

# 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.*

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**VOLUNTARY ARTICLE: IN A TIME OF TRANSITION**

June 24, 2025



June 24, 2025

*By Jan Clausen*

As we welcome incoming General Manager Joe Szladek, a referendum on hybrid General Meetings (GM) is underway. The Coop has entered a time of dramatic transitions. New beginnings offer openings for positive change. It's worth a look back at recent developments to help us plan wisely for the future.

At the April GM, the Coop's Board took action to let members vote on the popular hybrid proposal. They did this after an expected GM vote was taken off the agenda due to the cancellation of our rental agreement with City Tech. That large facility bowed out in the wake of a scurrilous email pressure campaign by a non-Coop group (End Jew Hatred). The Board needed to address the resulting governance crisis once it became apparent that the General Coordinators (GCs) would not. Otherwise, our ability to decide matters vital to the Coop would have been permanently undermined.

The Board clearly acted within the scope of our bylaws, which specify that it may issue a referendum “on any matter.” There was overwhelming support from the member-owners at the April GM. Nevertheless, two out of the five Board members present (including Joe Holtz and Imani Q’ryn, both outgoing) argued strongly against the action, claiming it violated the tradition whereby the Board limits itself to affirming the results of a formal member vote. In the wake of the Board’s split decision to issue the referendum, the GCs solicited a legal opinion. That opinion not only confirmed the propriety of the action but stated that no change to the bylaws is required for the Coop to adopt hybrid General Meetings! Yet, because the GCs had previously dug in their heels on claims that the bylaws change was needed (requiring a two-thirds majority “yes” vote, not a simple majority), the referendum will be subject to the bylaws change threshold.

**JUST AS THE BOARD (OUR ELECTED LEADERSHIP BODY) IS CHARGED WITH SAFEGUARDING THE COOP’S FINANCIAL SURVIVAL, SO IT MUST ACT TO SUPPORT MEMBER-LED DEMOCRACY.**

Critics warn of an “activist board,” failing to distinguish between arbitrary Board action and the Board’s support of members’ right to vote when normal channels have been blocked. We’ve heard claims that the work of PSFC Members for Palestine on behalf of the hybrid measure is sneaky or suspect. In fact, seeking a boycott of Israeli products and supporting an expansion of member democracy are both cherished goals of PSFC Members for Palestine.

Just as the Board (our elected leadership body) is charged with safeguarding the Coop’s financial survival, so it must act to support member-led democracy. If its recent move comes as a surprise, perhaps that’s because we’ve gotten used to a relatively quiet role for the membership. The Board has often accepted member advice based on GM votes whose outcomes were heavily influenced by the views and interests of the GCs. One important example is the March GM vote in 2012 rejecting a pro-

posal that would have mandated a Coop-wide vote (referendum) on a pro-Palestine boycott. Prior to that meeting, Joe Holtz weighed in to urge a “no” vote, strongly implying that to do otherwise would mark the voter as anti-Coop. Holts also vocally supported the 2016 measure that saw the GM adopt an unprecedented 75% supermajority requirement for approving boycotts.\* Recently, an extraordinary series of Coordinators’ Corner columns collectively signed by the GCs has sought to replicate this pattern of GC influence over votes. What this strategy may fail to recognize is that an energized membership is a plus for the Coop.

A new situation requires new thinking. At the May GM, Szladek cautioned us not to take the Coop’s success for granted and vowed to prioritize stability. Stability is important but shouldn’t be confused with a “tradition” of resistance to member input. Stability and democratic decision-making must be partners for success over the long haul.

*Jan Clausen is a writer, teacher, and activist with Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine.*

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**VOLUNTARY ARTICLE: “BECAUSE IT’S ALWAYS BEEN DONE THIS WAY” AS THE COOP’S NORTH STAR?**

June 24, 2025



June 24, 2025

*By Tim Hospodar*

It was frightful when many members attending the May 2025 General Meeting (GM) demanded outgoing General Manager Joe Holtz disclose the legal counsel who supported the General Coordinators' (GC) inquiry into the April 2025 GM proceedings. Curious about what fellow members plan to do with the information, I became equally curious about why GCs solicited counsel without questioning its cost. At the May GM, Holtz reminded members that "Legal Fees" is an expense itemized on each financial statement discussed at every meeting, and I suppose that's reason not to hesitate an inquiry into whether April GM votes were allowable. "What would it cost?" has guided GCs to deliberate hybrid meetings, the return of childcare, but not the employment of a third-party firm.

The Bylaws (Article V, Section 2) confirm the Coop may employ a firm for such purposes, namely actions deemed necessary for the good of the corporation that cannot

await the next meeting of directors. During the past couple of years, mail ballots had been distributed prior to the May GM; resolving what that ballot would look like before Tuesday, May 27 was appropriate. It's why I sponsored a resolution (Article V, Section 1), authorizing GCs to take such action without further inquiry. While the April GM could be endlessly studied and debated, the mail ballot could take shape as decided by the Board of Directors at the April GM. The resolution would absolve us from any liability in this purposeful collection of data. Remember, also, that the data alone will not enable an amendment to the Bylaws.

I shared this resolution with GCs by email—our primary form of discussion between GMs. Besides hundreds of member emails, some members on the Board ask questions of the GCs, ask questions of the Agenda Committee (AC), while copying other committees too. Occasionally the questions lead to discussion, when a GC responds or the AC. When members of the Board posed questions about the mail ballot, however, it was radio silence from the GCs. I chimed in late, suggesting resolutions could serve as an appropriate solution. Acknowledging the cost, a law firm's decision makes the resolution a moot issue.

#### THE DATA ALONE WILL NOT ENABLE AN AMENDMENT TO THE BYLAWS.

"It's always been done this way," was probably no factor in how the law firm reached their decision. If they consulted the Coop's guide to GMs and AMs, Section V informed them that the structure of the GM can be changed by a majority vote of the members present. They might have established that the Board may consider this vote to be the advice of the members. Maybe they decided the members' requests that the Board take action or the introduction of a referendum during the Open Forum served as advice baked into a demonstration of overwhelming support by the voting members. I figure the Board drew an inference from the number of raised hands, and the Board ratified the advice of the members present. And this is what the Board was asked to do—ratify the members' advice—regardless of how it's always been done for 48-plus

years.

*Timothy Hospodar is a member of the Coop's Board of Directors.*

## CONFUSION, CONFLICT, AND BOARD'S DECISION TO ISSUE A REFERENDUM ON HYBRID MEETINGS ROCK APRIL GENERAL MEETING

June 24, 2025



May 13, 2025

*By Leila Darabi*

PHOTO BY LEILA DARABI

The April General Meeting (GM) held on April 29 at the Prospect Park Picnic House quickly became one of the most contentious in Coop history. Amid overflowing attendance, procedural confusion and accusations of obstruction, the Board voted to issue a Coop-wide referendum on whether to allow hybrid GMs. This vote followed a chaotic Open Forum during which members voted—for the first time in Coop history—to adjourn the General Meeting and proceed directly to the Board of Directors meeting.

Based on the Board vote, the referendum will appear on the same ballot as the June Board of Directors election for which members will be able to vote online or by mail.

### **A Vote on a Vote at a Meeting about Meetings**

The proposal that passed during the April Board meeting seeks to amend the Coop's bylaws to allow members to participate in GMs either in person or remotely via Zoom. First submitted to the Agenda Committee in December 2023, the topic of members voting to allow hybrid General Meetings has faced significant delays, with a meeting-venue cancellation and internal debate over whether a vote could be held without a larger venue due to the Coop's current policy that all GMs take place in person.

In a message sent to members prior to the GM, General Coordinator Ann Herpel shared a statement to explain a last-minute venue change and removal of hybrid voting from the April agenda:

*Thursday, April 10, we received an email from City Tech canceling our rental. The email read: 'After further review, we can no longer accommodate this event. Sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.' Despite our attempts to contact the City Tech events staff via email and phone for further clarification, we did not receive a response.*

*To be absolutely clear, City Tech made the decision to cancel. This action was not initiated by the General Coordinators in any way.*

As a result, the meeting moved to the Picnic House in Prospect Park, which filled to fire code capacity well before the 7:00 p.m. start time. General Coordinator Joe Szladek, who was helping with crowd control, later shared that he estimated that around 125–150 members didn't get into the meeting that evening.

Some of those members could be heard cheering and chanting “hybrid meetings” throughout the evening.

Inside the Picnic House, Board Member Keyian Vafai expressed frustration at larger venue cancellations preventing members from voting on the question of hybrid meetings, as he introduced a motion to amend the Coop's bylaws.

“For over 17 months, members have been prevented from voting on the extremely popular proposal to make GMs hybrid,” he said. He added, “The General Coordinators repeatedly asked the Agenda Committee to delay a vote on this proposal, claiming without evidence that a larger venue was needed for the vote.” He spoke before a boisterous audience, many waving paper fans with slogans including “Member-Owner for Hybrid” and “Everyone Should Vote.”

“The current stalemate is a governance crisis for our Coop. We can't govern our 17,000-member cooperative if no issue that interests more than 250 of those members can ever be discussed.” Vafai continued, “The board has an obligation to hear the advice of our members and to ensure that members can provide their advice without delay.”



Chair Committee huddle at the April GM

**Historic Motion to Adjourn the General Meeting**

The Board meeting and controversial vote were preceded by a chaotic General Meeting.

Many members spoke during the open forum about their inability to participate in person and their support for hybrid meetings. “I’m a single parent, and it’s very hard for me to go to meetings. It’s exploitative to require that every member contribute their labor to collectively run this Coop, but doesn’t guarantee that everyone can vote,” Marina said. “This Coop is, and always was, undemocratic. This can be changed through adopting the hybrid GMs to make for a truly democratic and cooperative Coop world.”

Alyce Barr, a member since 1978, said: “Hybrid meetings maximize participation...Efforts to minimize participation have another name. It’s called voter suppression.”

Founding Coop member Donnie Rotkin reflected on the deeper stakes, acknowledging that many see a vote on hybrid meetings as a vote in favor of boycotting products from Israel as part of the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement: “What I’m going to say is about conflict and not about hybrid meetings in general, but about all of this anti-democracy stuff. BDS lost two significant votes, big votes. We fought, we argued. We lost. The Coop went on.”

The turning point came when, at the end of the Open Forum, a Coop member moved to adjourn the General Meeting and proceed directly to the Board session. That motion triggered procedural confusion and live consultations of Robert’s rules of order, the guide to the General and Annual Meetings, and the Coop bylaws. At one point, the Chair Committee and Board members huddled onstage with the bylaws, attempting to determine whether such a motion was valid.

### **Procedural Confusion and Onstage Bylaw Review**

“Tell them the page, what’s the rule again?” one chair committee member asked aloud.

The motion was introduced by a member named John, who stated: “I think the Board of Directors need more time to talk about getting the Coop through this governance crisis...Therefore, using section 21 of Robert’s rules, I move to adjourn this meeting and transition to the Board of Directors committee.”

A member from the floor seconded this motion, which was then contested by the Chair who ruled to continue with the General Meeting. Another member then moved to overrule the Chair, a motion that passed. Throughout this portion of the meeting, participants shouted from the floor for clarification and called on the Chair committee to project written versions of the motion to adjourn the meeting and the motion to overrule the Chair on screen before voting on each. Despite frequent pleas from the Chair committee for order, members waved paper fans, clapped and cheered while several General Coordinators shouted that, in their view, the GM and Board meeting could not be separated, and that adjourning one meant adjourning the other.

Both votes (to first overrule the Chair, then to move directly to the Board of Directors meeting) passed by an overwhelming majority, with more than 200 members voting in favor of each and about a dozen voting against, including several General Coordinators.

“This was the first ever meeting that we adjourned before the expected ending time,” said General Coordinator and Coop Cofounder Joe Holtz in an email following the meeting. “It is the first time that the Board took over a meeting and stopped asking to hear the advice of the members who were present.”

### **A Motion for the Board to Issue a Referendum**

With the GM adjourned, the Board meeting formally began. Vafai made the motion to issue a mail ballot referendum on hybrid meetings (Agenda Item 884). The motion was seconded by Tim Hospedar.

Holtz and Imani Q’ryn both opposed the motion and argued at length that they felt

the Board had not sufficiently heard the advice of the members. As Chair Committee member David Moss explained in a follow-up interview: “There is a provision in the by-laws that says, at any time the board can decide to have a referendum. So, if you look at that sentence in isolation, then you can say, well, the Board can do whatever they want.” He expounded. “Another counter argument would be, well, at any time when there’s notice. I think the bylaws are poorly drafted on that point. That’s my personal opinion.”

During the Board meeting, Holtz argued that a mail ballot should only follow a properly noticed GM vote. “The Coop is built on discussion,” he said. “Every mail ballot that we’ve ever had has been from the advice of the members to have one.”

Q’ryn warned against setting a precedent that bypasses inclusive debate. “What we’re doing right here is very dangerous, and it changes the whole governance of the Coop,” she said, her voice quavering. “Hold your power. Do not give it to us.”

“We voted for you!” one member shouted, triggering applause.

Ultimately, the motion passed 3–2, with Vafai, Hospedar and Tess Brown-Lavoie voting in favor, and Holtz and Imani Q’ryn voting against. Board member Brandon West was absent.

## **What the Debate is Really About**

While the procedural details and bylaws dominated much of the April GM, the deeper disagreement centers around three fundamental questions about how the Coop should function:

### **1. Are Coop members allowed to organize?**

Chair Committee member David Moss criticized what he described as a coordinated effort by PSFC Members for Palestine (M4P) and some Board members to flood the

room and overrule the chair, calling it an “orchestrated strategy.”

“The meeting’s outcome was predetermined,” Moss wrote in a statement submitted to the *Gazette*. “M4P and three board members had effectively planned ahead to secure their preferred result.”

In contrast, Brown-Lavoie defended the organizing: “Mass-mobilization organizing is democracy,” she said. “The Board didn’t decide anything. The Board is enabling a decision that was brought...forth by members.”

## **2. Is the Board required to hear additional advice from members before issuing a referendum—or has it already heard enough?**

Holtz argued that the Board had not yet heard the advice of the members in a formal setting:

“The Board hasn’t gotten the advice of the members yet,” he said. “We’re skipping that step.”

Brown-Lavoie countered that hundreds of emails, meeting turnout and months of engagement had already constituted clear member input: “It is incumbent on the Board to enable that listening to the will of the membership... And that falls outside of normal procedure because normal procedure had been blocked.”

## **3. Will the Board’s decision hold up?**

Holtz raised doubts about whether the referendum would stand. “We have not followed [the process for] amending the bylaws,” he said. “And this is not the way you go about it.”

As of publication, Coop leadership had not announced any plan to challenge the referendum vote.

Following the GM, the *Gazette* asked the General Coordinators whether they consider the referendum vote to be valid under Coop bylaws; whether there are plans to challenge, delay, or block implementation of the vote or its results; and whether they plan to issue a formal statement to the membership regarding their position. The General Coordinators declined to comment on these questions.

## **Competing Views of Governance**

In a follow-up conversation, Board Member Keyian Vafai defended the decision to issue a referendum as a necessary and overdue response to member demand. “After 17 months of delay and obstruction, it was clear that a referendum was the only way that the Board would be able to hear the advice of members on this important proposal,” he said.

“Our bylaws allow the Board, by a majority vote, to direct a mail ballot ‘on any matter.’” He continued, “Members will receive the referendum on hybrid GMs on the same ballot as the Board of Directors election, and this will allow the Board to hear the advice of the membership on a proposal that’s waited seventeen months for a vote.”

Chair Committee Member David Moss noted that while he and other Chairs support hybrid meetings in principle, the tactics used to reach the vote may signal a broader shift. “It will be interesting to see if M4P limits its ability to control PSFC governance to forcing votes on hybrid meetings and boycott-related issues, or if this signals a fundamental shift in Coop governance.”

Vafai, by contrast, sees the referendum as an overdue fulfillment of democratic process. “I have an obligation as a Board member to ensure that our Coop remains a member-run democracy,” he said. “To do that, we must make sure that the Board can hear the advice of our membership.”

*Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She posts photos of the food*

*she makes with Coop ingredients on Instagram (@persian\_ish); and cohosts Cringe-watchers, a podcast that uses binge-worthy TV as a lens to discuss sex, politics, and culture.*

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## MARCH GENERAL MEETING: SPRING PRODUCTS, BOARD CANDIDATES AND MORE

June 24, 2025



April 22, 2025

*By Zach Schiffman*

As attendees entered the Picnic House on March 25, the sidewalk was flanked with

members advocating for various causes, handing out info sheets about hybrid meetings or QR code slips introducing candidates up for election. On one side of the immediate entry, members offered “halvah from Israel,” while on the other, a table with a handful of food options featured literature with voices from Gaza. The competing efforts outside the Picnic House foreshadowed what would come in the well-attended meeting, with the issues spilling into nearly every aspect of the agenda.

## **OPEN FORUM**



Members turned out for the March General Meeting.

The Open Forum began with a member asking the Chair Committee to clarify the policy around open forum rules, pointing out that past meetings have allowed topics unrelated to Coop operations, with speakers granted longer than one minute. Chair Committee member David Moss responded that the committee uses a document called the Park Slope Food Coop Guide to General and Annual Meetings, which does not limit topics to Coop operations. He added that the one-minute rule is interpreted flexibly,

depending on the needs of a particular meeting.

While some brought up items of general interest to the membership—honoring the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, increasing the amount of meetings eligible for work credit, a plea to stop members from eating while working the checkout shift—speakers continued to challenge the transparency of the general meetings.

Coop member Josh Geller flagged how he was not on the ballot for the evening's dispute resolution community, while member Noah Potter questioned how his agenda item had not come up, despite requesting it to be expedited. "I've been ghosted. I think it's inappropriate," Potter said, in the first of many comments he would make throughout the meeting.

One member asked if the June 24 General meeting date could be moved to avoid conflicting with the New York State and City primary elections, but outgoing General Coordinator Joe Holtz said that wasn't possible due to the timing of the annual financial audit.



Member Adam Tager asked the candidates some questions.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

Holtz, who also serves as Treasurer, reported on the four-week period ending 3/2/25, with a presentation of the top-line details and a full report sent to members' inboxes the previous week. The report compared the first four weeks of the current fiscal year to the same period last year, noting that the previous fiscal year ended in January 2024. Holtz pointed out that last year's gross margin for this period was unrealistically high due to error, ("The first four weeks last year had an unreasonably high gross margin that was unrealistic. So I didn't bother to write it down because it sorted itself out by the eight-week statement.") but that this year's data was more reliable, with a positive swing in bottom-line income from negative \$35,000 to positive \$33,000. He noted a rosy outlook, with sales up 10.4 percent, and an increase of \$182,000 cash on hand, the most vital asset in the Coop's finances. The overall financial stability of the Coop is underscored by the increase in base markup from 24 percent to 25 per-

cent.

As of February 25, 2024, total liabilities were \$5.22 million, while total member equity—including member investments, paid-in capital and retained earnings—was \$8.64 million. He explained that member equity includes all member investments and the Coop’s retained earnings, and that donated investments are categorized as additional paid-in capital. He walked members through other financial statements, including a cash comparison from the beginning of the fiscal year.

The final portion of the report introduced a new feature: comparing projections for the year with the annualized actual results for the four-week period. Holtz noted that the Coop had projected \$62.8 million in annual sales, but if current trends continue, sales could exceed \$63.8 million. Expenses and gross margin were also slightly better than projected. He clarified that these annualized figures are theoretical and could shift. “The slow summer months are not yet included and therefore the projected variance could be overstated,” he said. Holtz closed by explaining how annualization works mathematically. A member then raised a concern about whether the financial statement had been received by email (it had), and another asked about the backlog of new member applicants.

## **GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS**

Joe Szladek, one of the general coordinators, began with a few announcements. He shared that the April General Meeting will be held at a new location: The theater at City Tech, located at 275 Jay Street in Brooklyn. The venue change was made “to accommodate the anticipated larger audience” for the discussion and a vote on the hybrid general meeting proposal. Szladek also announced two staffing updates: Guillermo Rojas Hernandez has started as a developer/programmer, and Eric Alger, a receiving coordinator, has left Coop employment. Szladek reminded members that the Coop’s hours had been extended.



Produce Buyer Cecelia Rembert asked for feedback.

Cecelia Rembert, one of the Coop's two produce buyers, shared seasonal highlights: "The citrus season is wrapping up, so if you have been enjoying the California citrus, do it now," she said, highlighting the Oro Blancos and mandarins.

She mentioned that berries are "mostly out of Mexico except for some blueberries from Chile," and while pricing deals aren't yet available, "look forward to that in a month or two, maybe in April and going into May." Apples are also winding down and will be replaced by New Zealand apples in the summer. Rembert also gave a grape outlook: Grapes are currently out of South Africa right now but will soon move to Mexican grapes, with California grape season beginning in June. Local vegetables are just beginning to arrive, including "some little gem lettuce from Lancaster next week," and "head lettuces coming the week after that."

She highlighted California-grown Delta Queen asparagus and noted they are "on the lookout" for sustainably harvested ramps: "There aren't that many farms that do that

that we feel comfortable with.” Fiddlehead ferns have arrived as “a good sign of spring,” and she reminded members, “Make sure to cook them.”

Rembert also shared that the Coop has seeds in soil right now, and a new pallet of soil will arrive mostly on Thursdays over the next six or seven weekends. The Coop will also be running its small plant program through the spring, which she described as “really fun.” During the Q&A, member Serko Artinian raised concerns about the freshness of the raspberries. Rembert explained: “Raspberries have the highest sugar content, and they mold the fastest; sometimes, there’s more age on them than we would like.” Another member asked about reduced plastic packaging and lower-quality organic produce coming to the Coop. Rembert responded, “No, I haven’t noticed that,” regarding suppliers dumping poor-quality items at the Coop.

Dory Kornfield, a member of the Equity, Access and Community Committee (EACC), announced the upcoming launch of the Coop’s first-ever member demographic survey. The goal is to gather basic information about the Coop membership through a quick 15-question, five-minute survey. She emphasized that this is “not a household survey,” it’s an individual survey for people 18 and over. The questions will cover neighborhood, household composition, disabilities status, as well as some general demographic questions: age, race, gender and sexual orientation.

“The reason we are doing this is because the Coop doesn’t collect any of this information and we don’t know who we are or enough about ourselves to know if we are as diverse and welcoming as we say we are,” she said, noting that the data could help “inform and guide policy decisions, processes in the Coop.”

She cited childcare as an example: “Childcare has been a hot topic for a couple of years now, but we actually don’t know how many members have kids.”

Dan Weiss, a member of the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) since 2017, gave an overview of the committee’s role and process. “The Dispute Resolution Committee—our charge is to facilitate the resolution of disputes among members.” Weiss ex-

plained the committee handles “complaints of member misconduct,” including “conflict, goods, shopping for businesses, masking violations, violations of personal space, intimidation, harassment, incomplete work on shift.”

He described the work as consensus-based and guided by “GM-approved resolution procedures,” with two membership coordinators serving as liaisons. Weiss emphasized the committee’s standards: “Our members approach their work without prejudice. We set aside our political opinions to ensure the fair and equitable process for our membership.” He also addressed a recent development: “This month, we made a difficult decision to halt certain types of cases involving political issues at the Coop. We’re in the midst of legal proceedings related to these matters.”

Until a “reasonable framework” is developed, those cases will remain on hold, which he said has precedent: “We’ve had legal proceedings in the past involving civil rights issues, and we’ve had to pause on those cases.”

Bart DeCoursy from the International Trade Education Squad (ITES) reported that the group had signed on to a USMCA review organizational letter ahead of the mandatory six-year review of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement. He outlined their hopes for renegotiation: “End the offshoring of good-paying jobs, raise wages, strengthen rural communities, stop abuses of big tech, make medicine more affordable.” DeCoursy also warned of the Trump administration’s announcement of “reciprocal tariffs” beginning April 2, including a “25 percent tariff on all goods from any country that imports Venezuelan oil.” He joked, “Almost by threatening one thing and walking it back, he could manipulate the market, but who’s to say—he also just might not know what he’s doing.” He encouraged members to follow the squad on Bluesky to keep up on all things international trade.

A representative from the Personnel Committee gave a brief update, noting that the committee currently has only five members instead of the usual seven. They announced that in the April 1st Gazette, there will be an ad asking for more members, and encouraged anyone with experience in employment law, general management,

staffing or conflict resolution to apply. The committee is also continuing the search for a new general coordinator to replace Joe Holtz: “Four people have been interviewed, and there’s one or two more to be interviewed, and that’s ongoing.”

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE ELECTION**

Existing DRC committee member Christopher Cox presented two new members up for election, Dorothy Lund and Olivia Goldberg, and four members who are up for reelection: Deb Magocsi, Lee Bantle, Melinda Daniels and Grace Protos. Cox noted that the committee received dozens of applications for these spots, “definitely more than we could handle,” and emphasized that this was “just the first step in helping rebuild the committee to handle our caseload.”



Dispute Resolution Committee candidate Olivia Goldberg addressed the meeting. New candidate Olivia Goldberg shared her long-standing Coop connection: “My parents met at the Coop’s 16th anniversary party in 1989, so I might not actually exist

without the Coop”—and cited her professional experience in early childhood education, the tree care industry and food service. Dorothy Lund, a law professor at Columbia University, touted her work studying how organizations manage conflict, saying her skills could help people “feel like they’ve been seen and heard.”

Returning members emphasized commitment, collaboration and deep Coop knowledge. Deborah Magocsi recalled joining when the committee’s name changed from “Disciplinary” to “Dispute Resolution” and said she strives to “listen with an open mind and an open heart.” Grace Protos said she valued being part of a process where “people feel as if they’re actually seen,” and noted that the work “comes in emails and phone calls and committee meetings” beyond standard shift hours. Melinda Daniels said she brings “patience, empathy and problem solving” and called it an honor to continue the work. Helen Koh read a statement from Lee Bantle, who was absent, in which he said his goal was “to take down the temperature when members are in conflict.”

During the Q&A, members raised serious concerns about the committee’s recent decision to pause certain politically sensitive cases. One asked: “If a member punches me and said it’s because I’m calling for a boycott, will your committee decline to consider my complaint?” Other questions addressed transparency, the onboarding process, and whether incumbents disputed how only six candidates were advanced. In response, Magocsi explained: “We can only bring a couple of members on at a time because it is a lengthy onboarding process.” Current members of the committee emphasized their hope to grow the DRC to 16 members, doubling the current size. The vote followed, with all six unopposed candidates elected to the board.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES**

The Board of Directors candidates all presented statements explaining why they should be elected. Dan Kaminsky submitted a video statement because he was attending “the biggest event in the pizza world... the Pizza Expo.” In his recorded statement, Kaminsky said he has been a Coop member since 2018 and is currently com-

pleting a master's in social work: "Quite literally, my master's degree is in the study and practice of Cooperation." Other candidates introduced themselves in person, including Serko Artinian, who presented data from his informal poll of members, attempting to find out what percentage of people exclusively shop at the Coop and identifying pain points that members raised.



Board candidate Taylor Pate spoke at the meeting.

Lynn Husum, a Carroll Gardens resident who successfully sold her company last year, said she hoped to use her business acumen to serve the Coop. Taylor Pate highlighted her experience on nonprofit boards and at other food coops: "I believe that the solidarity economy and Cooperative movements are how we build community power." Brandon West, the current board president, stressed his "institutional memory," having the best record for GM attendance of any current members. He also hopes to make the Coop more democratic, easier to understand and less volatile. Ralph Yozzo advocated for term limits and listening to members. Noah Potter invoked our current

president, saying he hopes to “Make the Coop Cooperative Again.” Elizabeth Tobier, the current Coop secretary, emphasized the importance of attendance at the General Meeting in her statement.

During the Q&A, candidates were asked to share what makes their platforms unique. Pate noted her “deep knowledge of supply chains” and experience with leadership transitions (something the Coop currently faces with the departure of Joe Holtz), while Potter sought to facilitate “intramembership communication” and update bylaws. Artinian proposed “building coalitions with other coops” and using tech to bring the Coop into the future.

Candidates also discussed Coop challenges. Tobier said the hardest part is learning “how to communicate Cooperatively.” West cited structural tensions: “There are now differing ideas about what the board should do.” Several, including Yozzo, stressed the importance of preserving the Coop’s Cooperative spirit: “It means we cooperate, not rip ourselves apart.”

Members also raised concerns about candidate affiliations. One member asked the candidates to disclose endorsements, with Potter and Yozzo confirming they were endorsed by Coop for Unity. Another member asked if candidates aligned with Coop Members for Palestine, which Tonier dismissed as irrelevant, adding that it “has nothing to do with being a board member.” Finally, candidates responded to a question about hybrid meetings. Most supported the idea, while Tobier reiterated her view that board members should remain neutral on any upcoming votes or agenda items: “Our personal feelings as members would not come into play.”

A question about favorite Coop products offered a reprieve: For Serko Artinian, the heirloom organic oranges and for Ralph Yozzo, the gluten-free bread that’s not frozen—“Literally my family went up to Chatham, New York where they come from and we bought it there and it costs less at the Coop than right at the warehouse.”

Noah Potter refused to answer, “Just one? I don’t know if I can do that.” Lynn Husum

shouted out the chickpea salad and the quiches that are no longer sold—“What happened to the quiches?” Taylor Pate said the White Mustache yogurt. West and Tobier both highlighted the beer selection.

*Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian and Park Slope local.*

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APRIL 22, 2025

June 24, 2025

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

*Editor's note: The April 29 General Meeting (GM) was to be held at the Theatre at City Tech University, a location the General Coordinators (GCs) chose to accommodate a large turnout expected in response to agenda items including a vote to establish hybrid GMs. On April 10, officials at City Tech notified the GCs that they were cancelling the Coop's rental reservation; they offered no explanation for this decision. In its wake, the GCs moved the coming April GM to the Picnic*

*House in Prospect Park and removed the hybrid vote from the agenda until further notice. The letters below were written before the cancellation at City Tech was known. Those members who wrote submissions regarding hybrid voting were given the opportunity to pull their letters from the Gazette. Members who opted to proceed with publication of their letters notwithstanding the late venue change appear below.*

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## **ONLINE, ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION AND VOTING**

To Coop members interested in more inclusive decision-making,

If the Coop wants members to “participat[e] in the Coop’s decision-making process,” it should make the process easy and convenient. General Meetings are neither.

I propose to create an online forum and virtual polling place where members can discuss and vote on agenda items ahead of GMs.

Online forums have been around since the 1970s. As a format for discussion, they have the following advantages over live meetings:

- **They are scalable.** One hundred people speaking for one minute each would take up almost the entire two hours of a GM. Online forums let more people participate, and people can contribute more considered responses.
- **They are more convenient.** Any reasonable time for the GM is also a time when the Coop is typically open, so at minimum, GMs exclude employees and other members working at the Coop during the meeting. Online forums would let everyone participate in the governance of the Coop, regardless of their schedules.
- **They are accessible to more people.** As a neurodivergent person, I have difficul-

ty processing information in real-time, including during live meetings. Online forums would make it easier for me to fully understand and make informed decisions on agenda items. They are also easier to make accessible for people with visual and auditory disabilities.

Online, asynchronous voting is also more scalable, convenient, and accessible than in-person, live voting. Around 4,000 people voted in the last Board of Directors elections, compared to the 240 that can fit in the Picnic House. Let's do that for all votes.

For details on how this could work, cost estimates and a comment form, please visit **[tinyurl.com/psfc-online-forum](http://tinyurl.com/psfc-online-forum)**. I would greatly appreciate people's thoughts on this proposal!

*Thank you,  
Yejia Chen*

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## **RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW**

Dear Gazette Editors,

*"Well, ya got trouble . . . right here in River City."*

- The Music Man

A great deal of time and energy has gone into the ongoing debate of whether or not to boycott a few products—in an official way—rather than letting Coop members make their own decisions. So much time and so much energy.

But now we have serious problems in our own country, problems that threaten our livelihoods, our health, our economy, our ability to make choices and many of the free-

doms we have taken for granted all of our lives. We need everyone to focus on this, using individual and collective efforts. Right here, right now.

*In Cooperation,  
Cynthia Blayer*

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## **EQUITY, ACCESS AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE (EACC) LWG STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HYBRID MEETINGS AND HYBRID VOTING AT PSFC GENERAL MEETING (GM)**

Dear Coop members:

The Equity, Access and Community Committee works to help ensure the Coop meets its mission, which states, “We are committed to diversity and equality. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store.”

In line with this mission, we observe that the in-person only attendance requirement for General Meetings is a barrier that dramatically reduces member participation. This unnecessary requirement, made obsolete by technology the Coop drew upon during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates inequities including: wealth, gender, race, geography, ability, family composition and others.

The upcoming April 29 vote on an agenda item to expand General Meetings from in-person only to hybrid is a crucial step toward the Park Slope Food Coop’s mission to maximize participation in policy-making and make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all. Decisions about the Coop are made at General Meetings. We should and must include as many members as possible so that they can attend, be heard and vote at General Meetings.

In-person only meetings make participation difficult—or impossible—for a wide swath of Coop members. Parents, caregivers, disabled and immunocompromised members, folks who live far from Prospect Park (where GMs are usually held), members employed in night work and other Coop members unable to attend a Tuesday evening meeting in Park Slope are essentially prohibited from the democratic governance of our Coop.

Hybrid meetings are one way to expand participation in shaping our Coop to folks for whom attending an in-person meeting is not possible. The Equity, Access and Community Committee strongly supports the measure to make General Meeting attendance and voting hybrid.

*In solidarity,*

*Jordan Dunn and Dory Kornfeld*

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## **MORE COMPASSION AND RESPECT, PLEASE**

To the Editors,

I love General Meetings. To me, coming together as a community to consider enhancements to the place where we buy our food is the Rockwellian ideal of civic engagement. Certainly, Coop members' passion for doing the right thing is an essential ingredient in the vibrancy of our cooperative grocery store.

But lately, one issue has turbo-charged moral striving, and allowed bitter factionalism to tarnish the utopian sheen of my family's primary source of nourishment. It's understandable that so much of our attention has turned to a conflict that has killed, maimed and displaced the relatives of many of our fellow members. Their anguish is not to be dismissed, nor should it matter "which side" they're on. But I can hold compassion for victims of this horrible conflict and still wonder:

How did so many members become convinced that adopting a singular stance on a complex and deeply fractious issue should be the Coop's highest priority?

How does aligning the Coop with an organization that does not recognize Israel's right to exist promote peace, or improve conditions in Gaza?

How do legal actions brought by members of Coop 4 Unity achieve anything resembling unity?

It is deeply unfortunate that so many members would rather attribute disagreement to moral failure than tolerate or attempt to understand opposition. Maybe this toxic penchant for oversimplifying very complex issues is related to the rampant smart-phone usage I've noticed during GMs these days. Whatever it is, I just wish we could recognize that "victory" at the Coop will neither ease pain nor improve the world. Only compassion and respect for each other, no matter how difficult, can do that.

*Best,*

*Brian Shuman*

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## **LET OUR VOICES BE HEARD—REALLY**

Member-owners,

Kudos to the Equity, Access and Community committee for their recent demographic survey, a step toward understanding members' identities and needs.

I hope the General Manager Search Committee will follow this lead and survey members about what's important in a new GM (whose salary, like all Coop employees, is funded by the markup we pay).

To date, the only communication we have received from the GM Search Team was emailed on 12/20/24. It concludes, *If you have questions or comments for the Search Committee, please contact us via this link: [bit.ly/PSFCgmquestion](https://bit.ly/PSFCgmquestion).*

Though any member who opened this email during that hectic December week had the option to “ask questions or make comments,” this is a far cry from seeking members’ input on what they want in a new GM.

This email was signed:

*The GM Search Committee*

*Yolanda McBride, Valerie Vadala, and Steve Jenkins, representing the Personnel Committee*

*Karen Mancuso and Charles Parham, representing the hourly paid staff*

*Ann Herpel and Matt Hoagland, representing the General Coordinator team*

Only three member-owners represent over 16,000 of us. I encourage them to be in full communication with all of us, to seek our opinions, and to make use of our experience and expertise.

I joined the Coop in 1978. We need a new General Manager who honors the Coop’s history of food and social justice and who helps us persevere at a time when outside forces encourage us to capitulate.

*Best,*

*Alyce Barr*

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## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AMONG BOARD MEMBERS**

Dear Fellow members:

The race for Board of Directors seats begins.

Eight members are running for two seats on the Board. Two of the candidates (Taylor Pate and Dan Kaminsky) are part of PSFC Members 4 Palestine, pushing the Coop to boycott Israel—a campaign that is tearing our Coop apart. Two other candidates (Noah Potter and Ralph Yozzo) have been endorsed by the Coop 4 Unity group fighting to preserve the Coop’s autonomy, harmony and financial stability.

At the March general meeting, during the Q&A of the candidates, a member asked about a complaint (to the State Division of Human Rights) filed by a member who was active in the Coop 4 Unity group, and whether it would be a conflict of interest for the Coop 4 Unity candidates to be on the Board.

The answer: No, because the member who filed the complaint did so on his own initiative, none of the other Coop 4 Unity members are involved in it, and that member is not running for the Board.

You know what IS a conflict of interest? Actively pursuing a campaign that is dividing the Coop and creating hostility among the members—which is what current Directors Keyian Vafai and Tess Brown-Lavoie are doing.

*Many kind thanks,*

*Zara Watkins*

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## WHAT'S THEIR VERSION OF TRANSPARENCY?

Greetings:

At the March membership meeting, a BDS adherent stated that a director candidate endorsed by Coop 4 Unity would have a conflict of interest due to the “Coop 4 Unity lawsuit” (actually a proceeding at the State Department of Human Rights). As a candidate endorsed by C4U, I responded that there is no such lawsuit: a member affiliated with C4U brought the claim on his own behalf, not ‘on behalf’ of or in coordination with C4U.

Here’s a fuller response. The only possible conflicts I can imagine would be if a C4U-affiliated director were (a) to share confidential information (such as legal advice from the Coop’s counsel) with the claimant, or (b) to compel a settlement on terms that are unfair to the Coop. Even if there were a conflict, (a) I have no reason to believe that any director would have access to confidential information without assistance from staff—which I assume would not be given, and it is a standard practice for corporate directors in such situations to be excluded from (i) discussions of the claim and (i-i) any vote relating to the claim. I challenge the member asserting a potential breach of fiduciary duty to state the basis for her belief. (Incidentally, this discussion shows the need to evaluate comprehensive bylaw amendments.)

Letters to the *Gazette* in support of the boycott from two board candidates appear on the Members 4 Palestine’s website (<https://psfc4palestine.org/boycott-letters/> letters dated 3/19/24 and 1/7/25). Pate was a moderator of M4P’s January 2025 teach-in. When the candidates were questioned whether their platforms and beliefs align with M4P, she did not respond; Dan Kaminsky was not present to answer. Neither one’s candidacy statement mentions their M4P affiliation.

What is M4P’s version of transparency?

## **FEELING BAD ABOUT THE COOP**

Greetings:

I feel upset. We should be spending these next few months celebrating the remarkable accomplishments of Joe Holtz during his 50-year tenure as General Manager. Under Joe's stewardship we achieved the improbable. We should all feel gratitude and satisfaction and be looking forward to the Coop's continued success and stability.

Instead, the Coop is held hostage by a group of members who have introduced division, distrust and enmity into the Coop. They seek to impose ideological conformity, disregarding differing perspectives.

I feel betrayed. The Coop is built on trust, goodwill and respect. Members say, "If only one person is affected, we should...." or "We must have dialog and understanding." Yet our concerns are ignored, even mocked. Requests for dialogue are dismissed. The committees tasked with addressing disputes appear to be at best indifferent, at worst hostile.

I feel disappointed. The General Coordinators responsible for the Coop's success have clearly stated the risks posed by PSFC Members for Palestine (M4P) three part strategy:

1. Hybrid General Meetings
2. Simple majority boycott threshold
3. Boycott Israeli products.

The General Coordinators, the Agenda Committee and the Chair Committee all have the authority to reject these reckless proposals.

Instead, at great cost to the Coop, they proceed.

I feel disrespected. The violence motivated by “Free Palestine” is real and directed against Jews. No other movement targeting any other identity group would ever be considered in the Coop.

Yet, we are forced to spend our precious free time defending ourselves. By allowing this motion to proceed, the Coop legitimizes a proposal that threatens our safety, even if it is rejected. The Coop is saying it’s acceptable to promote violence against Jews. Therefore, we resist.

I feel unwelcome and no one cares.

*Barbara Mazor*

*Editor’s Note: Barbara Mazor states that the GCs, Agenda Committee and Chair have the authority to “reject these reckless proposals.” That is incorrect; the GCs and Chair committee have no authority to prohibit agenda items. Only the agenda committee has the authority as defined by the GM to create the agenda. The agenda committee is the body in the Coop’s governance which is authorized to create the GM agenda. Nowhere in the organization’s governance documents are the GCs or the Chair given that authority.*

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## **IN THE SPIRIT OF MUTUAL EDUCATION**

Dear Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones,

I was pleased to see that you read my article regarding the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat and that you appreciated the parallel between humans and trees in terms of how we both grow and develop by way of self-abnegation (trees through a seed disintegrating into the ground, and humans through humbling ourselves by way of nullifying our egos).

As you alluded to, the verse from which I excerpted the phrase "For man is a tree in the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19) is indeed on a literal level a reference to how we are instructed to behave during wartime.

It is certainly unfortunate that Hamas has set up so many of its terror bases in such close proximity to trees to have resulted in such environmental devastation in Gaza.

Getting back to the focus of my original article however, it is well known amongst Torah scholars that there are a multitude of ways in which the Torah can be read and understood. The Hebrew language is replete with inner and multitudinous meanings, deeming all translations somewhat inadequate.

It is taught that there are four basic lenses through which the Torah can be read, known as: *Pshat* (Simple), *Remez* (Allegorical), *Drush* (Homiletical) and *Sod* (Secret/Mystical).

While you correctly cited the meaning of the verse on a Pshat (Simple) level, I was sharing a well-known Sod (Secret/Mystical) understanding based on Chassidic and Kabbalistic teachings.

If you'd be interested in learning more about how to understand the Torah through a more mystical lens, let's set up a *chavruta* (lit. "learning partner/friend"), meaning, I'd like to offer that we learn together in friendship. I would love to hear from you.

*Sarede Rachel Switzer*

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## **WHAT'S THE TRUE CO\$T OF HYBRID MEETINGS?**

Greetings:

I've built numerous hybrid events and can confirm they require significant investment in time, equipment, technical staff and platform subscriptions.

Organizations that rush into hybrid formats inevitably face low online attendance, technical glitches and unexpected costs that could have been anticipated with proper planning.

Recently, a Members for Palestine advocate claimed hybrid meetings would have “no financial impact” on the Coop. This statement simply isn't based in reality.

Before making such a significant change to our organization, we need proper due diligence. I propose that interested members join me to:

- Create a cost-benefit analysis with multiple scaled options
- Design a detailed technology implementation plan
- Solicit vendor proposals with actual costs
- Develop a comprehensive budget for review
- Set aside political differences for the Coop's benefit

Claims that raising these concerns is “fearmongering” ignore the real challenges of hybrid implementation. A concept is not a plan.

Until we do this work, please vote NO on April 29. I've reached out to M4P for their cost estimates and welcome collaboration on creating a proper proposal that address-

es these practical realities.

*Respectfully,  
Meg Robertson  
Member, Coop 4 Unity*

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## **WAIT WAIT...DON'T DOX ME!**

Dear Members:

The Gazette editors' grace was now ending

As our members had long been sensing

"He submits and submits"

"Wish he'd find a new hobby that sticks"

Still a guy who defends ethnic cleansing.

*Lauren Hudson*

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## **EVIDENCE THAT "HYBRID" GENERAL MEETINGS ARE A BAD IDEA**

To Members:

There has been much clamoring lately in favor of switching to "hybrid" General Meetings (GMs), so that members who cannot attend in person can nevertheless partici-

pate. “Hybrid” GMs could also be useful when no space can accommodate member interest in an agenda item.

Looking at the actual history of GM attendance when all meetings were held remotely shows that making the GMs hybrid will not draw more members. The first two meetings did have much higher participation than usual. I do not have the actual record of how many came to the May and June 2020 meetings, but I think it reached 500 or 600. From the General Meeting minutes, below are the numbers in attendance at GMs at the highpoint in the meeting (people came and went throughout).

Another way of solving the problem of membership interest exceeding venue space for certain GMs is to change the bylaws to accommodate allowing GMs to be held over Zoom only in those instances.

Record of member attendance at remotely-held General Meetings:

May	2020	No record
June	2020	No record
July	2020	341
August	2020	451
September	2020	221
October	2020	169
November	2020	No meeting
December	2020	170
January	2021	131
February	2021	205
March	2021	200

April	2021	207
May	2021	110
June	2021	127
July	2021	187
August	2021	127
September	2021	170
October	2021	95
November	2021	130
December	2021	No meeting
January	2022	154
February	2022	105
March	2022	100
April	2022	123
May	2022	120
June	2022	86
July	2022	149
August	2022	112
September	2022	165
October	2022	201
November	2022	126
December	2022	No meeting
January	2023	116
February	2023	121

March	2023	116
April	2023	85
May	2023	128
June	2023	72
July	2023	80
August	2023	61

*Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Tobier*

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## **QUESTIONS ON FUNDING PROPOSED HYBRID MEETINGS**

Greetings:

Who and how will the current hybrid meeting proposal be funded for over 16,000 people?

Multibillion-dollar companies regularly host online, verified hybrid meetings. However, these organizations have fully dedicated staff members and business units allocated specifically to this function.

We are a community-based organization in Brooklyn. The reality—which should be abundantly clear to anyone who has engaged with any financial documentation that the Coop has produced recently—is that we do not have the cash capital of a multibillion-dollar organization.

My request to members proposing this new format is quite simple: Where within our budget will the monetary cost be absorbed for investment in hybrid meetings, not on-

ly for technology, but also for the operational fees associated with staffing to set up and maintain the rigor of the meeting? Who will ensure that a physical space accommodates engagement for online members? And most importantly: who will validate and authenticate that only members join meetings virtually?

I love the idea of making meetings more accessible for all, but in its current state, the hybrid meeting proposal lacks the clarity and rigor necessary to make meetings accessible for all.

*Thank you,  
Zachary Zaban*

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## **WHAT A “REFERENDUM” ENTAILS AND MEANS**

Greetings:

*Lady Bracknell: To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. (Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest)*

As a 20-year member of the Park Slope Food Coop I used to hear the word “referendum” and assumed that it meant that we polled the entire membership and truly found out the general will of the membership.

About 15 years ago, I argued regarding some Coop loan program that we have 14,000 members and shouldn’t we hear from them before we vote??

I attended that 2012 vote about boycott at Brooklyn Tech. I was amazed at the turnout; the line was all the way around the building and the meeting went on for hours.

I thought for sure all these people wouldn't vote against a vote. I was incorrect.

To answer the question. It turns out a referendum is only of those who choose to vote. And the current numbers show that a recent high of 2,802 people voted yes in the recent board of directors election for one candidate. That's 2,802 out of 16,000 approximate members. Or 17.5% of the membership.

The general membership should be aware that if you create a mailing list or social group of several thousand people in the Food Coop that will listen to the group's endorsements (given the current voter turnout) you can significantly affect the future of the Coop.

What appears to be the "silent majority" may not be aware of that fact. And this is a small attempt to shine some light on it.

*Ralph Yozzo*

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## **BETTER DEMOCRACY THROUGH THOUGHTFUL REFORM—NOT JUST HYBRID**

Greetings:

There is growing momentum to create a more representative and deliberative governing process; one that works for parents, the immunocompromised, staff and for the tech-savvy and tech-limited alike. As a busy parent, I understand the call for increased accessibility to General Meetings. At the same time, a fundamental change to our governing structure **MUST** be approached with care.

The Members 4 Palestine endorsed proposal focuses only on a bylaw change to enable hybrid meetings.

Though hybrid meetings may *appear* to increase accessibility, they also introduce a new online space that can quickly devolve into something toxic. Online debate has a way of flattening contentious issues into the same kind of venomous discussions which rage on Twitter/Reddit...pitting one avatar against another. The hybrid proposal offers no mechanism to ensure digital engagement is constructive, equitable and safe.

In order to enable members to cooperatively solve problems, we need clear and effective policies in place BEFORE we amend our bylaws.

We also need to widen the lens through which we view this issue; we should not risk further polarization without genuine reform. There have been several other proposals that have appealing ideas. For example, Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner shared his ideas in a Gazette submission ("A New Coop Democracy" 10/15). To my knowledge, there are several other proposals as well.

To affect true and meaningful change, we should form a committee to design a governance structure that strengthens member voices and democratic participation. This committee would comprehensively study the issues and flesh out all related proposals in order to evaluate their risks and benefits and take the best of each.

*In cooperation,*  
*Tali Rasis*

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## **ANTI-HYBRIDERS WANT US TO CUT OFF OUR NOSE TO SPITE OUR FACE**

Dear Coop members:

The Food Coop's mission statement reads "We are committed to diversity and equali-

ty. We oppose discrimination in any form. We strive to make the Coop welcoming and accessible to all and to respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every member. We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store.”

Hybrid GMs would FINALLY fulfill this commitment to extend policy-making powers to ALL 17,000 of us. For the past 53 years, this right has been reserved only for those privileged enough to attend in-person.

General Coordinators and pro-Israel members don't want Hybrid and want to “cut off our nose to spite our face” by voting against our best and democratic interests. The boogie man? The proposal to de-shelve Israeli products made by an apartheid regime actively engaging in collective punishment of 2 million Palestinians through forced starvation, genocide, ethnic cleansing and land theft. It's offensive that a call for racial justice and human rights is leveraged to shut down hybrid meetings that would finally allow a democratic structure for all 17,000 of us. Don't want to boycott Israel? Then vote against it during a hybrid meeting. Several other pending proposals: reduce our reliance on plastic bags; bring back the bulletin board for member usage; bring back the print version of *Linewaiters' Gazette* and possibly more.

We used zoom during COVID. THIS was our “feasibility study.” Create a hybrid squad to overcome tech problems. One anti-hybridizer suggested Coop-approved exemptions only for the sick, disabled and parents with young kids to attend virtual GMs. Another wants only some proposals to be voted through hybrid.

REJECT ANYTHING THAT DOESN'T ALLOW ALL OF US TO PARTICIPATE BY HYBRID FOR EVERY GM. Anyone who continues to deprive all of this right are obstructionists to a truly democratic Coop.

*In solidarity,*

*Hima B.*

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## **PLEASE CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENTAL TOLL IN GAZA**

Dear Fellow Members,

I am a long-time Coop member with a form of cancer linked to asbestos exposure. It's an experience I wouldn't wish on anybody. I flinch when I even see the word "asbestos," let alone when I hear about new incidents of environmental contamination with this horrific poison. Recently I read a story in the Electronic Intifada: "Asbestos Dust Threat Looms Over Much of Gaza" (published March 24). I learned that Israel's destruction of an estimated 92 percent of housing units in Gaza has created some 39 million tons of debris, much of it asbestos-laden (UN figures). Pulmonologist Dr. Shadi Awad of Al-Shifa Hospital describes the consequences: "polluted air enters the airways and directly impacts lung tissues." Those who escape cancer may develop other severe respiratory disorders.

It's easy to feel distanced from atrocities occurring thousands of miles away. I have not felt detached from the suffering in Gaza, but reading this story renewed my sense of urgency. I can't bear to think of small children (those "lucky" ones who survive the current carnage) going on to develop asbestos-related lung diseases. Given Israel's deliberate targeting of medical infrastructure, will appropriate treatment even be available?

Coop members have the option to join a powerful global movement that refuses complicity with these horrors. We can send a clear signal to our own government, the chief patron of Israel's rampage: We refuse cooperation with genocide and occupation.

Don't fall for the argument that our Coop is too small to make a meaningful difference.

Or that it's not worth "upsetting" Coop members who support a genocidal ethnostate. Action on the local level is exactly what's needed to chip away at the wall of impunity that permits unspeakable crimes to continue unchecked. Please join PSFC4Palestine in calling for an Israeli products boycott.

*In Cooperation,*  
*[Name Withheld]*