

Does The Coop have a Board of Directors?

Yes. The Coop has a Board of Directors, consisting of five members. They are elected by the members of the Coop at the Annual Meeting in June. (See Article Three)

Does the Coop have Officers?

Yes. The Coop has a President, Vice-President, Secretary and a Treasurer. (See Article Four)

Does the Coop have paid employees?

Yes. The Coop employs paid staff members who belong to one of two tiers. General Coordinators are responsible for overall management of the Coop, and Area Coordinators supervise Receiving, Membership, Bookkeeping and Information Technology. (See Article Five. This information is also found in Section Eight of the Membership Manual.)

Does the Board of Directors meet regularly?

Yes. The board of directors convenes at least ten times annually. (See Article Six)

Are board of directors elected and if so, when?

Board of directors elections take place at the Annual Meeting in June. An election can be held at a monthly meeting if a position becomes vacant before term's end. (See Article Seven)

Are officers elected and if so, when?

Elections for officers take place at the GM in June, which includes the board of directors elections. (See Article Eight)

Are the board of directors in charge of how the Coop is run?

Yes. The board of directors is ultimately responsible for the operation and administration of the Coop. (See Article Nine)

Can the bylaws be amended?

The bylaws may be amended (in whole or in part) so long as they receive approval of two thirds of Coop board members and two thirds of members at the GM. Written notice must circulate before such a meeting takes place. (See Article Ten)

I'm really glad I read the bylaws. It didn't take much time—after all, there are only ten of them—and it gave me a sense of history, context and a much better understanding of this amazing organization that I've been a member of for 26 years.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer whose work has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and

Homelessness. *Her latest book is* Object Essays.