

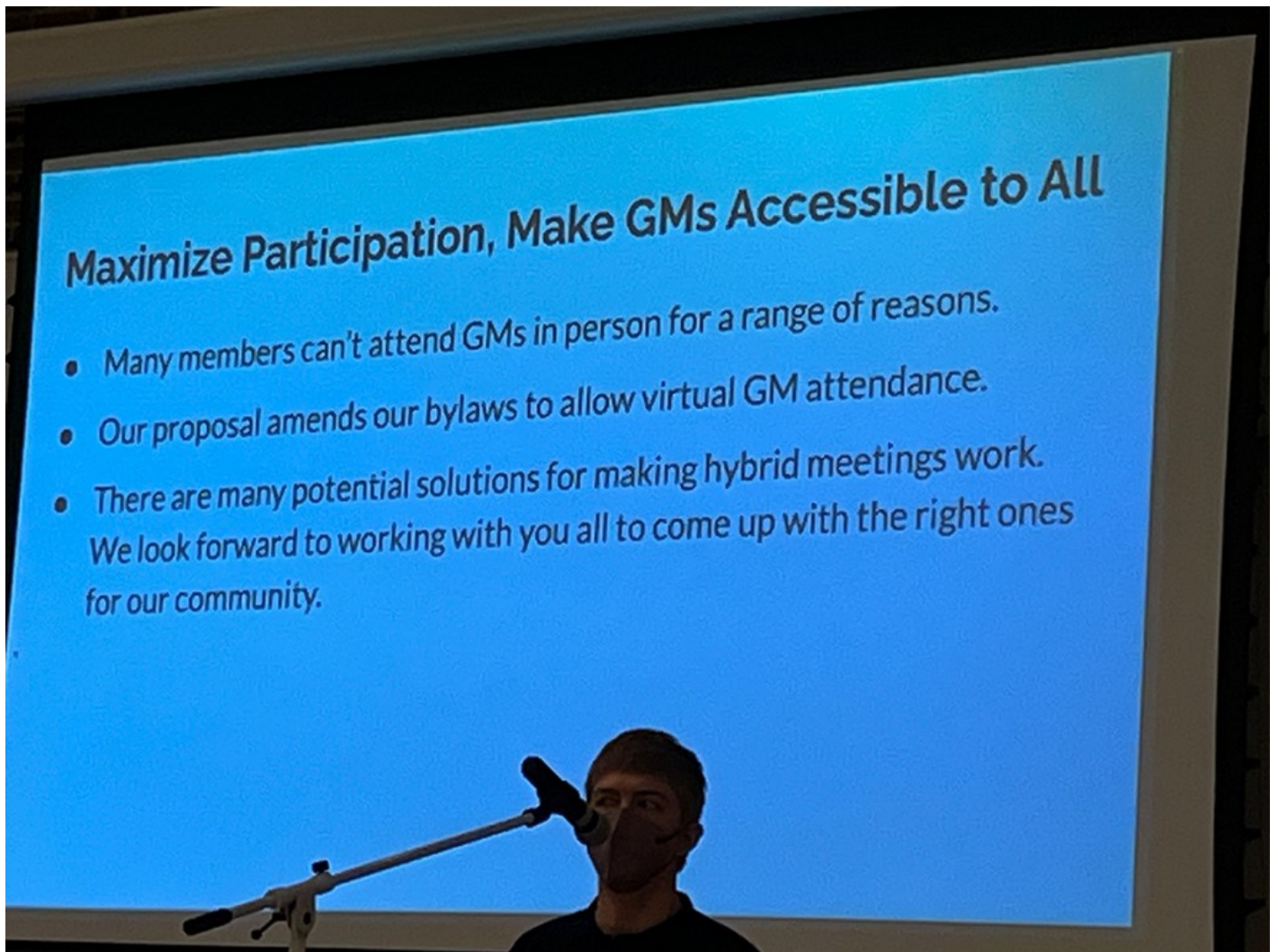
SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING REPORT

November 5, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

November 5, 2024



Maximize Participation, Make GMs Accessible to All

- Many members can't attend GMs in person for a range of reasons.
 - Our proposal amends our bylaws to allow virtual GM attendance.
 - There are many potential solutions for making hybrid meetings work.
- We look forward to working with you all to come up with the right ones for our community.

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.

Szladdek 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.)



Apple: Calville blanc d'hiver
heirloom ipm PLU 5283
\$3.34

Apple: Honeycrisp ipm
\$2.28

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



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FOOD REPORT

Elinor 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.”