COST CUTTING, THE BULLETIN BOARD, AND A $4,000 QUESTION: NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

April 1, 2025

April 1, 2025

By Nikia Dawkins

At the start of February's General Meeting, Chair David Moss announced that the Dispute Resolution Committee election would be postponed, which left just one issue on the official agenda. It was an issue that elicited excitement, frustration and personal accusations, an issue near and dear to the hearts of many—the Coop bulletin board. During an evening spent discussing hybrid meetings, unexpected financial loss and the search for a new general manager, the most hotly debated issue of the night was where this hypothetical bulletin board should be located.

But first, the open forum began with an impassioned plea from member Spike Kahn about the need for hybrid meetings. While wearing a mask, Kahn argued that hybrid meetings would allow more accessibility for members like herself who are immunocompromised or otherwise unable to attend in person, adding that they would also be more democratic because Prospect Park's Picnic House is not large enough to accommodate the entire Coop community. Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Joe Szladek addressed concerns that the GCs are fundamentally against hybrid meetings. "We are not opposed to considering it," he said, "but are concerned about the impact and how it will be implemented." He went on to raise the following questions: How do we ensure that only Coop members have access and that no one video records or screenshots the meetings? How do we determine who can be remote and who must be there in person? And, finally, how much will it cost? Szladek advised that one tech company gave him a quote of $4,000 per meeting. "And when I asked if we could DIY, they laughed," he said. Szladek floated the idea that we could, perhaps, purchase equipment and use skilled member labor instead of a third party, but right now there are more questions than answers. He bemoaned that a lot of these issues weren't properly addressed by those who initially proposed the idea. "Yes, they were!" said Carol Wald from the audience, after which a few other members raised their hands to speak on the topic, but Chair Moss determined there wasn't enough time left for discussion on the matter.

General Manager Joe Holtz presented the Treasurer's Report, in which he compared the financial projections from 2023 to the financial actualities of 2024. It had been projected that the Coop would have a positive gain of $25,000, but the Coop actually lost

$420,000. Sales last year were up 6.68%, but income was down due to a lower markup and higher-than-expected expenses, including health benefits, electronic payment fees, and business insurance. The unexpected portion of the expenses totaled $438,000, with the bulk of that being the unexpected increase in health benefits, which cost $312,000 more than projected. However, despite these negative variances, the Coop still ended the year with $247,000 in positive cash flow. So, overall, there was an increase in cash despite a loss of income. A few members requested more information about the unexpected increase in expenses. Holtz explained that health insurance rates are skyrocketing across the country, adding that the Coop did tweak the employee health plan to save a little money, and now it is more expensive to seek treatment out-of-network. With regard to insurance, he wanted to make sure the Coop could be rebuilt if it were, say, hit by an asteroid or otherwise demolished, so coverage had to be increased. Finally, Holtz shared that he's working on getting into a program that will lower fees for electronic payments and that the newly extended shopping hours will also help improve Coop finances.

Later, during the General Coordinators' Reports, Elinoar Astrinsky outlined several ways that members can also help to cut costs. She said that members are now being used for front end support on the shopping floor, a decision designed to decrease staff hours. She suggested that members sign up for squad leader roles and repair shifts to further decrease the Coop's expenses. Most of the repair work requires skill and expertise (so if you *are* experienced, please sign up!), but some of the work can be done by almost anyone, such as painting. She stressed that using member labor instead of hired help saves a lot of money, and that many squad leaders are aging out or retiring, so we need a new generation to step up. On a similar note, Chairwoman and Board Member Imani Q'ryn informed the crowd that she would be retiring in June, which means that we will need a new chair committee member and a new board member to replace her.

Valerie Vadala from the Personnel Committee said they were still reviewing candidates for the new General Manager and had whittled the pool down to four people who would be interviewed in the coming weeks. She said that replacing Joe Holtz, who's been with us for 50 years, won't be easy. They're looking for someone both innovative and with the appropriate level of experience, who can handle the volume and intensity of the Coop.

Speaking on behalf of the International Trade Education Committee, Bart DeCoursy reported that Trump's tariffs would begin on April 2, raising U.S. inflation by 0.8%. He encouraged members to visit BlueSky for more information as the economic impact will be ongoing and extensive.

At this point, the meeting moved to the official agenda, and Keyian Vafai gave a presentation explaining the history of the Coop bulletin board, from its initial creation in the 1980s to its removal in 2020 due to Covid precautions and fire code regulations. There is now an official Coop-business-only bulletin board in the corner entrance, and he proposed that members should be allowed to use it as well. His presentation was followed by that of Katheryn Keller, who argued that reinstating the bulletin board would foster connection, provide access to trustworthy local resources, and encourage non-digital engagement. A small-business owner herself, she said that over the years, she was able to find a pet sitter, a subletter and multiple clients via the old bulletin board, and she believes that reinstating it would create a lifeline for service providers and freelancers, as well as a shared information hub for events and opportunities. She also presented the results of a member survey she created to determine the level of interest in the bulletin board, and although she was only able to survey 375 out of 17,000 members, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Almost everyone seemed excited about the bulletin board—so excited, in fact, that there was a flurry of ideas. For every idea, however, there was an opposing idea, and for every point a counterpoint. The main issues revolved around the location of the bulletin board and the supervision of its content. Two members were extremely concerned that Vafai, who is a vocal supporter of Palestine, would weaponize the bulletin board to promote and organize the BDS movement. Vafai calmly replied, "I won't be running it," which left members arguing over whether anyone needed to run it. As for its location, members were divided on whether it should be located in the corner entrance (which is, perhaps, too small for such use), in the stairwell (where it originally existed but which may not meet fire code regulations or provide enough accessibility), just outside the Coop (which could exacerbate the Coop's current litter problem), or in place of the lockers near the entrance. The animated discussion was ultimately ended by Chair Moss because it was "really in the weeds."

The Board then voted to approve the minutes of the January GM after no one had any suggested changes, and the meeting disbanded.

Nikia Dawkins is a creative writer, journalist, and night owl.

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING REPORT: HIGH TENSIONS ON A COLD NIGHT AND A COOP DIVIDED

April 1, 2025

March 11, 2025

By William Doran

Coop members warmed themselves around pots of soup outside the Prospect Park Picnic House, awaiting entry for the January General Meeting (GM).

Once everyone was settled inside, the evening's agenda hovered above gathered members on a large projection screen. While there were other topics discussed, three contentious issues took up most of the two-and-a-half-hour gathering: boycotts, hybrid general meetings and committee elections.

OPEN FORUM

Several members spoke in favor of boycotting Israeli products and expressed disappointment in two General Coordinators' articles published in the January *Gazette.*

Some members who spoke that night chose to only give their first names.

A Coop member, Jim, argued that, “When the Coop was founded in the ’70s, we boycotted products from apartheid South Africa, despite the fact that the United States, under multiple presidents, had official policies protecting South Africa.”

Another member, Judy, pushed for open discussion: “The Coop is a member-led organization dedicated to democracy and to making the world a better place. Members need to be able to have this discussion. It’s been put off and refused to be discussed for over 10 years.”

Aaron, a member, labeled the General Coordinators’ stance in the *Gazette* as fear-mongering: “The place to mediate disagreements is at these general meetings. As a Jew, I’m pretty familiar with fear-mongering rhetoric around the non-violent protest movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).”

A self-organized group, Coop 4 Unity, spoke against the boycott, calling for unity among members and extending an invitation to engage boycott supporters in dialogue. Another member, Barbara, directly criticized boycott supporters, saying: “You don’t understand the movement you’re promoting, or you are willfully lying to all of us. And to this group I’m going to ask you, do you value the Coop more than you hate Israel? And to everyone else I ask, if you value the Coop, then please, we have to do something to stop them.”

Aaron

Hana


Hima

Boycott supporters have also self-organized as PSFC 4 Palestine, publishing a zine called *The Olive Press*, which they distributed outside before the meeting, along with the aforementioned soup.

Members criticized the 75% majority voting threshold for boycotts, citing important decisions regularly made via simple majority, such as board elections and markup increases. To applause and laughter, a Coop member, Hana, sardonically identified several other things that could become policy with a simple majority: “We could allow suspended members to shop, but only if they wear a scarlet ‘S’ around their neck. We [could] make all Coop general meetings black-tie only. We could even refrigerate beer.”

Another member, Hima, criticized the concept of in-person-only general meetings: “This group of people here, we represent 2% of the membership. Why should we be the only exclusive club that gets to vote on any issues?” Hima continued, “During

COVID, we saw that technology is definitely available and accessible. It's exploitative that 100% of us work, but only 2% of us can actually vote."

> "I CAN'T MEASURE THE IMPACT. IT WOULD BREAK MY HEART FOR PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COOP JUST BECAUSE THEY DON'T AGREE WITH A COOP POLICY," SAID JOE HOLTZ, REGARDING THE PROPOSED BOYCOTT.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Coop's net income dropped by about $525,000 from the previous year, due largely to a 1% reduction in the base markup, which returned to 25% at the start of the 2026 fiscal year in February. In 2020, members voted to increase the markup from 21% to 25% to combat pandemic losses. It was later reduced to 24% to alleviate some of the pressure on members.

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz stressed of the decrease, "You can't eat the markup, but you can eat the food." He highlighted cost of goods sold (the value of goods prior to markup) as a better indicator of how the Coop performed which was up roughly $3 million over last year. He noted that member equity—the value of what we all own together, minus debts—stayed consistent from 2023 to 2024 at $8.73 million.

Member questions shifted the focus back to boycotts, requesting financials to support the General Coordinators' stance against the boycotts that were published in the January *Gazette.* The January 7, 2025, piece, with a byline from the "General Coordinator Team," titled, "Coordinator's Corner: Our Coop at Risk," warned, in part: "Financial fallout from a boycott could force tough decisions such as raising prices or laying off staff."

Holtz responded, "I can't measure the impact. It would break my heart for people to leave the Coop just because they don't agree with a Coop policy." Calling attention to thousands of members on both sides of the issue, Holtz said that taking a stance is a risky prospect, and that the Coop cannot afford to lose members. “I believe that cooperators are precious, and I don’t want to lose any of you.”

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORTS

General Coordinator Lisa Moore validated member complaints about adherence to election protocols, citing that the Agenda Committee missed the deadline to publish an announcement in the *Gazette* prior to elections last year, and it did not announce the opening at the September 2024 GM.

She quieted doubts, however, about the legitimacy of the election in question, saying: “There’s no evidence suggesting that these committees intentionally omitted their announcements from the *Gazette.* Nor should the omission cast doubts on the validity of the elections.”

She called for an update to the Coop’s Guide for General Meetings and Annual Meetings to include guidelines on vacancy announcements and potential consequences for omitting the required steps mentioned. Moore noted, “All committees should be held to the same standard to ensure transparency, cultivate trust and encourage participation among all members.” She invited interested members to submit their information to psfcac@gmail.com, reiterating that there are still openings on the Agenda Committee.

Lastly, she indicated that the Coop has identified several 800-seat (or larger) venues for in-person voting on hybrid meetings. The Agenda Committee will reach out to the proposal’s presenters to select a date.

Lisa Moore


Joe Szladek
General Coordinator Joe Szladek closed the presentation of GC reports by reminding everyone of the Coop’s early closing on February 1 for annual inventory.

EIGHT MEMBERS PROPOSED A NEW COMMITTEE TO SHRINK COOP RELIANCE ON PLASTIC. THE COMMITTEE WOULD SOLICIT COOP-MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND WORK WITH STAFF TO IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT CONCRETE CHANGES.

MEMBER COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Pension Education and Reporting Committee solicited members to submit questions for the Committee’s upcoming annual report in the *Gazette.*

The Personnel Committee shared progress on its search for a new General Manager to replace Joe Holtz, who will retire in June of 2025. The committee anticipates selection by late spring of this year. The job posting and salary are publicly available on the Coop's website.

The International Trade Education Committee highlighted potential impacts of Trump Administration tariffs and encouraged members to read "What New Trump Tariffs Would Mean for the Coop," published in the *Gazette* last December by *Gazette* reporter Leila Darabi.

PLASTIC REDUCTION

Eight members proposed a new committee to shrink Coop reliance on plastic. The committee would solicit Coop-member participation and work with staff to identify and implement concrete changes.

Fifteen-year-member Jessica Roff supported the need for such a committee by sharing some staggering statistics: "Of all the plastic produced [in the U.S.] since 1950, 91% has never been recycled." She continued, "Many of the things that make plastic problematic to recycle are the same things that harm our bodies and the environment. There are more than 16,000 chemicals in plastic."

Roff and many of the other presenters advocating for the committee's creation combat environmental hazards in their professional lives. They outlined opportunities and challenges while acknowledging the Coop's significant history of environmental advocacy and valuable insights that could come from Coop members and staff.

Members expressed gratitude for the group's work and posed questions about how to forge ahead. Things like reuseable, member-provided containers came up, as well as frustration over the lack of plastic-free options for some food items, like milk. Presenters emphasized that this must happen in community to be successful. Members can submit questions and ideas to reduce.plastic.psfc@gmail.com.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Meeting Chair Imani Q'Ryn announced that this may be her last meeting, after serving the Coop for 20 years. Many cheered and offered standing applause, expressing thanks for her service.

The Board of Directors voted to accept the advice of the general membership. Director Tim Hospodar addressed how the Coop's board of directors meets, acknowledging that this portion of the GM is the one time that the board is mandated to meet, however brief.

Imani Q'Ryn seated at left

Tim Hospodar

He suggested leveraging this time as an opportunity to more adeptly engage general membership and discuss important issues. Hospodar proposed, "…Perhaps we can maximize this chance to discuss topics that the board finds concerning or disconcerting. He continued, "The Board of Directors does not have a dedicated part of the meeting to report out or raise our concerns."

Ironically, the discussion was cut short for the sake of time, and the GM adjourned.

William Doran is a licensed architect, educator and food writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Though originally from New Orleans, LA, he has been a Coop member and New York City resident since 2022. He has taught cooking classes for the Coop (foodcoopcooks.org) and publishes a free quarterly newsletter at adventurouscooks.com.

COORDINATORS' CORNER: CLARIFYING OUR POSITION ON HYBRID MEETINGS

April 1, 2025

March 11, 2025

By the General Coordinator Team

Over the past several months, discussions surrounding hybrid General Meetings (GM-s) have led to accusations that the General Coordinators (GCs) are against hybrid meetings and, therefore, against increased member participation and democracy. That is simply not true.

We are not opposed to hybrid meetings. What we are opposed to is implementing a major governance change without a clear understanding of its impact. We urge all members to take a careful approach to this issue and first prioritize a study of hybrid meetings before implementation.

To further clarify our position, here are three separate excerpts from a recent *Linewaiters' Gazette* article by the GC Team titled, "Coordinators' Corner: Our Coop at Risk.":

We are not opposed to studying and considering other formats for the General Meeting, including hybrid meetings.

While hybrid meetings could enhance accessibility and participation, such a significant governance change requires careful study. It has been the Coop's decades-long tradition to form a committee to study any proposed changes to Coop governance before bringing the changes to a GM.

Before voting, members need answers to important questions: How will member privacy and security be protected? How will the potentially high costs of well-executed hybrid meetings be managed? What impact will hybrid participation have on the GM's deliberative process? What other logistical challenges do hybrid meetings present, including ensuring that members attending in-person and those attending virtually have equivalent experiences? Until these concerns are addressed, this proposal should not move forward.

> CALLING FOR A STUDY ISN'T A DELAY TACTIC, BUT A RESPONSIBLE STEP TO ENSURE THAT HYBRID MEETINGS, IF IMPLEMENTED, ARE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE.

WHY STUDY HYBRID MEETINGS BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION?

For over 50 years, our governance model has helped to avoid making hasty decisions that could have an outsized impact on the Coop. Some examples include:

- Acquiring a second location. This discussion item had a great deal of support. However, after the conclusion of a lengthy study and submission of a final proposal, the item was voted down at a General Meeting in 2023.
- In October 1994, the GM voted to create a Committee that would study Coop governance and come up with proposed changes that would be in compliance with New York State laws.
- In 1985, the General Meeting voted to create the Ad Hoc Governance Committee to study possible alternative governance systems for the Coop to adopt.

Conducting a study prior to implementing hybrid meetings would keep with a decades-long tradition of carefully scrutinizing any major Coop changes prior to implementation and should provide answers to reasonable questions and concerns that members have, including:

EQUITY ISSUES

How will the Coop ensure:

- Remote and in-person attendees have an equivalent GM experience?
- All GM attendees, remote and in-person, have an equal opportunity to speak, engage and vote?

SECURITY & ELIGIBILITY

How will the Coop ensure:

- Only Coop members attend, listen and vote remotely, as required by our policies?
- Screen captures and recordings by members do not occur?

DELIBERATION & ENGAGEMENT

- How do we prevent members from logging in solely to vote, without engaging or hearing the discussion?
- How do we preserve the deliberative nature of GMs?

COSTS & LOGISTICS

- What are the financial and technical requirements for facilitating high-quality hybrid meetings, and how will those costs be managed?

ATTENDANCE

- Will some members and committees be required to attend in-person, or will attendance be optional, potentially leading to minimal in-person participation and wasted resources for in-person setup?
- During the final months of fully remote General Meetings—when access was available to all members—attendance was very low, averaging fewer participants than current in-person meetings. How do we ensure hybrid meetings do not face the same issues?

A DELAY TACTIC?

Calling for a study isn’t a delay tactic, but a responsible step to ensure that hybrid meetings, if implemented, are both effective and equitable. Important questions left unanswered before a vote still need to be addressed before implementation. That’s why we strongly recommend that a committee of members evaluate these concerns in advance. By doing so, if hybrid meetings are approved, this critical work will be completed beforehand, rather than becoming solely the responsibility of Coop staff, who may not have the capacity to take it on immediately after the vote.

SAFEGUARDING OUR COOP'S FUTURE

Our goal remains the same: to preserve the Coop's ability to thrive for years to come. Taking a careful and deliberative approach to a major change like instituting hybrid meetings isn't resisting change—it's about ensuring that a change preserves and strengthens, rather than weakens, what we have built together.

Join us in safeguarding our Coop's future:

- Support studying hybrid meetings before implementation.
- Engage in respectful, informed discussions about governance changes.
- Attend GMs and participate in shaping the future of the Coop.

DECEMBER GENERAL MEETING REPORT

April 1, 2025

January 7, 2025

By Kim Velsey

The crowd at the Picnic House was somewhat light on December 3, a cold and blustery night. Though members who showed up engaged in a vigorous discussion about bringing back the print edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. While many members were enthusiastic about the idea, others raised concerns about the cost, labor and equipment that would be needed to return to a print *Gazette*, which went fully digital during the pandemic. At the end of the night, members approved a proposal to conduct a feasibility study on bringing it back.

Open Forum

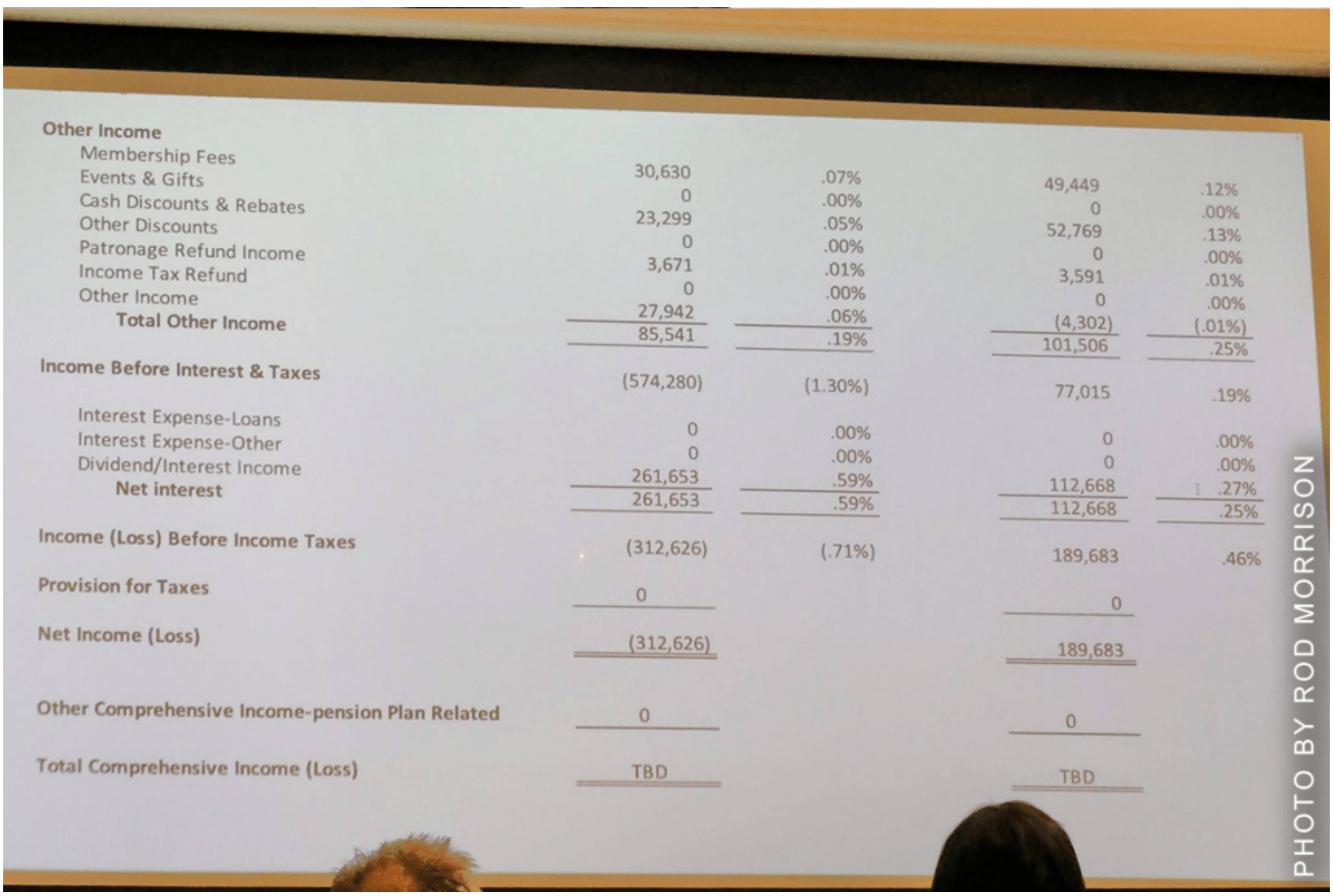
Several members posed questions during the Open Forum segment. One, who has an agenda item up requiring mediation between those for and against Israeli boycotts before any votes are taken, asked about expediting agenda items. Another noted how unique the Coop is and how important it is to keep that in mind when having heated discussions. A third spoke about her experiences joining the Coop in 1978, praising the economic diversity at that time, and asked what could be done to return the Coop to its really strong roots in economic justice and taking care of people in the broader community.

Coop Finances

Joe Holtz wearing his treasurer's hat, shared the Coop's financial position

General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz gave the financial report. There was a net loss of $312,626 for the 40 weeks ending in November, in contrast to last year's net positive of $189,683, a difference of a little more than $500,000, but Holtz noted that there are 13 weeks left in the financial year, which ends February 2, 2025. Last year, during the last 12 weeks of the year, the Coop's cash increased by more than $600,000. "I can't promise the same bump this year, but if you're worried about the financial sustainability of the Coop, don't worry," Holtz said.

In response to a question about whether extended shopping hours will help the bottom line—the Coop will stay open one hour later from Mondays to Saturdays, starting in February—Holtz shared that sales might go up but only modestly, by two or three percent. He also noted that the flat markup, which dropped from 25 to 24 percent last year, but is going back up to 25 percent on February 3, should help. The Coop, Holtz added, charges additional markups on vitamins and supplements (ten percent), cheese (three percent), bulk items (six percent), organic produce ($1.10 per case) and bananas ($2.50 per case), not as a way of making money, but as a way of countering against losses.



Other Income				
Membership Fees	30,630	.07%	49,449	.12%
Events & Gifts	0	.00%	0	.00%
Cash Discounts & Rebates	23,299	.05%	52,769	.13%
Other Discounts	0	.00%	0	.00%
Patronage Refund Income	3,671	.01%	3,591	.01%
Income Tax Refund	0	.00%	0	.00%
Other Income	27,942	.06%	(4,302)	(.01%)
Total Other Income	85,541	.19%	101,506	.25%
Income Before Interest & Taxes	(574,280)	(1.30%)	77,015	.19%
Interest Expense-Loans	0	.00%	0	.00%
Interest Expense-Other	0	.00%	0	.00%
Dividend/Interest Income	261,653	.59%	112,668	.27%
Net interest	261,653	.59%	112,668	.25%
Income (Loss) Before Income Taxes	(312,626)	(.71%)	189,683	.46%
Provision for Taxes	0		0	
Net Income (Loss)	(312,626)		189,683	
Other Comprehensive Income-pension Plan Related	0		0	
Total Comprehensive Income (Loss)	TBD		TBD	

The Coop's balance sheet projected on the PowerPoint screen

Another member asked if adding more members would help. Holtz thought it might, and shared that the Coop is adding some new members, but that new membership must be balanced against other factors, such as our capacity limits.

General Coordinators Report

Holtz brought up the Agenda Committee election at last month's meeting, where a Coop board member abstained from voting—something that is allowed by the Coop's by-laws but is very rare. Holtz said it has not been done for 23.5 years and felt that other Coop members should ask why the board member abstained or the board member should explain it, neither of which had happened.

Tim Hospodar identified himself as the board member who abstained and said he did so because believed it was an unfair election—that the proper notice and nomination protocol had not been followed.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel disagreed and said it was standard operating procedure that a person who has a position can put themselves up for re-election, that the move was seconded and that the committee is understaffed and the person was not taking a position from someone else. She also noted that the Agenda Committee had placed a notice about the election in the *Gazette*, on FoodCoop.com and on the Coop Corner bulletin board, as required.


PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Director of Purchasing and General Coordinator Joe Szladek said 651 turkeys were ordered prior to Thanksgiving.
General Coordinator and Coop Director of Purchasing and Operations, Joe Szladek, talked about Thanksgiving sales. The Coop ordered 651 turkeys this year and 1,400 pounds of turkey parts. Only six turkeys and 150 pounds of parts were left over, a margin of error of only about two percent. The Coop also ordered 1,200 pies.

Szladek also talked about the Coop deals program, run by the National Co+op Grocers, which the Coop participated in last month. About 100 Field Day products were marked down ten to 28 percent. The Coop may participate again in the future, but is going to pause the program at the moment, he said, because it needs to finish building Clover, the inventory system that uses electronic labels. For the deals trial, new prices had to be entered manually, and the process is too much to manage as the staff works to roll out Clover.

Committee Reports

The Fun Committee's past, current, and future plans where heralded by committee member Rob Price.

Rob Price talked about some of the Fun Committee's plans for next year: a square dancing event, possibly a singles night, a happy hour at Bierwax in Prospect Heights. Previous events have included a puzzle swap and a picnic.

Personnel Committee

Newly elected Personal Committee member, Jerome Barth, demonstrating his leadership skills.

Jerome Barth was elected to the Personnel Committee, which is involved in hiring Coop personnel, including selecting Joe Holtz's successor. Ninety-seven members voted in favor of his election and 10 voted against.

Print *Linewaiters' Gazette* Feasibility Study

Advocating for a return to the newsprint *Linewaiters' Gazette*, Alex Godin introduced his idea with passion and some success.

Member Alex Godin brought forth a proposal to conduct a feasibility study on the return to a print *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Godin, who joined the Coop six years ago, said that since the pandemic, which brought the end of many community traditions including the print *Gazette*, childcare and the bulletin board, he has felt out of touch; in his view, the Coop has become "more sterile and more like a Whole Foods."

Godin said he's talked to new members who are amazed to learn that the Coop had a newspaper and older members who say they haven't read it since they could pick it up. "It feels to me important, feels like we can do it, if we're able to sell 600 turkeys and hit the number within six, I think we should be able to publish a newspaper," he said.

After Holtz suggested adding a deadline and pointed out that the *Gazette* staff may be too overtaxed to conduct the study themselves, the proposal was changed to read that a committee, including but not limited to Godin and *Gazette* staff, would report back on options, logistics and constraints to bring back the print edition, within one year.

Rod Morrison, a *Gazette* photographer who joined in 1983, held up a few old print *Gazettes*, eliciting a little chorus of appreciative sighs. But Morrison recommended against reinstituting it. “The horse is out of the barn. Members don’t consume media in hardcopy any more. Right now, the *Gazette* is put together virtually. To produce the old *Gazette* before the pandemic, a team went in on Sunday, five of them, including a proofreader,” he said. “I think what we need to do is build on what we have, make it more personal. Do a better job of publicizing the fact that we have a newspaper, rather than looking back to a media that is sort of dead, unlike the Food Coop.”

General Coordinator Herpel said that it cost about $23,000 per year to print the *Gazette*, that the Coop doesn’t have the infrastructure to do it again, that the digital readership is probably 10 times the print readership, and that the Coop recycled probably half of the print *Gazettes*.


PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

General Coordinator Ann Herpel returned to the podium to argue against switching back to the old way of publishing the *Gazette*.

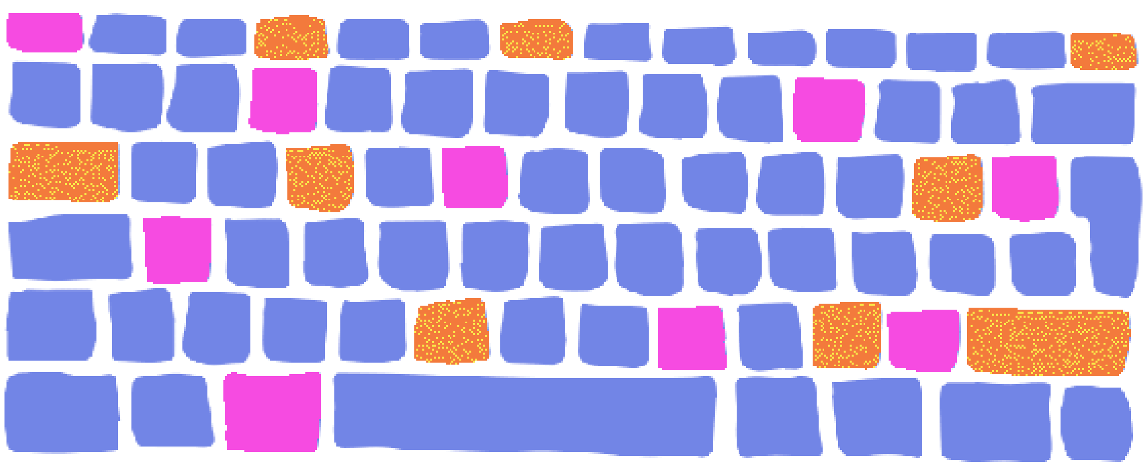
A number of members spoke in favor of the proposal, which passed 88 to 25, and expressed delight at the idea of a print edition. “My house is filled with books, magazines, zines of all sorts. I would love to read a *Linewaiters’ Gazette* on the subway,” one said. Another suggested that if printing every issue was too onerous, the Coop might do a more limited print edition, a special issue, for example, few times a year.

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.*

DECEMBER 17, 2024

April 1, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



ALARMING COST RISE AT THE COOP

Dear Fellow Members:

It was deeply distressing to learn that the Coop plans to return to what was supposed to be a temporary, pandemic gross margin of 25% after failing a very modest retreat to 24% (“Notes from the October General Meeting“). It seems clear that something permanent has shifted in the cost structure of this organization to the point of institutionalized bloat. If the Coop is to serve its core mission of affordable food then costs must come down permanently and a more serious examination of expenses must be undertaken.

The ability and willingness to do so should be prominent in the criteria for selecting Joe Holtz’s replacement. Unfortunately the selection process has thus far proceeded with a minimal role for members, whose focused interests in low margins differ from the interests of coordinators paid from the margin. Member approval was not sought to extend the “temporary” higher margin another year (essentially making it permanent) nor was any information or analysis of how we got to this point brought to the meeting where the decision was announced, judging from the *Gazette* report. Instead members received an update about another cost center in the works, home delivery.

A reckoning on expenses is inevitable. We should collectively summon the grit to face it now rather than later, when it will be much more difficult to do so. We as members must also be vocal when coordinators fail to consult us on important matters.

In cooperation,
Ryan Tate

Dear Ryan,

The Gazette Letters Editor asked the General Coordinators to respond to your letter.

At the March 2023 GM, members voted to give authority to the General Coordinators to annually set the markup in a range of 21–25%, based on the Coop’s financial situation. You can read the minutes from that meeting.

Second, at the October 2024 GM, Joe Holtz gave a detailed report of why the markup was going back up to 25%. This document, shown at the GM, provides the financial *reasons the markup will be increasing to 25% on Feb 3, 2025 (the first day of the fiscal year 2026). Every member received this document, either by email or text, before the meeting.*

The delivery service's cost to the Coop is pure speculation. In fact, we predict the opposite. However, since it hasn't started yet, no one knows what its effect on our finances will be. It's also important to note that the service will have a trial period, after which it will come to a GM for final approval or rejection by members.

Sincerely,
The General Coordinators

IT STARTED WITH WORDS

Dear Editor:

In 2021, Holocaust survivors began a campaign to show how that genocide "started with words."

The current epidemic of antisemitic and anti-Zionist speech, and subsequent global escalation of antisemitic violence, echo that phrase. We are witnessing the latest provocation for the historically recurring, multi-millennial expulsions and genocidal attacks on Jews, in this instance for defending themselves against their terrorist enemies who have declared their genocidal "intent," intent being required to prove genocide.

According to *Gazette* policy, letters cannot be "hateful, needlessly inflammatory, discriminatory libelous, personal attacks…." Apparently, this principle applies only to attacks on individuals, not religious, national or ethnic groups, though I'm certain such sustained attacks on any groups other than Jews and Israel would never appear in the

Gazette. (A letter of mine was rejected as “inflammatory” for using the word “Arab” as a descriptive, non-pejorative term, and Palestinians identify as Arabs).

For years the editors have intentionally or thoughtlessly ignored their policy that letters must be written with “accurate, attributed, easily verifiable statements of facts separated from opinions.” If this is true, why publish a letter alleging “haunting parallels” between the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Israel’s actions in Gaza? Israel is widely recognized for making unprecedented wartime efforts to avoid civilian casualties, undermined by Hamas operating within civilian infrastructure.

Another allegation is “purposeful starvation” of Palestinians. Note that Hamas is known to frequently hijack food provided by Israel and intended for civilians.

As to calls for a ceasefire, it was during a ceasefire that Hamas committed its brutality on Oct 7, 2023.

Sadly, I don’t expect this letter to have any impact on the editors, Board of Directors, Diversity Committee or BDS activists. This Coop is what it is, a community lacking ethical agency and commitment to its principle of inclusiveness for *all* members.

Sylvia Lowenthal

HYBRID MEETINGS: MAKING A BAD SYSTEM WORSE

Dear Editor:

The Coop’s town hall type GM was appropriate for a simpler time. We were small, intimate, and running the store was relatively simple. Now it is more complex. The Coop manages dozens of employees, pension and health plans, reserve funds, property, etc. It is a $60M/year business.

Our current system allows any member to introduce any agenda item, and it must be scheduled for a GM. There is no obligation to provide an impact or cost/benefit analysis. The presentations are brief and there is no opportunity for prepared counter responses. Instead, we have ad hoc responses often based more on feelings than on facts. All present members vote, and the Board of Directors, by tradition, mirrors the meeting proceedings thereby making the meeting decision official and legal.

The system allows for abuse and irresponsible decision making, such as when an update to the personnel policy was rejected. The hybrid meeting would amplify these deficiencies.

Aside from the recklessness of voting to change the bylaws without a plan on how to carry out hybrid meetings and taking on additional expenses when the Coop sales are not meeting costs, there does not appear to be a demand to attend GM's that would warrant holding hybrid meetings, except for the push to have the Coop endorse the BDS movement, and with it endorse the Hamas war against Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state. Anyone who believes the former does not include the latter has not done due diligence. The BDS faction has been very public about promoting hybrid meetings as a means to hold a BDS vote. A vote for hybrid is a vote for BDS. BDS will destroy our Coop. Please vote against hybrid meetings.

Barbara Mazor

BDS IS ALREADY HURTING OUR FINANCES

Dear Membership,

BDS has already damaged PSFC's balance sheet and threatens staff pensions. Just imagine the ruin if we ever vote them a place at our table.

At the October General Meeting, the financial report stated awareness that people aren't shopping due to political "disputes." I am one of those people. It's my coop and I'm disgusted every time I see BDS openly attempt to dictate what I buy, what I believe and how to behave politically.

Frequent stops and socializing once translated into me spending over $1,000 a month. Since March, I don't crack $350. I just get essentials, and I'm out. Coming up is our ultimate protest: not shopping altogether yet refusing to relinquish membership.

I join Jews, Christians and Muslims in resisting this attack on our Coop, a growing groundswell ever since Hamas broke the truce on October 7, 2023, raping, kidnapping and murdering 1,200 Jews and Muslims of every age.

But what about, "I'm Jewish so it's OK," or, "I'm anti-Zionist, not anti-Jew"? My reply is, "Nope, not buying that either." History looks brutal for the minuscule, misinformed Jewish groups who initially supported the Germans politically and at concentration camps, or spied for Stalin. And public anti-Zionist figures worldwide are open about their violent intentions towards (yeah, right) Zionists.

BDS goes beyond purging certain kinds of Jews from PSFC and ignoring how Palestinians were always more terrified of Hamas than the IDF. This is 1930's level bigotry and whatever term passes for Fascism on the Left.

It literally nauseates me now to visit. I imagine that titillates some keffiyeh-clad members, but look at them and ask yourself, "What's funny about ruining this place?"

BDS needs the Coop, not the other way around.

Jesse Rosenfeld

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR FREELANCERS

Dear PSCF Community,

As a freelancer for more than 10 years, health insurance has been a real struggle both in terms of cost, coverage and network. I found Opolis in 2023 and enrolled in 2024 and am happy to say I will renew for 2025. I felt other freelancers would want to know about this option for health insurance. The fact that Opolis is also an insured coop is a double bonus for the PSFC community. I can attest you won’t find cheaper and better health insurance on the open market.

Thanks,
Johanna Kolodny

PAPER BALLOTS, POST-HOLTZ PLANNING, AND PEANUT ALLERGIES: NOTES FROM THE OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

April 1, 2025

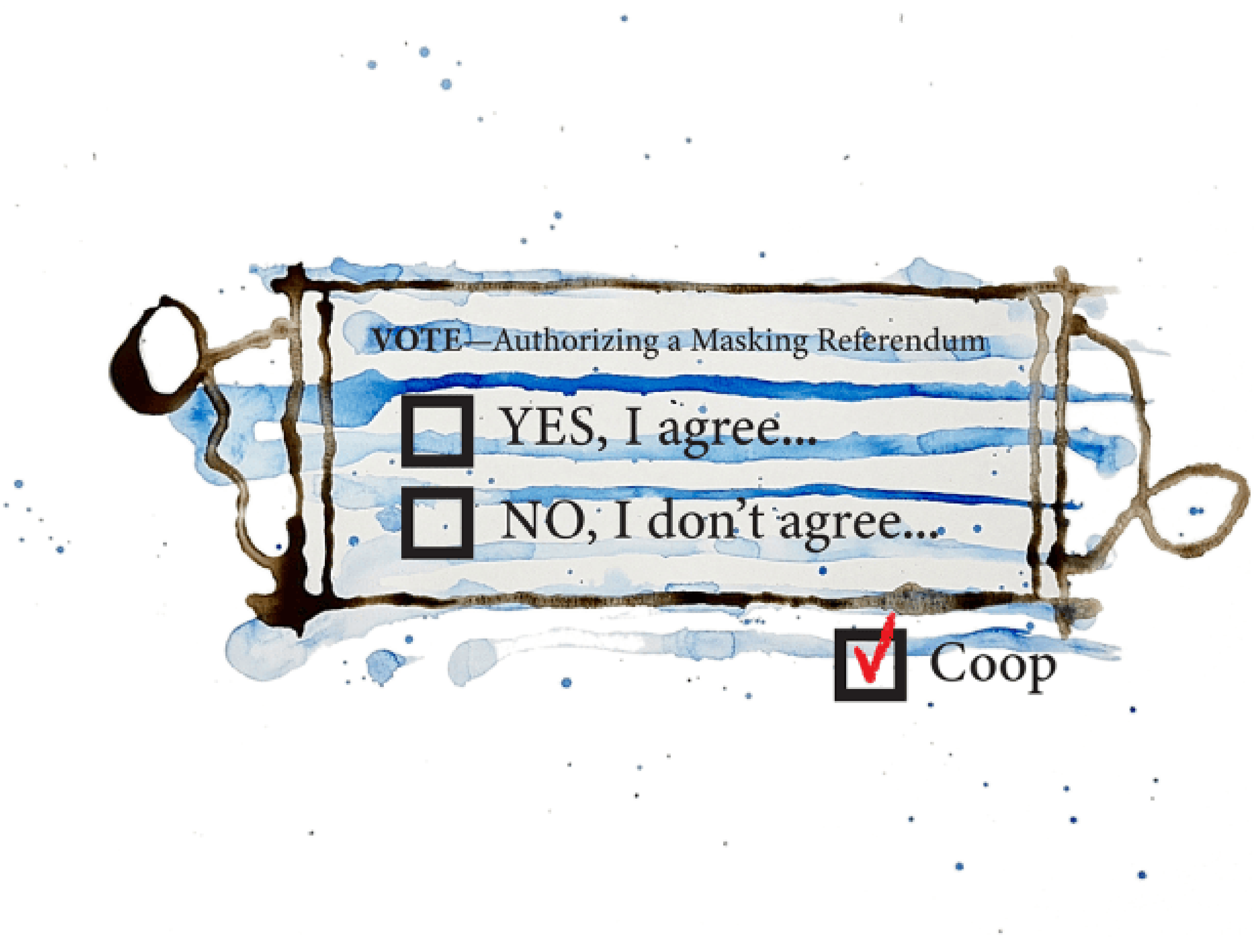


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Anita Bushell

November 26, 2024

The October 2024 General Meeting focused on Personnel Committee and Agenda Committee elections, as well as a vote on a proposed mask referendum. General coordinators and the treasurer gave updates to the more than 300 attendees who assembled in the Prospect Park Picnic House.

OPEN FORUM

During the Open Forum portion, members brought up several concerns. These included petitioning the Coop to stop selling Israeli products as a protest of the war in Gaza, asking the Coop to do more to protect members with allergies that might be triggered by products in the bulk aisle, protocol for lodging a complaint regarding member behavior during GMs and whether the Coop will begin a home delivery service in the near future.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz began his report by answering the question about food allergens, reminding members who would be affected by such allergens to not shop in the bulk aisle because of the airborne nature of items such as peanuts.

Holtz also addressed the issue of home delivery. The Coop is working on a pilot project, hoping to use a cooperative delivery service, which it would like to have in place if there is another pandemic.

Holtz shared the financial summary for the 36-week period ending October 6, 2024.

- Sales were $39,617,000.
- The gross margin was $7,620,000.
- Cash on hand was $7,944,000.
- Net income went from $201,000 last year to negative $234,000 this year over the same 36 week period.
- This downward swing of $435,000 is primarily due to our lower base mark-up this year (24%) versus last year's (25%).

Holtz discussed the annual report on the base mark-up percentage for the next fiscal year, which had been distributed to members prior to the meeting. The report states that the mark-up will return to 25% for the fiscal year of 2026 to "allow for a gain before taxes."

THE COOP IS WORKING ON A PILOT HOME DELIVERY PROJECT, WHICH IT WOULD LIKE TO HAVE IN PLACE IF THERE IS ANOTHER PANDEMIC.

During the Q&A period, members asked: Is raising the markup being brought to the GM for a vote; what is holding up expanding member shopping hours; will members have input on home delivery services; and whether a recent drop in sales is related to some members shopping less because of political disputes at the Coop, and whether such disputes are lowering new member applications? Holtz answered these issues, stating that the Coop was aware of members who were shopping less or not shopping due to such disputes, but that at this point the general coordinators could not quantify the effects. He said, however, that the Coop tries to take everything into account when making financial decisions such as the decision on the mark-up in order to keep the Coop on a prudent financial path.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Lisa Moore opened her report by announcing the retirement of Holtz, who will leave, after serving the Coop for 50 years, in June 2025. Moore paid tribute to Holtz and announced that there would be a Coop party in his honor on June 1, 2025. Moore also stated that the Coop has, through recommendations from members of National Coop Grocers, hired The Carlisle Group, an executive search and recruitment firm, and is also using a consultant from Columinate, who has consulted for food cooperators for years. The replacement search will take place from November 2024 through March 2025. The search committee will include two Personnel Committee members, two staff area coordinators, and two general coordinators. A member asked how much the costs of hiring these firms will cost; Moore answered that she will obtain the exact figure, which is under $50,000.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE ELECTION

Members of the Personnel Committee presented three candidates for three openings: Sonjia Hyon, Steve Jenkins and Valerie Vadala. Each candidate spoke about their qualifications for serving on the personnel committee and asked members to vote for them.

Voting results: Sonjia Hyon (yes: 195, no: 67); Steve Jenkins (yes: 252, no: 27); and

Valerie Vadala (yes: 163, no: 98). All three were winners.

AFTER THE PRESENTATIONS, A DISCUSSION ENSUED REGARDING CONFUSION ABOUT THE LANGUAGE USED ON THE PAPER BALLOTS.

AGENDA COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Agenda Committee presented one candidate for re-election: David Warren.

187 attendees voted in favor of David Warren’s re-election and 73 voted against. He was re-elected to a new two-year term with no break in his service.

MASKING REFERENDUM

Member David Bartner presented his proposal to authorize a Coop mask policy referendum. After the presentation, members spoke for the need to protect those who are immunocompromised as well as against making members wear masks. When the ballots were distributed, a lively discussion ensued as many members did not feel the ballot language was clear, in terms of what it was asking members to vote for. After clarification of the language by the meeting chairs, members voted using the ballots.

The masking proposal did not pass, with only 92 votes in its favor. 215 people voted against it.

PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

Coop-elected Secretary Elizabeth Tobier presented the minutes of the September 24, 2024 GM; no corrections were made. There were no recommendations from the members at the meeting. Therefore, the minutes were approved with the same contents that were sent to all members the Friday before the meeting.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Brandon West chaired the meeting and all members of the board who were present voted in favor of accepting the advice of the members on the minutes of the September 24, 2024 GM. The Board approved the Personnel Committee election by a vote of 5 to zero; the Agenda Committee election by 4 yeses, zero nos and one abstention; and the masking decision by 5 to zero. This was the first time in the last 25 years that a board member has abstained from voting to approve the will of the membership.

The meeting adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

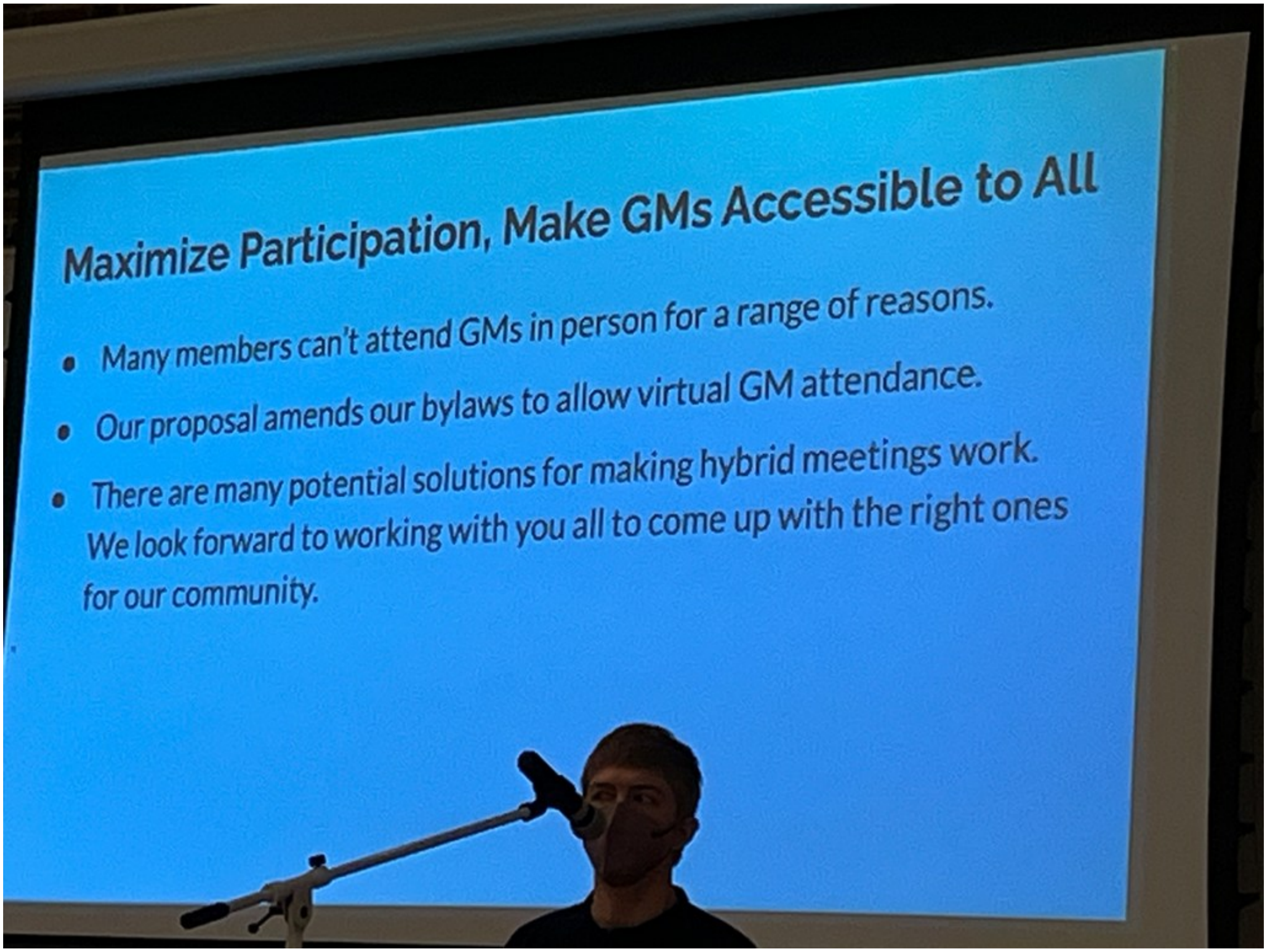
Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, *and* Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness*. Her novel,* One Way to Whitefish*, will be published in December.*

SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING REPORT

April 1, 2025

ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

November 5, 2024



People packed the Picnic House in Prospect Park on September 24 for the Coop's General Meeting, where there was a spirited discussion about a proposal to adopt a hybrid structure for monthly meetings. The proposal's sponsors said it was intended to "expand access to and encourage meaningful participation" by more members.

Like many organizations, the Coop went virtual for General Meetings during the pandemic, but has since returned to an in-person approach, with no option for members to watch or to take part in meetings by video. Many people at the meeting declared their support for the proposal to go hybrid, saying that it would help ensure that disabled, elderly and other members who have difficulty attending in person would be able to have a voice in Coop affairs.

But some members expressed concerns about the technical challenges, given the size of the Coop's membership, as well as about privacy and the potential for vote fraud under a hybrid system. Others voiced suspicion that the hybrid proposal was intended to bolster efforts by some at the Coop to win approval for a ban on Israeli goods.

OPEN FORUM

The meeting began with an open forum punctuated by a variety of questions from members: One asked whether the Coop's financial reserves are deep enough. Another said he was interested in learning about what happened to the posters and flyers that used to be in the stairwell that goes to the upstairs offices. A third spoke about whether there was a way to make the Coop more democratic beyond encouraging participation in general meetings.

COOP FINANCES

Joe Szladek, General Coordinator and the Coop's director of purchasing and operations, gave the financial report, filling in for Joe Holtz, the Coop's General Manager and Treasurer, who was attending a meeting of the National Co+op Grocers (NCG) in Minnesota.

(On Oct. 2, Holtz, a cofounder of the Coop and a legendary figure in its history, announced that he would be retiring in June 2025 after 50 years as the General Manager. *The Linewaiters' Gazette* will have much more coverage of Holtz's life and impact on the Coop in future issues.)

Szladek reported that the Coop had $30.98 million in sales through the first 28 weeks of the year, with a slight operating loss of $255,000. After accounting charges, the Coop was nearing break even, he said.

Sales tend to go down over the summer because of vacations, and rise significantly in the fall. Szladek added that this year sales were slightly lower than they have been in the past because the Coop shaved its markup to 24 percent from 25 percent.

“The fall months get very busy, and therefore we should see that net income rise and probably hopefully finish closer to break even,” he said.

He also pointed out that because the Coop’s membership is down 8.28 percent since 2019, the volume of sales has decreased as well. For example, the number of transactions fell to 53,000 in January 2024 from 75,000 in January 2019.

He highlighted what he said was one especially interesting comparison: In January 2019, each member purchased around 97 items on average, while in January 2024, each member purchased 84 items on average.

There are several theories for the cause of that decrease, he said. Members are working every six weeks, rather than every four, so they are in the Coop less and thus less likely to be shopping after a shift.

There are more online shopping options, and more Coop members may live farther away so are less likely to pop into the Coop for a quick shop. The Coop closes earlier in the evening than before the pandemic, reducing shopping hours.

Szladek said the Coop’s leadership is discussing a number of initiatives that are intended to boost sales, including adding more hours and more members. (The Coop had about 15,500 members in January 2024.)

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN


Red Napa Cabbage
Brussels sprouts stalks org
$5.75 ea
PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN


PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

FOOD REPORT

Elinoar Astrinsky, a General Coordinator, described how Coop products are shifting toward the fall season, with farm-fresh tomatoes and corn going away. But, she added, “we’re welcoming an amazing assortment of apples and pears,” including from Scott Farm Orchard in Vermont.

Winter squashes and pumpkins have also arrived, she said.

She mentioned a range of other new products, including coffee blends from Brooklyn Roasting Company and Gimme! Coffee, as well as La Riojana extra virgin olive oil from Argentina.

“A whole bunch of cooperatives banded together to import this olive oil from Argentina and give direct money to those growers,” she said.

EQUITY, ACCESS AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Naomi Brussel, cochairperson of the Equity, Access and Community Committee, delivered the sad news that her fellow chairperson, Maitefa Angaza, passed away on Aug. 8 at age 70.

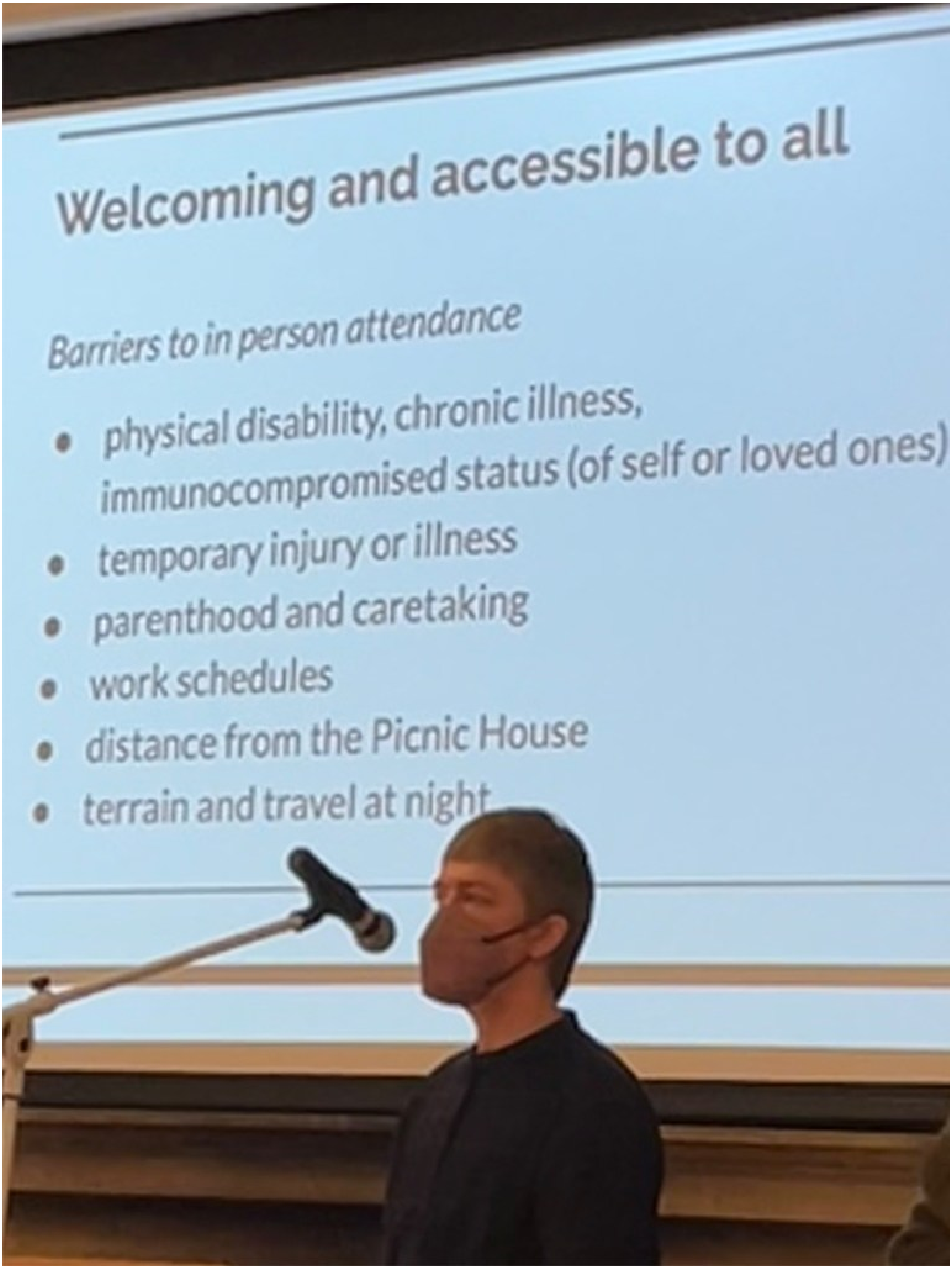
Angaza was an author, journalist, editor, filmmaker and spiritual leader who served as executive editor of the *City Sun* newspaper and managing editor of *African Voices* magazine.

“Her perceptiveness, her warmth and her humor are missed by everyone who knew her,” Brussel said.

Brussel said the committee’s work continues, and it is launching a demographic questionnaire for Coop members.

HEARING OFFICER COMMITTEE

Two members of the Hearing Officer Committee, Jonathan Fox and Catherine McCaw, were reelected to their positions by those present at the monthly meeting. The committee is part of the dispute resolution system at the Coop.


Welcoming and accessible to all
Barriers to in person attendance
physical disability, chronic illness, immunocompromised status (of self or loved ones)
temporary injury or illness
parenthood and caretaking
work schedules
distance from the Picnic House
terrain and travel at night

A member speaks about the hybrid meeting proposal.

HYBRID MEETING MODEL

The proposal to adopt a hybrid meeting model, allowing members to observe and take part by video, was presented by CJ Glackin and Morgan Võ.

“What we’re hoping to do is to provide access for folks who currently don’t have access,” Võ said.

Glackin and Võ said the issue affected them personally. Glackin spoke of having a disability, and Võ said he was a new parent with a newborn at home.

“I have a few chronic illnesses, and I’m disabled, and I did make it here tonight,” Glackin said. “But depending on how I’m feeling, it often is difficult or impossible for me to make it here.”

They acknowledged that the details and technical considerations for a hybrid model still needed to be worked out, but expressed confidence that the Coop leadership could handle those challenges—especially given that general meetings were on video during the pandemic.

“This is just to expand access to members who can’t attend in person for a range of reasons, and those voices that are locked out of the room and that have a lot to say,” Glackin said.

The proposal received significant support from members in the audience. Alyce Barr, who joined the Coop in 1980, said the Coop had long seemed to have an aversion to new technology, pointing out that some members long resisted online signups for shifts—a feature that now seems indispensable.

Barr said she appreciated the opportunity to take part in Coop meetings by video during the pandemic, and believed that going to a hybrid model was the right thing to do.

“I want to say to all of us, it is 2024,” she said.

Rodrigo Camarena asked audience members how many people had young children at home. After some people raised their hands, Camarena said he had a four-year-old, which made it tough to attend General Meetings.

“We live in an era of remote learning, of telehealth, of remote work, of hybrid everything,” he said. “It’s just a straightforward proposal to make the Coop meetings hybrid. It’s something that would make my ability to come here more frequent. It would make my partner’s ability to come here more likely, and I know that a lot of members that want to vote and really care about the issues of the Coop can’t be here tonight because they work.”

David Moss, a member of the Chair Committee, said, “I can’t speak for the whole chair committee, but I think at least many of us are in favor of having hybrid meetings, even though it will mean more work for us. It’s purely an important matter of access.”

An opponent of the proposal, Erik Diamond, said he feared that allowing members to take part in discussions by video would undermine the Coop’s values.

“The Coop is a special place with a special culture,” Diamond said. “And I can’t point to any great deliberative body, legislative body, great company that feels satisfied with operating remotely. When we debate a difficult or contentious issue, which seems like we are going to, it’s different doing it in person. And it’s not just the words of the people. It’s the feelings. And it’s our shared humanity.”

Another speaker, Ramon Maislen, who is a leader of a group fighting a proposed boycott of Israeli goods at the Coop, said he was not opposed to the hybrid proposal, but expressed skepticism that inclusivity was the real goal.

Maislen questioned whether the sponsors of the hybrid proposal were more interested in using a hybrid meeting structure to muster support to get a boycott approved.

“I’m not opposed to the idea of hybrid voting if we can have an honest conversation about it,” he said after the meeting. “I just don’t trust their honesty, because if you look at their platform, if you go onto their website, they have a whole plan of action, what they want to do.”

But Võ told the audience that the hybrid proposal was unrelated to the boycott one.

“I think the one issue about divorcing this from the boycott, obviously, I understand that this is a really contentious moment, not just at the Coop, but in the world, and a difficult moment,” Võ said. “The proposal that we’ve brought forward is not about forwarding any particular one issue, which is why there is no mention of any issue other than this.”