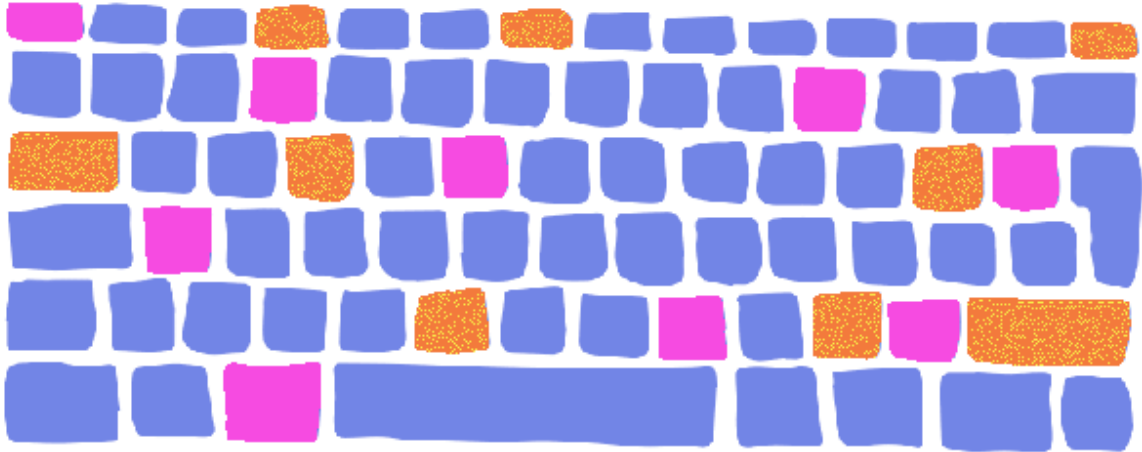


APRIL 9, 2024

April 9, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



PROVENANCE PLEASE FOR ALL COOP PRODUCTS

Dear Fellow Members:

Can we add country of origin as dedicated information on shelf labels? On housewares, on dry goods—the Coop is about educated choices. I know we make a sign when we're proud of something, usually involving fair trade, but I would appreciate this information for all items, especially as the tech team programs labels like we now have in produce.

Thank you,
Lisa Guido

REFINING MEMBER USE OF THE PAGING SYSTEM

Dear Fellow Members:

While many of the initiatives to improve the Coop's sonic experience, from a "Shift DJ" discussion item at a GM a few months ago to a PSFC Spotify channel, are music-oriented, there is one simple thing that every member who is able can do to go easier on the ears of your fellow shoppers and workers.

Our awesome paging system enables anyone using it to be heard using our "inside voices," but there is an enormous difference between ending a page with a finger and the amplified collision of plastic that blasts everyone at the Coop when a page is ended by hanging up the phone.

For many, this is one more piece of noise pollution, like sirens and hydraulic bus brakes, that we simply tune out. But for others, it is an unnecessary aural assault that can be avoided with a small amount of mindfulness.

Please. If you use the paging system and you are able, use your finger to hang up the quiet way.

Thanks,
Brian Shuman

WHAT'S THE PLAN FOR WORKING PARENTS?

Dear Editor:

Two years ago, the world—and our member work requirements—asked us to return to a version of the “way it was.” A single mother of two—as hardcore a Food Coop member as you can get—told me she was leaving.

“What am I supposed to do?” she said.

Many families feel abandoned by the new policies of the Coop. With work, school, meals and bedtime, they find it increasingly difficult with the online platform to even schedule a shift, let alone worry about who'll care for their children while they do it. This leads to an increased work debt many are reminded of every time they need to buy food for their families.

“Why must I ask permission to shop at a store I've been a member of for over 10 years for having a lapsing grace period after being suspended for not doing shifts that are impossible to schedule?” is a sentiment I've heard more than once.

In the past few years, I've spent a lot of my (limited) free time and energy working to bring back childcare, and when we voted as a community, the item overwhelmingly passed. Then we hit a hiccup: our childcare insurance policy is impossible to renew.

So, what now? We've already lost many families, and we continue to fail to serve young families who are members, especially those in single parent households. The end of childcare should not mean the end of support for working member families.

As we move into the next 50 years of cooperation, we need to ask ourselves how will equity, in addition to cost efficiency and convenience, shape our idea of membership and work requirements? How can we make it easier for families with young children to complete their required shifts?

Lauren Belski

HUMAN-SIZED PORTIONS, PLEASE

Dear Gazette:

Buying four bags of smoked paprika, three bags of peppercorns, five bags of parsley and so on, I would suggest a larger serving size in our member packed goods. If we could have a number of larger sizes of bags so I don't clear out the tamari roasted pepitas and smoked paprika in one run, I'd feel less guilty and I think many members with larger households would be happier, plus fewer wasted bags.

Here's my Coop spiced pasta recipe for a quick easy meal (feeds four):

Ingredients:

2-3 tbs of parsley

2-3 tbs of oregano

3-4 tbs of garlic

1-2 tsp of Aleppo pepper

Salt to taste

Freshly ground pepper to taste

½ cup of olive oil or whatever else you like

1 lb of pasta (I prefer Molisana brand but whatever works, gluten free can be fine too)

Optional: Fresh grated Parmesan or Romano cheese

Steps:

Boil 7 cups/1.7 liters of water in electric kettle and transfer to pot or boil on stove.

Pour pasta in water and give an initial stir, cover and bring to boil, drop to lowest flame that keeps it boiling, maybe smallest burner. Stir every couple of minutes so it doesn't get stuck together.

When the pasta reaches correct tenderness (which is usually indicated via the time shown on the pasta package), drain water over another vessel to save some pasta water.

Dump pasta in a big bowl, pour olive oil over it and add in $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the pasta water.

Pour all the spices in and stir for a bit till everything is coated with oil and spices.

Serve into bowls and add black pepper, salt and/or cheese as needed.

Enjoy,

Mark Paperno

NATIONAL GRID? HA! NATIONAL GREED'S MORE LIKE IT.

To the Editor:

A Coop member since the 1980s, I raised my family in the neighborhood, and one of the changes I've become keenly aware of is the skyrocketing cost of utilities. Their rates are putting New Yorkers in debt; the greed of National Grid hurts us all. It makes exorbitant profits off captive ratepayers while poisoning those who live in their shad-

ow with their product, a potent greenhouse gas.

It's unconscionable that utilities across the country are building infrastructure we don't need, don't want and can't afford at a time when the city and state of New York are passing legislation that will wean us off this high-emissions fossil fuel completely by 2050, a few decades into the future.

We must do this to have a livable planet. Yet, seeing the end of business as usual, National Grid is milking the system as fast as it can, expanding pipes and infrastructure because that's where their profits lie. Money pours into the purses of executives and investors while the public struggles to pay bills. And methane, the main component of "natural" gas, is 86 times the heat-trapping gas as carbon dioxide, when measured over a 20-year period. We now experience unhealthy emissions in the air and from our stoves and pay exorbitant fees at the same time—all of which is contrary to the spirit that we stand for.

But we can do something.

While our Coop was established to provide healthy food at affordable prices, it's up to us to stand up to National Greed and oppose their latest rate hike proposal, which translates to over \$30/month more per household or a total of \$3.8 billion. To make your voice count, call your legislators and Governor Hochul, and demand they pass the NY HEAT Act, S2016, which would limit utility bills for low- and moderate-income ratepayers to six percent of income.

JK Canepa

A NOVEL IDEA: BOYCOTTS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Fellow Coop members,

Why spend the time, money, and emotional energy on renting out a large space, hiring security, and debating a contentious issue endlessly when there is another possibility?

The people in favor of boycotting Israel would like to see their beliefs and shopping decisions forced on others. As a democratic institution, why are we looking for imposed mandates as solutions to divisive product issues when we have individual shopper decisions as a freer, more representative alternative?

I propose a novel idea: the individual boycott. What could be more democratic than each shopper making their own purchasing decisions based on their unique backgrounds and political persuasions? Products under minimal turnover thresholds due to these individual boycott decisions could then be removed from shelves.

Let's allow members to "vote" through their purchases, and we can avoid this whole *balagan* (commotion). How many of us really want to ruin an evening of our lives debating the conflict in the Middle East? Believe me, faster than you can say *gefilte*, I'll be the first to schlep my tuchus to whichever hapless venue the Coop finds to host a vote on the topic. But do I want to do that when I could be sitting on my couch munching on Bamba? Not really.

Do you want to single out the only Jewish state because you believe it to be the world's greatest evil as it fights a defensive war to return its hostages from a barbaric terrorist organization? Be my guest! YOU do not need to buy products from Israel.

I, for one, will proudly continue to stock my cart with Sabra hummus until the end of my days. Please, let's stop with this bupkis and focus on what unites our community instead.

Jonathan Aranov

POLITICS ARE PERSONAL

To the Editor,

I am dismayed to learn that the Coop and the *Gazette* are once again putting politics before the cooperation and respect that the Coop has embraced since its founding.

I have been a member for over 20 years, and it was this feeling of community, combined with the quality of food and respect for farmers and the environment that has made me proud.

I am a Jew who strongly supports the Palestinian cause. I show my support in many ways—personal ways. I don't need the Coop to tell me what products to buy or what products to boycott. I urge the Coop to permanently table this discussion. Sadly, if this political battle is allowed to rage at meetings and in the *Gazette*, or worse, if the Coop begins banning products based on political considerations, I will have to resign my membership.

In cooperation,

Helene Davis

BDS AND THE INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION

Dear Coop Members,

While I disagree with many points in Joe Holtz's recent Coordinator's Corner column, this letter addresses only his unsupported claim that the Coop can best "welcome"

members by avoiding a vote on boycotting Israeli products. How can anyone anguished over Israel's genocide in Gaza (including, by the way, Palestinian members) feel welcomed by Joe's preferred approach?

Writing "on behalf of the General Coordinators," Joe insists that a BDS boycott would transgress the International Principles of Cooperation. He paraphrases the first IPC principle as "essentially stat[ing] that coops welcome people" from divergent backgrounds. The actual language is: "Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination." Joe relies on the slippery word "welcome," used in the sense of "make comfortable." But being free from discrimination has nothing to do with being sheltered from controversy. If a boycott is enacted, the Coop will remain just as open to members who dislike that provision as it currently is to BDS advocates. A healthy cooperative must be resilient enough to accommodate serious disagreements, using democratic methods to decide a course of action.

Broadly hinting at the GCs' distaste for those methods, Joe writes: "Regardless of [a potential] vote's outcome, thousands of members could feel unsupported by their Coop and may choose to withdraw their membership." These are scare tactics, given that a tiny, vocal group of people desperate to shield Israel from legitimate criticism appears to constitute the "anti" side of the debate. Joe correctly notes that "The GCs... are obligated to support the Coop's democratic processes." I urge them to take their thumbs off the scale as we address this vital matter.

Jan Clausen

BOYCOTTING A BOYCOTT

Dear Editors:

Letters, opinions related to the Hamas war are wholly inappropriate and must be rejected.

Letters, opinions related to Hamas's terrorism and war are wholly inappropriate and must be rejected.

Boycotts, especially those against those that FIGHT anti-American, anti-Western Jihadi terrorism have NO PLACE in Park Slope.

We've had ENOUGH division and polarization in America, in American Politics, in Park Slope, and in the COOP.

THANK YOU FOR REJECTING any such offensive and objectionable initiatives.

J. Anthony Levy

INCLUDE MEMBER INPUT IN LETTERS POLICY CHANGES

To the Editors:

As a group of proud Jews particularly affected by *Gazette* standards, we feel that your Letters policy changes required input from us. We needed to be consulted on your new standards for Letters to the Editor and Member Contributions so that the new standards would allow all members to see in print that we feel welcome at our own Coop.

You made clear with your suspension of letters that content in letters and contributions are a very real problem to be considered, and we agree one hundred percent. A

respectful dialogue between the Gazette editors and our group in the same room would have been productive.

Instead, the Editors took about a week, seemingly without consulting anyone but themselves.

That Israel is criticized is not the issue. Israel is subject to more legitimate criticism by Israelis than anyone else. Yet we read a great deal of illegitimate criticism in the Gazette, and our harsh and deadly history shows us the veiled anti-Semitism underneath. Some of it is not veiled at all, just taking new forms that may be unrecognized for now by others. Our group cannot know what is legitimately offensive to other Jews and other groups of people in general until we are told. And others cannot know what is legitimately offensive to us unless they are told. More dialogue, not less, can bridge this gap in understanding.

The only litmus test in this regard for submissions to the Gazette is whether a Coop member feels unsafe and/or unwelcome in the Coop. This group of proud Jews have collectively felt both since October 7th of 2023.

Jesse Rosenfeld (+150 signatories)

Editor's response:

The change in policy regarding letters was further amended in early March. Letters and member contributions concerning the ongoing violence in the Middle East and its potential impact on the Coop are no longer restricted.

A RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF OVERREACH

Dear Members,

I would like to respond to Kristian Nammack's February 28 letter on the subject of the vote to dissolve the Committee Oversight Committee (COC).

Mr. Nammack charges that the vote was based on "untruths." Having witnessed the formation and actions of the COC as a member of the Agenda Committee until October of 2023, I would like to address the alleged "falsehoods."

Firstly, he asserts that the COC "never attempted to arbitrate committee disputes—that is the job of the Dispute Resolution Committee." That is incorrect; the DRC concerns itself with the actions of individuals, not committees. The COC's own previous description of its mission on the Coop website declared it would serve as "a liaison between committees, members and staff," suggesting that the COC would indeed try to mediate between various groups.

Secondly, he says that the COC never claimed that it would reduce the staff's workload. This was a part of the original proposal passed at the January 2022 GM: "Importantly, the proposal is intended to increase the ability of committees to reduce staff work."

Thirdly, the COC did attempt to take on work credit management. In response to the Structure and Reporting Requirements for New Coop Committees at the April 2022 GM, the COC again declared its mission: "Supervise all committee reports and requirements including scheduling updates and tracking work credits." Left unaddressed and unresolved was that the Coop already had systems in place for reporting all work credit. Even so, further encroachments upon staff time and member privacy occurred when the COC took it upon itself to try to inspect the past work records of thousands of members, not just those on Initiative committees. The purpose of these investigations was unclear, but the inappropriateness of this endeavor, the lack of any mandate and the enormous demands on the staff were suggested at the GM.

Mr. Nammack ignores why the resolution to disband the COC passed by a near 3 to 1 margin. As staff member Jana Cunningham's presentation made clear, the COC failed

to perform its mission to have committee members of both Essential and Initiative committees report to the Gazette, GM, and website their information and activities. Instead, the COC took upon the task of forming a complaint desk and investigating the decisions made by Essential committees. There was no language anywhere in the final item approved by the GM to authorize these activities. It was only after the October 2023 GM that the COC removed from the Coop website its self-declared mission to “investigate committee activities as requested.” The COC’s staff liaison, Joe Holtz, has never explained why this language appeared on the website in the first place or why it was promptly removed after Ms. Cunningham called our attention to it at the October GM. Notably, he didn’t defend the COC’s activities at either GM where the fate of the committee was being determined.

As was her prerogative, Ms. Cunningham took the feedback she received at the October GM and modified her item to specify for a full dissolution of the Committee Oversight Committee. Surely, the January GM and Mr. Nammack’s letter make clear that, given the COC’s gross overstepping of its stated purpose, she was right to do so. Casting doubts on a longtime and highly respected staff member who went far beyond the call of duty to do what she felt was right for the Coop, Mr. Nammack has provided only further justification for disbanding the Committee Oversight Committee.

In cooperation,
Cynthia Payne

JANUARY GM: MEMBERS VOTE TO RAISE THE WORK REQUIREMENT AGE TO 22

April 9, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

By Walecia Konrad

There was a lot of voting going on at the January Park Slope Food Coop General Meeting, held in person at the Picnic House in Prospect Park. Members voted to raise the work requirement age from 18 to 22, giving PSFC households with college students much sought-after clarity on how young adults should be represented.

In another vote, members voted yes to disband the Committee Oversight Committee,

a member committee designed to make sure other committees were meeting their work slot and reporting requirements. Going forward, Coop staff will provide that oversight.

OPEN FORUM

Before the votes, the meeting kicked off with the Open Forum, a time reserved for members to ask questions or bring up concerns not included in the meeting's agenda. During this time, a group from the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine took turns voicing their concerns about the war in Gaza and asking Coop staffers to consider an online meeting to discuss a boycott of Israeli goods. This issue has come up during Open Forum in several recent GMs.

The speakers pointed out that more than 1,000 members had signed a petition in support of a boycott. Many asked for a status update on the General Coordinators' efforts to find a venue to discuss the matter that is large enough to accommodate the anticipated number of members expected to attend. Others reiterated their request to have an online meeting for discussion and voting, adding that the emergency in Gaza required this approach.

One Coop member for Palestine asked about fact-checking at the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, pointing to a recent letter that claimed—erroneously according to the speaker—that the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement promotes violence. Later, the letter's author, Jesse Rosenfeld, defended his submission, saying the included links proved his assertion.

AT THE MOST RECENT GENERAL MEETING, MEMBERS VOTED TO SAY GOODBYE TO THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

THE GENERAL COORDINATORS' RESPONSE

General Coordinator Joe Holtz then took the mic for the Treasurer's report but began by answering some of the questions from the Open Forum.

Holtz said the General Coordinators were looking to rent a space large enough to accommodate a BDS discussion, which would likely include 2,500 members. So far coordinators have been turned down by places like the King's Theater, BAM, and many Brooklyn schools, Holtz said. In addition, Holtz reminded members that the Coop held a meeting at Brooklyn Tech High School in 2012 to discuss the referendum to join BDS, and voted no. At the end of the meeting, police asked Coop staff to inform them if the Coop ever had a meeting like that again, he said. Holtz also said that the police told the Coop to hire private security and that Brooklyn Tech said we should have alerted them in advance as to what we would be discussing.

Because of that 2012 event and the limited space, the coordinators took an "extraordinary action" shortly before the November General Meeting and removed the boycott discussion item from the meeting's agenda, Holtz said.

He added that in-person general meetings are mandated by the Coop's bylaws, which require the Board to meet in person at a time that members are invited to join them. As a result, having a Zoom meeting to discuss the boycott issue couldn't happen without a change in the bylaws.

During COVID, GMs were held on Zoom because of the emergency nature of the pandemic and the fact that public spaces were locked down. "We had guidance and rules on that from three governments," Holtz said.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

COOP FINANCES

Holtz then moved to the Treasurer's report. The Coop's finances continue to recover nicely after the pandemic. Sales for the 48-week period ending Dec. 31, 2023 were \$50,533,000—a \$6.5 million increase from the same period last year. The Coop reported \$181,201 in operating income, a significant increase from the slightly more than \$266,000 loss reported last year. Holtz also reported that the Coop lowered its markup from 25% to 24% in late January, which was ahead of schedule.

Holtz also pointed out that the Coop's gross margin increased to 19.75% from 19.5%. The increase is great news, Holtz explained, because gross margin is crucial for the Coop's financial sustainability. He encouraged members to consult page two of the Jan. 30, 2024 financial summary for a detailed explanation of gross margin and its im-

portance to the Coop.

During the question and answer period after the Treasurer's report, a member asked if it would be possible to access current and past financial reports and GM agendas on the website. Holtz answered that he would discuss this with the other coordinators and look into this good suggestion.

CHILDCARE UPDATE

Next, General Coordinator Lisa Moore updated members on the Coop's longstanding attempts to bring back childcare after last year's vote to restart the service. Coordinators have not been able to find an insurer that will cover childcare at the Coop because it is not a licensed New York State childcare facility. Licensing requirements are quite stringent and the Coop's childcare room does not meet requirements.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

After many frustrating attempts to find an insurer that will cover a non-licensed facility, Moore reported that the coordinators recently got a bid from an insurance company for \$3 million per year, nine times the \$335,000 the Coop is paying for business insurance now. Since then, the coordinators approached three insurance brokers look-

ing for help. One said no, another didn't reply and the third said they are working on it. Moore said she is hoping to hear more from that broker soon.

COOKING CLASSES ARE IN FULL SWING—BUT STILL ON ZOOM

Jeff Bonar of the Food Coop Cooking Class squad reported that the committee has conducted six online cooking classes in the last six months. The next one, featuring “Personalized Chili” will be held on February 22. Bonar also announced that the committee is looking for guest chefs to lead future classes in return for work slot credit. For more information on guest chefs, future classes and links to past recipes, Bonar encouraged members to check out foodcoopcooks.org. He also said the committee is looking forward to holding classes in person soon.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

DOES THE PSFC NEED A COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE COMMITTEES?

Coordinator Jana Cunningham presented the first agenda item up for a membership vote: her proposal to disband the Committee Oversight Committee (COC). As the proposal describes, the COC was started almost two years ago to reduce Coop staff time

spent overseeing member committees, to make sure committees post their mission statements on the Coop's website and to assist committees with reporting requirements and tracking work slot credit.

Cunningham explained that the COC oversees member-originated "initiative" committees, such as the Environmental or Food Safety committees, and not the operational or essential committees that make up the vast majority of work slots at the Coop. Only 80 members are part of an initiative Coop committee.

The COC is not meeting its objectives, Cunningham said, using a report card to make her point. While the COC has ensured that about 60% of committee mission statements are posted, in 2023 very few committees met the requirements to report to a General Meeting once a year (10%) or publish submissions in the Linewaiters' Gazette twice a year (1%), Cunningham reported. She also said that the Committee has not been effective in tracking work slots and thus was not saving staff time. As a result, Cunningham asked members to vote to disband the committee.

During the discussion period, the chairman of the COC vigorously defended the existence of the committee and expressed his surprise that the committee was "on the chopping block." There was also some discussion that disbanding the committee, which was started by longtime and extremely active member Rachel Porter, who has since passed away, would hurt her legacy at the Coop.

The vote was taken and the proposal passed 84 in favor, 34 against.

A NEW MINIMUM AGE FOR COOP MEMBERSHIP

Holtz presented the final agenda item—a proposal to amend the age for working at the Coop, which would help clarify the definition of a Coop household. Holtz explained that after hearing from many members that the current household requirement for 18-year-olds to join the Coop could be confusing and cumbersome for families with college-age children who were living away from home, the general coordinators decid-

ed to propose some changes.

Holtz proposed defining an adult person as someone who has reached the age of 21, and that all adults in a household are required to join the Coop and fulfill membership requirements. In addition, any person between the ages of 18 and 21 who wants to join the Coop will be allowed to become a full Coop member, but they will be exempt from the work requirement.

Holtz explained that the work exemption would apply to all 18-to-21-year-olds, even if they were a household of young people who were, for example, working or attending Brooklyn College and wanting to join the Coop. "We wouldn't make some 18-year-olds work just because they're not living with their parents. That wouldn't be fair," said Holtz.

During the discussion period, several members took exception to the work exemption for all 18-to-21-year-olds, arguing that if someone lives in the community and is a Coop member, it isn't an unfair burden for them to work.

One member pointed out that many 21-year-olds are still in college, so 22 might be a better age for the upper limit. Holtz agreed and changed the proposal to age 22.

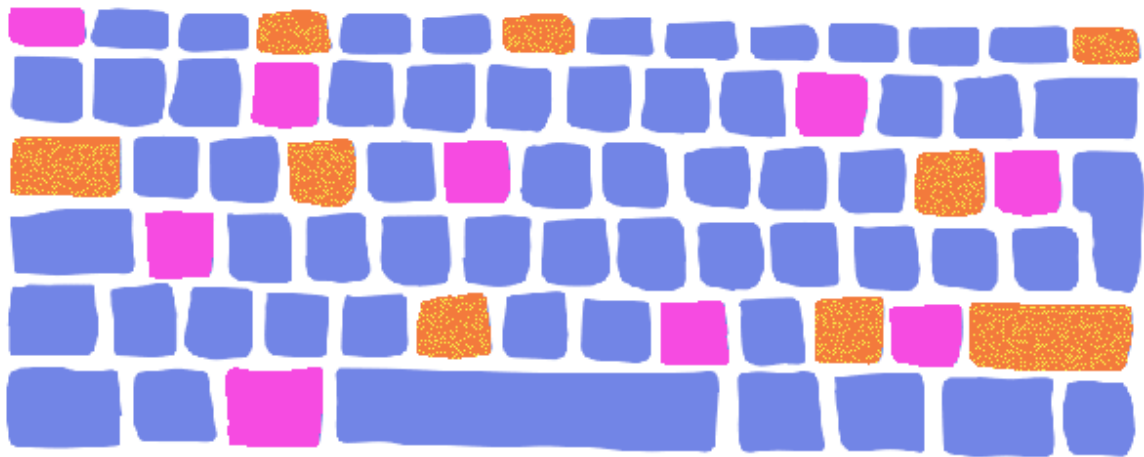
Members voted to amend the age to join the Coop from 18 to 22, with 69 in favor and 50 opposed.

The Board of Directors then voted to accept the advice of members and the meeting was adjourned.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

April 9, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Editors' Note: The *Gazette* is pausing the publication of all member letters and member articles related to the war in the Middle East while we revise our submissions policy.

LINEWAITERS' GA-ZINE?

Dear Linewaiters' Gazette,

At the November GM a member asked about the *Gazette* being brought back to a print edition, and the question has stuck with me. The transition to a digital *Gazette* has clearly had many advantages (some of which were covered in detail in an article May 2022), however I agree that something tangible may have also been lost in this move.

The appeal of spontaneously collecting a physical edition while shopping is tempting, and some other recent new publications—such as the *New York Review of Architecture*—have triumphed in their role as primarily physical things, to be folded into pockets or left on tables, and which are full of idiosyncratic sketches and graphics. Even the simple ability for editions of the *Gazette* to be continuously archived at the Brooklyn Public Library to expand on their current collection could be of value.

I understand that the cost and time of producing a traditional print edition in parallel to the digital version might be challenging. However, while walking around Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines at the Brooklyn Museum this week, it occurred to me that the *Gazette* could learn from the scrappy, improvised and imperfect world of zines. I propose that, for each digital release, someone takes a turn to print out the new articles, letters and graphics, and paste them into a haphazard zine master copy layout. We could photocopy a dozen and leave them by the entrance, and if the stack runs low, we could just photocopy some more! Each edition could be unique and represent the graphic whims of whoever was responsible for the cut and paste job, and each edition would be photocopied to demand—low cost recycled paper, and tailored to how many copies are needed.

Zine-cerely,

Dan Bergsagel

DISBANDING THE COC TONIGHT AT THE GM—AN EXAMPLE OF STAFF OVERREACH AND POOR GOVERNANCE FOR A COOP

To the editors:

I just returned from the January GM a few minutes ago and, as one of the four members of the COC, which was disbanded tonight, I am both a bit relieved yet quite disappointed. Relieved to no longer be in a crossfire of an unwillingness to collaborate and illuminate; disappointed at a very poorly run process.

The agenda items (Oct. and last night) were mostly based on untruths, namely:

- We never attempted to arbitrate committee disputes—that is the job of the Dispute Resolution Committee.
- We never claimed we would reduce staff workload. Not sure where this idea came from.
- We never tried to take on work credit management. That is done by Staff.

After that October discussion—where the COC leader Brian responded to clear up some “misunderstandings”—i.e. false allegations—we thought everything was amended. Then suddenly in early January we discovered there was an agenda item to disband us. A few of us attempted to reach out to the proposing staff member to discuss but were met with a stone wall. No communication.

Earlier today, I took the time to read the Agenda Committee’s memo “How to Develop an Agenda Item for the General Meeting.” Among the suggestions—not evidenced by this process at all, are:

- Write out your proposal or discussion item and check it for clarity.
- Seek background information.
- Publicize your idea.
- Ask for feedback.

It concerns me that this kind of forceful, top-down behavior is at play at the Coop. It also concerns me that the Agenda Committee did not make any effort to fact check the allegations made about the COC in tonight's agenda item—which was filled with falsehoods.

Just a warning—this is a slippery slope. We are a member-owned coop, and our governance should reflect that.

Kristian Nammack

ACCESS FOR ALL COOP FAMILIES

Dear editors,

I've been a member for 10 years, though I spent many of those away from the borough, and then away from the state. When I rejoined last year, I was so happy to find a vibrant and thriving Coop. I brought with me my now 6-year-old daughter, who fell in love immediately with the place, believes (correctly) that you can find "everything" there, and pesters me daily about when she can work a shift. We are passionate about the Coop in our family! I've begun seeking out ways to get more involved, to both give back to and learn from this community that has fed and nurtured us so well. But for reasons I'm sure a lot of parent-members can relate to, I'm limited by work and family obligations. I'd like to attend the General Meetings, but I simply can't. However, if these meetings shifted to a hybrid model that accommodated virtual atten-

dance, this would help so many who want to participate, but currently are not able — parents, immunocompromised individuals, people who have mobility, health, work, school or any other kind of constraints. I applaud the Coop for recently reinstating masking midweek; it's a powerful way of expressing commitment to and care for each other. The same principle of access and inclusion should be extended to the General Meetings. These, too, should be spaces where all of us feel welcome.

Sincerely,
Genevieve Yue

SOMETHING NEW IS NOT WORKING WELL AT THE PSFC

Dear Coop:

I haven't been able to shop at the Coop for at least the past 30 days, despite having completed four shifts between late September and early January and having two future shifts scheduled. Yes, I had five free passes and they were already used up, because I have a family, and I shop often via bicycle. They did not replenish after the shift I worked in January. Yes, I fell behind in my work shifts. Yes, I have been a member for 30 years but am too young to "retire". Yes, I spoke to Coop staff members about this. I was told that the new system is not going to change because it is working well for the Coop. Attendance for work slots is at an all-time high. Got it. The greater good, for sure. But what about members like me? This is a call to open up a discussion about the need for some leeway, nuance. I kept my money in the Coop during the pandemic when it was struggling and when I had to wait in line for three hours each time that I shopped. Now I need to go to Whole Foods instead of shopping where I have shopped for three decades. There's no good reason that a 30-year member should shop at Whole Foods because of a one-size (doesn't) fit-all policy. I mean, we wear masks two days a week to accommodate certain members. Let's find some crea-

tive solutions regarding suspension rules to fit a few more members' needs.

Rebecca Stronger

THE OCTOBER GM: MASKING AT THE COOP, CHILDCARE AND A LOT MORE

April 9, 2024



By Zach Schiffman

The Coop's October General Meeting was well-attended, with more than 125 members in attendance at the Prospect Park Picnic House, many of them in costume, as it

was Halloween. The bulk of the meeting was spent discussing and voting on a partial return to masking at the Coop. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) was up first.



BOYCOTTING AND DIVESTING

An open forum item was brought forward by floor monitor George Olken about resuming the discussion of a referendum for the Coop to join the BDS movement, which calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel. The resolution failed in 2012 and has not been discussed since.

The BDS comment was met with applause. General Manager Joe Holtz responded by recounting the aftermath of the 2012 meetings. Brooklyn Tech, which then hosted general meetings, told the Coop they were unwilling to host meetings that discussed boycotting and divesting.

While the item was put on the Coop's agenda through the "democratic pipeline," Holtz said that the Coop has since been unable to find a venue that will house this discussion, despite continued staff efforts to find a location. "It's everyone's right to put

an agenda item in,” Holtz said, “and the Coop administration will take it seriously... we also feel an obligation to tell the location we are renting from what it’s about. It’s a difficult conundrum.”

Holtz concluded by saying, “We just want to fill you all in on the difficulty we have had since 2012. We’ve been thwarted when we’ve tried to do it again.” The open forum discussion was then closed after Holtz’s explanation, albeit a few minutes ahead of schedule. The early end of the open forum discussion was met with cries of “shame” from the crowd. The meeting chair defended the choice to end the discussion early because the agenda was jam-packed as is.

POST-PANDEMIC FINANCES



Earlier this year, the General Meeting voted to maintain the Coop’s base markup at 25%. Members receiving income-based assistance can get an exemption, resulting in a 21% markup.

For Fiscal Year 2025, which begins at the end of January 2024, the base markup will

go down to 24%. While there were some questions at the GM about keeping the markup that high, Holtz explained that the markup will remain at that level to keep the Coop's reserve fund in the \$7.5 to \$10 million dollar range.

The gross margin for the year was 19.64%, which is above last year's, and is in line with the financial health of the Coop.

Between current sales, progress toward reaching a membership of 16,000, and the \$6.1 million dollars pandemic aid received from the government, the Coop is in a good position to maintain its level of savings. While the reserve fund target is notable, Holtz also stressed the importance of having savings in case there is another emergency like the COVID pandemic.

A new member asked how often the board projections are correct. Holtz shared that last year, when the Coop had lower membership, we did about \$20 million in sales during the last 20 weeks of the year. The Coop is on track to do 13% more than that during the last 20 weeks of this fiscal year.

Historically, the Coop leans toward making conservative projections, while assuming the actual finances will probably be better, in the interest of being "a robust, financially sustainable organization without a big bottom line."

Other new profit initiatives include plans for a robust home delivery service and the shift to electronic labels.

DESPITE A VOTE TO RESUME CHILDCARE AT THE COOP, IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE.

CHILDCARE IS STILL A NO GO

General Coordinator Lisa Moore told the crowd that, despite last year's vote to restart

childcare in 2023, it will continue to be unavailable at the Coop. The facilities that previously housed the service do not meet the stringent requirements for New York State licensing, and the Coop's former insurer no longer offers policies to unlicensed facilities.

The General Coordinators worked with a broker and began a search in May to find an insurance provider willing to offer policies to providers that lack official licensing. However, as the September 30th deadline (set by the General Coordinators) came and went, the broker was unable to find a provider willing to carry the Coop. Holtz attempted to escalate the situation to a senior broker, but non-NYS carriers are not covering unlicensed childcare providers.

Moore said the broker had "essentially given up hope on securing insurance and does not believe the situation will change."

MASKING TO RETURN TWO DAYS PER WEEK

**IN CASE OF
SHOPPING
ON WEDNESDAY
AND THURSDAY**



**BREAK
GLASS**

Donohue

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

Member Kristina Bassi brought forward a proposal to require masking for both workers and shoppers on the same two days each week to make the Coop accessible and safe for our medically vulnerable, immune compromised, and disabled member-owners. The idea behind masking two days a week came from the results of the survey sent out earlier this year to the membership, which showed 28% of members were in favor of masking.

A lot of the discussion was centered on how the vote should be carried out. John McNally, an IT coordinator, proposed an amendment that the vote be conducted as a referendum to include members at home, especially those who are immunocompromised and unable to attend a GM in person. Bassi, however, objected to the idea of a referendum instead of a GM vote. If the item were moved to a referendum, the membership as a whole would give it less thought, she suggested. In person, it was said that the present members could listen to one another and understand why they fought to bring this agenda item to the table. Bassi worried that “the process of doing an online system would delay and delay and delay it.” The amendment to make the vote into a referendum ultimately failed.

Many staff members at the Coop objected to the proposal. Kathy Hieatt, a bookkeeping coordinator, said if she were required to wear a mask all day two days a week, she “would consider working somewhere else.” Brian Robinson, a receiving coordinator, mentioned that the sixteen months of the pandemic without member labor were “the most challenging of his life. It was really hard to do all of this physical labor in a mask,” he said, adding that he “didn’t like the idea of making these shifts less appealing to sign up for.”

Kristina Bassi and Sophia Tu’s proposal also did not fully acknowledge who would be enforcing the two-day mandate. Membership Coordinator Anna Adelson reminded the audience that when masks were completely required, “people were jerks.” General Coordinator Ann Herpel added “It’s not just difficult for the staff. People were spit on, people were called names, people were kicked out of the Coop after how they acted

when they were asked to comply with the mask mandate.”

Another membership coordinator, Jason Weiner, who says he has voluntarily continued to mask himself in the Coop, added that he was against the item because he feared the Coop becoming an “arbiter of free will,” posing “how does this affect everything going forward.”

One concern during the meeting was the data used to come to the two-day-a-week proposal. The online poll was from earlier this year, and it’s unclear if that 28% would still be true today. Additionally, that poll was simply for or against masking writ large and included no language about partial masking. The “anti-democratic” nature of this in-person vote sparked emotive speeches. A retired coordinator Allen Zimmerman, who has been a part of the PSFC for 28 years and himself is “severely immunocompromised,” mentioned that over the years, he has voted against agenda items that he emotionally supported because he didn’t think they were best for the Coop. He said he feared that bringing back masking two days a week would harm the PSFC financially.

Shortly after, member George Olken brought forward the amendment to restrict masking to only the shopping floor, which no one objected to. After the robust discussion, the motion succeeded with an in-person vote of 72 yes to 50 no.

AGENDA COMMITTEE RE-ELECTION

While none of the three members up for re-election for the Agenda Committee were present, as it was Halloween night, Allie Essinger, Dominique Bravo and Kate Spota were all re-elected for their positions on the Agenda Committee.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE’S SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The final discussion item of the evening, brought forward by Member Coordinator Jana Cunningham, surrounded this nascent committee. She posed the following discussion items:

1. The Committee Oversight Committee (COC) was empowered to supervise committee reporting requirements, including scheduling updates and tracking work credit. Some of the Coop Initiative Committees are less transparent and may benefit from the assistance of the COC. However, there are many committees that are directly under the supervision of staff, who already account for members' attendance and work, and don't need additional oversight.
2. Is the COC empowered to investigate other committees? To what end? Or were they commissioned to assist new and current committees with structure and scheduling reports to the Membership?

Cunningham outlined the lengthy formation process that the COC underwent, during which the committee was repeatedly unable to clearly address its purpose, saying there was "endless resistance about clarifying what this committee was meant to do." She added that in the midst of this confusion, the COC also does not save the PSFC staff time or money.

The discussion, which was left unresolved as the meeting was running long, sought to determine which committees need oversight from an additional committee. The Committee Oversight Committee has taken on the role of a policing system with ongoing investigations, which is not something clearly outlined in the committee's mandate. The current chair of the COC, Brian Shuman—the fourth chair this year—added that the investigations began after the suspension of Joe Holtz, and have grown from there. The discussion was left unresolved but will resume to sort out the actual powers of the COC and how to make it more "harmonious with the staff."