

DECEMBER GENERAL MEETING: BDS TENSIONS FLARE AGAIN

December 30, 2025

spin the meeting dial



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

December 30, 2025

By Kayla Levy

During the final General Meeting of 2025, held on December 2 at the Prospect Park

Picnic House, tensions over a proposed boycott of Israeli goods, which have simmered all year, burst into the open again.

As members filed into the rows of white folding chairs, Jan Clausen, a writer and Coop member since the 1970s, stood in the center aisle handing out copies of “The Olive Press,” a zine published by Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine. Shortly before 7 p.m., General Manager Joseph Szladek approached and asked her to stop.

“Members aren’t allowed to pamphlet while someone is shopping for milk, and being at the General Meeting is akin to that,” Szladek said in a follow-up interview, adding that the Coop would always allow members to distribute materials in a public space, like the Union Street sidewalk.

Clausen responded that for decades there was a literature table at the general meetings, where members handed out all sorts of pamphlets, including political materials. “I’ve seen a lot of rules made up to suppress speech,” she said.

This exchange foreshadowed much of what came next: an update from the Chair Committee on a long-debated proposal for hybrid meetings, a communications proposal related to the staff’s ability to send “do-not-reply” emails, and, in less contentious news, a rundown on Thanksgiving shopping.

OPEN FORUM LEADS TO BOYCOTT DEBATE, AGAIN

The majority of the nine members who took to the floor during the open forum discussed issues related to the boycott debate. Meeting chair Dan Hegwood read aloud a letter from Noah Potter voicing dissatisfaction with the Board of Directors, who broke with typical protocol and authorized a referendum vote on hybrid meetings at the April GM.

While ostensibly about virtual attendance at general meetings, the issue of hybrid voting has become tied up in the fight over the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions move-

ment (BDS). In his letter, Potter said the Board's decision to proceed with the vote marked "the end of member governance of the Coop."

Opponents of BDS say the push for hybrid meetings actually represents an effort by BDS supporters to get their proposal approved by the Coop, since in-person votes on the matter have been canceled. They say in a hybrid meeting, a BDS vote is more likely to pass.

At the June meeting, it was announced that hybrid voting was supported by 66.43 percent of members in a referendum, which was not enough for the 66.67 percent needed for a bylaw amendment.

The Board then independently decided to authorize hybrid meetings in September.

Later, Barbara Mazor, a Coop member since 1988, asked four board members that she termed "activists"—who have shown support for BDS or the April motion—if they would adhere to hypothetical future votes where Coop membership rejected BDS. She and Board Member Keyian Vafai had a muffled exchange, after which Mazor said, "I'll take that as a no."

Vafai, however, spoke up five minutes later: "Yes, I absolutely believe in voting with the membership." Board members Tess Brown-Lavoie, Tim Hospodar and Brandon West, who Mazor also called out by name, did not comment.

Two members made non-BDS-related comments. Hospodar raised concerns with an amendment passed in August affirming that the Coop Treasurer must be an upper-level management staff person, and former General Manager Joe Holtz asked attendees to support a developing co-op in Brazil, which he previously wrote about in the *Line-waiters' Gazette*.

THE NUMBERS: COOP FINANCES & THANKSGIVING SALES

The General Coordinators' reports largely centered on numbers—including the standard update on the financial health of the Coop from General Manager and Treasurer Szladek, and a seasonal report on Thanksgiving sales.

Year-to-date sales through November 9 were up 8.5 percent over the previous year, but the cost of goods and running the Coop were, too, meaning the business had a \$372,000 deficit, Szladek said. The General Manager reassured members that sales usually pick up during the fall and winter and he expects the Coop to come “close” to breaking even by year's end.

Szladek attributed some of this year's deficit to costly one-off expenses and rising healthcare expenses for personnel, as seen nationally. He said the Coop is seriously considering how to balance rising healthcare costs while maintaining a strong staff plan, and noted in follow-ups that the current self-insured, premium-free plan has saved the Coop “a tremendous amount of money over the years.”

Next, Elinoar Astrinsky, a General Coordinator since 2009, detailed Thanksgiving sales—a staggering volume of food totaling more than a Boeing 787's cargo load. Shoppers bought 38,000 pounds of produce, 7,760 pounds of cheese (cheddar was the most popular) and plenty of walnuts (about 1,000 pounds), she said.

Astrinsky concluded with a shout-out to staff for keeping the store well-stocked and relatively line-free, which elicited applause from the audience. Meeting chair Hegwood, who repeatedly asked attendees to hold their applause during politically fraught moments, joked that applause was only appropriate “when we're having Thanksgiving sales numbers.”

AN UPDATE ON HYBRID MEETINGS

Following a brief committee update from the International Trade Education Squad about the Trump Administration's trade policy (which, in summary, remains volatile but still impacts the Coop far less than other grocers thanks to our focus on local

goods), the Chair Committee issued a progress update on hybrid meetings.

After the Chair Committee solicited support for the transition to hybrid meetings, nine people expressed interest, seven responded to an outreach email and six were selected for the role, explained Committee member Josef Szende. The positions are short-term and will be evaluated for long-term participation, he added.

During a period for questions, Mazor took to the stage again to ask whether members will be able to comment on the Committee's eventual proposal, expressing specific concerns about how the meetings will be kept civilized. Szende responded that he couldn't speak to specifics (the Committee hasn't yet met), but that the transition will be collaborative.

"This is not a consulting firm delivering a product. This is a community. We're working together and we need to dialogue," he said "It's going to be a process and it's definitely not going to be perfect."

TWO ELECTIONS & A PROPOSAL ABOUT ELECTIONS—PLUS A DISCUSSION ABOUT RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION

Chair Hegwood opened the GM agenda by urging members to be "civil and generous," a request that was mostly respected during the 90-minute session covering two proposals and votes.

The meeting opened with member Michael Freedman-Schnapp, who brought his earlier proposal for a member-led Financial Advisory Committee to a vote. Most members expressed support for the Committee, especially since Freedman-Schnapp added a revision in response to feedback that reserves two of the seven seats for members without financial expertise.

"I don't have a lot of expertise, but I have thoughts about what are socially responsible investments that I would want the Coop to make," said Alyce Barr, a member of nearly 50 years, explaining that a Committee with a mix of backgrounds would foster

cooperation. The vote passed 111 to 11.

Next came a hotly debated agenda item from Coop member Rosa Palermo, who proposed reserving the “do-not-reply” email—used for one-way staff communications—for operational updates and announcements, not personal opinions or advocacy. Her proposal came in response to a controversial message that Holtz sent from the “do-not-reply” email weeks before the Board of Directors Election (and his retirement).

In the message that staff said was sent to 34,000 active and inactive members, Holtz said that he was speaking only for himself, but encouraged all recipients to vote against Dan Kaminsky and Taylor Pate—pro-BDS candidates endorsed by PSFC Members for Palestine. Kaminsky and Pate both lost the election.

In her opening statement, Palermo mentioned the email, saying that it made her think about how “our communication tools support equal member voice and align with our cooperative values.” However, she maintained that the proposal was about communication structures, not specific political views, and never named Holtz explicitly.

This caused confusion for at least one member, who took to the mic to ask for clarification on the email, but most speakers understood its subtext, and many expressed support for the proposal, citing frustration with Holtz’s message.

However, the response wasn’t all positive. One member questioned whether the proposal even merited consideration, noting he was sure “Joe was very sorry,” which drew applause that the chair quickly curtailed. Later, while Palermo discussed how communication can be used to strengthen cooperativism and increase access, an audience member shouted, “why the lies” prompting the chair to intervene again and remind members not to shout out.

The discussion concluded with a member named John, who said he was present in support of Palermo, emphasizing that there are already participatory channels where

members can share personal viewpoints, namely, the GM or *Gazette*.

Next, the evening saw two elections: Members re-elected Jacob Heyman-Kantor (120-5) and elected Josh Geller (93-31) to serve on the Hearing Officer Committee (HOC), following brief presentations of their qualifications and a question-and-answer segment.

Directly following the HOC election, members George Sarah Olken and Sophia Li presented an aptly timed proposal on establishing an Election Committee to administer open elections on a consistent schedule. As it currently stands, committee elections are not held on a fixed schedule. Typically, when a committee has an open seat, sitting members solicit interest from Coop members and contenders are asked to make a case at the GM (or join in a less formal manner).

“Those elections work, in general, the way we just saw,” said Olken, referencing the HOC election. “It’s not exactly an election because we don’t know how many other people applied, it’s two people running for two positions, members often don’t know what the committee even does and then in almost all cases the nominees slip through.”

Olken and Li’s proposal, by contrast, presents a more thoughtful vision of open and participatory elections overseen by the Election Committee. Their plan centers on two meetings: first, a nomination GM where members can put themselves or others forward for open positions from the floor. Then, a vote in June, aligning with the Board of Directors Elections. This model closely mirrors that of the Brooklyn Public Library Union, where Olken is President.

Members queried and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal. While some appreciated how it could make elections more open, many raised concerns about practicalities, like how long and chaotic a nomination meeting could be, or how devoting two of ten annual GMs to elections could deter from other work members need to do.

Li and Olken waived most of their allotted wrap-up remark time to let others speak, and then gave a brief thank-you at the end. “This is exactly the conversation I think we need to have,” said Olken. “I am glad this proposal engendered this and I’m hopeful that by trying to change our systems we will figure out what exactly we want them to be.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, all board members voted in favor to accept the members’ advice on the Financial Advisory Committee and Hearing Officer Committee Elections held earlier in the evening.

NOVEMBER 5, 2024

December 30, 2025

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

TAKING PART IN TRANSITIONING TO THE COOP'S POST-HOLTZ ERA

Fellow Coop members,

What a time of transition! As Joe Holtz, founding member and current General Manager and Treasurer, plans his retirement, we members have the responsibility to think about the Coop's next 5, 10... 50 years. The Coop has many (many!) strengths and

this transition provides us an opportunity to build on them and continue seeking improvements. It's time to roll up our sleeves and partner with the search team to find the best possible candidate for these very important jobs. (I'm saying "jobs" plural with the understanding that no one person can possibly replace Joe!)

There is so much energy and expertise in our membership and I'm sure many of us are, like me, eager to support these transitions. So far, we haven't received detailed information about member involvement in the search and decision-making process. How do we get involved to serve our Coop at this critical time?

*Sincerely,
Elaine Roghanian*

HOPING FOR HYBRID GENERAL MEETINGS

Fellow Coop Members,

I am writing in support of a remote option for all Coop general meetings. I understand that this was discussed at the September GM and I'm hoping it soon becomes a reality.

As a midwife who works nights, as well as a parent with two toddlers at home (one with lung disease), I am stretched for time and have to be cautious about indoor activities that could expose my family to infection.

My husband grew up coming to the Coop his entire life and I have been a member for over 14 years. Our Coop membership is important to us, especially as we raise a third generation of members.

As we enter the high season for respiratory infections, remote general meetings are a

simple solution that will let us both continue to be active participants in the Coop community without needing to change our work schedules, arrange childcare or compromise on infection prevention efforts for our two-year-old son.

*With hope,
Rachel Blatt*

HYBRID GM = ACCESS FOR ALL

To the Editor:

I have been a Coop member since the '70s. Sometimes checkout workers have exclaimed, "You're old!!" when they notice my three digit member number. Then they quickly recover and say, "I mean you've been a member for a long time."

Yes, I am getting old. I used to do receiving and lift heavy boxes of juice gallons. Haul compost bins. Not anymore. Now I'm retired and I experience chronic medical conditions that too often sideline me from being out in the world. This includes going to in-person meetings. Attending the monthly Coop meeting in-person is a long shot for people like me. Why not hold these meetings with a remote option? Working remotely during the pandemic allowed me, and many others, to see how we could stay active using platforms like Zoom, while also keeping safe and operating within our physical limitations. This technology is not rocket science. It is a no-brainer to adopt a hybrid meeting model and be as inclusive as possible for all Coop members.

Christina Fuentes

A COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION FOR HYBRID GMS

Dear Fellow Coop Members:

We write with gratitude for the Agenda Committee, the Chair Committee and the September GM attendees for facilitating a collaborative discussion towards making GMs hybrid and supporting accessibility in our Coop.

It was exciting to be part of a rigorous conversation centered around enabling the participation of as many members as possible. Members shared personal experiences with disability, and with being parents of young children unable to attend most GMs (it was one such member's first GM, and he lamented that his partner, watching their children, couldn't be there as well). Members offered skills and expertise as folks who've coordinated large-scale hybrid meetings at companies with locations around the world. And members voiced concerns about privacy, and whether hybrid models could support the Coop's community ethos. Much appreciated were contributions from Chair Committee members who expressed enthusiasm about making GMs more accessible, and who conveyed confidence in the Coop's ability to develop solutions that would make hybrid GMs work for us.

We want to highlight one stand-out contribution, delivered with panache by Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner (and published as "A New Coop Democracy" in the Oct. 15th issue). Jason offered support for the values at the heart of our proposal, but clarified that—hybrid or not—a meeting held on Tuesday nights would still prevent plenty of folks from participating in the Coop's governance. While we still believe in the value of expanding our current model of participation to allow for remote attendance, we wholly support Jason's call to make voting on the important issues facing the Coop available to every one of its members. Making GMs hybrid is a good move, but it won't be the last in making our Coop a truly democratic community endeavor.

In solidarity,

CJ Glackin & Morgan Vö

HEADING OFF THE COOP'S POTENTIAL FINANCIAL LOSSES

Dear Coop:

At the recent General Meeting (September 24, 2024) the Coop's finances were presented. The presentation seemed to show the Coop is experiencing lackluster sales in terms of items sold and dollars spent. It was stated that the Coop will be fortunate if it can manage to "break even" by the end of the year. I found this somewhat alarming—as a Coop member for more than 30 years, the Coop's continued health and existence is critical! Since the core mission of the Coop is to sell good food (and other items) to its members at lower prices, how to increase sales should be at the forefront of the Coop's plans. A few ways to achieve better sales were mentioned and should be seriously considered, including increasing the membership (I do not find the Coop crowded compared to before the pandemic), eliminating the "carrot-based" caps on numbers of people shopping at any given time (very rarely have I been there when there are no available carrots and I shop on weekends), and increasing the hours the Coop is open. Inflation has bumped up prices and certainly has impacted sales, so it is a good idea for the Coop to more regularly promote the on-sale products it offers, as was mentioned at the GM. Additional ideas for increasing sales could surely be found by engaging with members who have retail and other business expertise.

In Cooperation,
Tim Forker

IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE COOP

To the Board of Directors,

According to the New York Times, the recently-deceased Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar “built Hamas’s ability to harm Israel in service of the group’s long-term goal of destroying the Jewish state and building an Islamist, Palestinian nation in its place.” And as far as we know, this is the goal of the Palestinian-founded BDS movement that a group of Coop members have been trying to advance almost continuously since 2009.

According to the National Cooperative Business Association Clusa International, there are hundreds of food coops serving more than one million members in the United States. As far as we know, only one is boycotting Israel, the Olympia Food Co-op in Washington State, a decision made in 2014. Around that time, a few other food coops considered such a boycott but summarily rejected the idea. And at the largest and most costly meeting ever held at our Coop, a proposed referendum on boycotting Israel was rejected by the members present.

And yet, this anti-Israel contingent persists in their activism, despite the repeatedly stated fact that this is deeply offensive to many members based on ethnic and religious identities and contrary to the Coop’s assurance of a welcoming environment.

Some years ago, despite repeated efforts by a member of the Diversity Committee to convince it to act, not only did the committee have no interest in doing so, but it barred that member from the committee.

And so I ask the Board of Directors to weigh in on what kind of Coop this is and what kind of Coop you want it to be. Directors have the power to make a proposal to end this crusade, in the best interests of the Coop, and to overrule any contrary member advice. Do you have the courage?

Sylvia Lowenthal

THE CASE AGAINST A BDS ENDORSEMENT

Dear Cooperators,

Tragically, on October 7, 2023 Hamas committed the largest slaughter of Jews in a single day since the Holocaust. It was a gleeful spree of rape, murder, mutilation, burnings and kidnappings, surpassing ISIS in its brutality. The number brutally murdered compared to Israel's population is the equivalent of 29 9/11 in the US.

On October 8, the BDS Movement website posted: "We believe that the heroic actions of Hamas fighters against the occupying forces are reasonable in their quest...." And goes on to describe the massacre as "deserved" and "justified" against "military and civilians."

The Coop faction, Members 4 Palestine (M4P), posted on their website: "the BDS framework offers [them] clarity" and our Coop should "endorse BDS." This is their "clarity," a movement that supports, glorifies and encourages the flagrant and reprehensible violation of the norms of civilized behavior. M4P engages in the same language and false claims of the wider BDS movement, a movement that has inspired and incited vandalism and violence here in Brooklyn and beyond.

It is inconceivable that our Coop would even consider aligning ourselves with such a violent and destructive movement. If a proposal to boycott Israeli products were ever brought to a General Meeting, it would be a loud and clear declaration that Jews are neither welcome nor safe at the Park Slope Food Coop.

This is a deeply harmful path that must be avoided.

*With hopes of unity and compassion,
Sondra Shaievitz*

HOW SINWAR'S LEGACY REACHED THE PSFC

Coop Membership,

Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas, has been killed.

Many Palestinians blame Sinwar for their suffering, wishing he 'rots in Hell'. Public boycott advocates (PBAs) would do well to listen.

While relieved myself that the planner of October 7th's rampage of rape, kidnapping and infanticide plans no more, I am not celebrating. Rather, I view it as another chapter of sacrificing PSFC's special cooperative model on the altar of an international movement that blames Jews for everything.

Today's version of anti-Jewish uses smokescreens. At September's General Meeting 'nonviolent' PBAs masked their violence towards Jews through indifference to Jewish safety. There, when Jewish members voiced real fears of their faces being recorded and passed along to hate groups during online meetings, indifferent PBAs and indifferent members of the Chair Committee pooh-poohed the security flaws while touting complete faith in their own stunning lack of knowledge of online conference technology. Online voting itself is an admitted tactic for changing PSFC's bylaws to get one more shot at boycotting Israeli goods (the only Jewish country) and was never about accessibility. Some Jews in 1930s-1940s Germany and in Soviet Russia succumbed to antisemitism too, giving cover to genocidal regimes, and Jewish PBAs worldwide today are arguably their counterparts.

Jew hatred at PSFC today is real and my inner alarm bells are the bottom line. Certainly LGBT+ concerns would never be treated so callously. The only good thing Hamas killed on October 7th was plausible deniability, finally showing PBAs have been dishonest with PSFC about Jews all along.

PBAs relying on extremist militants for inspiration have dehumanized PSFC into overt Jew hatred in our aisles, our General Meetings and our committees. That, and continued Palestinian suffering, is the legacy of Sinwar. So no, I'm not celebrating.

Jesse Rosenfeld

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

December 30, 2025



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.

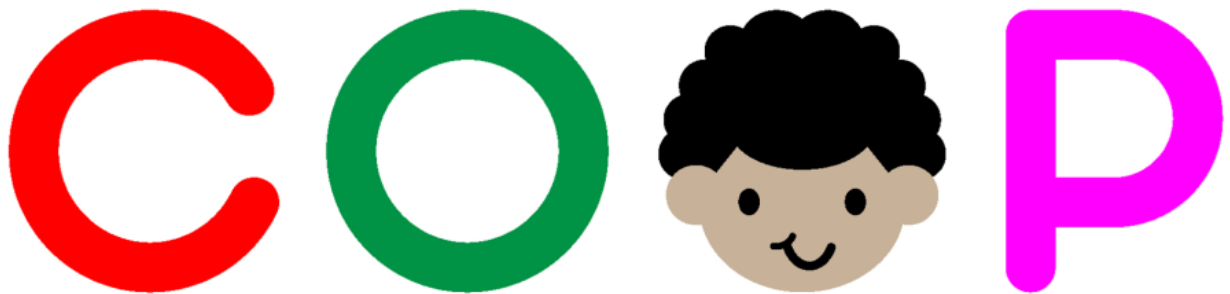


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

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.

COOP TO COMMUNITY: NEW MEMBERS WELCOME—AND NEEDED

December 30, 2025

JOIN

the

PARK SLOPE
FOOD COOP
EST 1973



ILLUSTRATION BY OLEXA HEWRYK

By Meredith Kolodner

The Coop has dusted off its welcome mat for new members, ending a 20-month freeze on new admissions.



NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING

December 30, 2025



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Sara Ivry

November's General Meeting kicked off with the persistently pressing question of new member recruitment, key to the Coop regaining financial stability in the wake of pandemic-related losses.



GM ADDRESSES MASKS, FINANCE, ADDING NEW WORK SLOTS AND MEMBERS

December 30, 2025



By Hayley Gorenberg

Members played out a miniature version of a national debate in the open forum to

kick off the October 26 General Meeting, as one member objected to the Coop's mask requirement. The member deemed masks a personal choice for adult decision-making, and asserted that the Coop should consider temperature checks and junk the current mask requirement.

All responses voiced support for masks in the store. One member recast masks as a measure to "protect each other and our community," including people who cannot medically tolerate or qualify for a vaccine, and noted widespread mask requirements at other establishments.

The next speaker referred to their professional background in infectious diseases and public health, and called masks a key part of "ending the pandemic."

The final member who spoke added that absence of fever does not medically confirm that an individual with COVID-19 cannot transmit it, so a fever-check system would be insufficient to protect members' health.

FINANCES STILL TOUGH

Coop General Manager Joe Holtz shared a new financial report on the Zoom screen, noting that slow IRS credit processes ought not obscure the fact that financial "trend lines" for the Coop, while improving, still show the Coop losing money weekly, "and we shouldn't be complacent about that."



The Coop's infamous "cash burn" has improved to the best level in the pandemic. If the Coop had not received the IRS credits that did flow in over the previous four weeks, the Coop would have lost \$155,000, Holtz noted. That said, the "cash burn" has improved to its best level during the pandemic, he added, as the Coop was down \$125,000 per week early in the pandemic.

The Coop has lost \$6.8 million over the course of pandemic operations, and sales volume remains \$300,000 less per week than it was before March 2020, which Holtz termed "really troublesome."



Donohue

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

Possibilities to grow sales might include adding more hours, adding more capacity (shoppers on the floor and checkout lines) and adding more members, Holtz suggested. The Coop routinely loses about 2,300 members per year, but that number increased to about 4,000 over the course of the pandemic. Holtz opined that adding more members was the most important measure, and that in addition to shopping and boosting sales, more member workers would be needed for the Coop to expand hours and operations.



Major credits owed to the Coop were recently paid by the IRS.

One member suggested applying lagging IRS credits to offset Coop payroll taxes, adding that some local restaurants had adopted that measure to mitigate cash flow. Holtz noted payroll taxes are below \$10,000 per week, “and our problem is much bigger than that.” He said the Coop is considering a bridge loan secured by money it is owed by the IRS.

Asked whether the Coop’s higher markup might have contributed to member falloff, Holtz acknowledged that “as the world of groceries gets more competitive,” with some stores running checkouts “with no human labor,” it was all the more important to try and return to earlier prices, but that “we need some rebuilding first,” and the Coop is working on a system for recruiting members.

NEW WORK SHIFTS



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky reviewed the Coop's operations including plans for new work shifts.

The Coop is rolling out new work shifts, including bulk packaging upstairs in what was previously the childcare room, and three nightly cleaning shifts with “not many people . . . basically working on your own,” ideal for members who want a very sparsely populated shift, reported General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky. She highlighted new receiving shifts, as well as deep-cleaning and repair shifts Monday through Wednesday at 8:30 p.m., “if you're handy with tools.”

Members will soon be able to book shifts further in advance and shop a little later in the evening, and with good planning and safety measures, the Coop is experiencing “almost no no-shows” for work, a record Astrinsky pressed with pride.



New work shifts are being rolled out, including pre-packaging the most popular bulk items.

SUPPLY CHAIN

As Coop buyers continue to seek out good options and alternatives, “I don't think

there's any need to panic-shop," Astrinsky said. She supported buying staples members know they will need, and highlighted an "amazing selection" of pears, which ripen from the inside out and should be stored in the refrigerator till the "shoulder" around the stem has a little give, indicating "juicy, lovely flavor."

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A member of the International Trade Education Committee reported about objections from Brazil to vaccine cost and intellectual property constraints under a contract with Pfizer, and about low vaccine access in Africa.

The Labor Committee, focused on workplace fairness, announced committee vacancies and a desire to recruit more members of color. The committee reported on the Coop's participation in the tomato workers' Fair Food program, in which Coop members pay a "6% premium on tomatoes" and are now sending a check of over \$4,500 to the campaign, modeling small-store support.



Fran Hawthorne was also reelected to the
Agenda
Committee.



PHOTO BY EVA WALTER

Pirco Wolfframm successfully ran again for the Agenda Committee.

Three Agenda Committee members successfully sought reelection: Fran Hawthorne, Kate Spota and Pirco Wolfframm. They responded to GM member requests for more transparency in advance about agenda items and the potential for innovation.

PARENTAL LEAVE DISCUSSION



PHOTO BY DAVID BARTNER

Member David Bartner is campaigning for the Coop to make parental leave more flexible.

Member David Bartner teed up a proposal for discussion, suggesting the Coop allow parents to time parental leave as they choose, sometime before a child turns 3 years old—rather than requiring leave start upon the birth of the child. His proposal also included a provision to “backdate,” for members who had a child during the pandemic member-work suspension, so that they could take a year of leave from subsequently required work.

Bartner asked to table his item and delete the suggestion of backdating leave, given the GM’s discussion of worker needs, saying “it may not be the right time to change things, given what’s going on at the Coop.”

Members nonetheless commented, expressing support for flexibly timed leave.

Hayley Gorenberg joined the Coop in 1993. When she’s not writing for the Gazette, she’s working as a community-driven civil rights lawyer—or playing the surdo for a local women’s/TGNCl+ samba reggae band.