

DECEMBER GENERAL MEETING: BDS TENSIONS FLARE AGAIN

December 30, 2025

spin the meeting dial



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

December 30, 2025

By Kayla Levy

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

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

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

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

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

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

OPEN FORUM LEADS TO BOYCOTT DEBATE, AGAIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE NUMBERS: COOP FINANCES & THANKSGIVING SALES

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

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

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

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

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

AN UPDATE ON HYBRID MEETINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

cooperation. The vote passed 111 to 11.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING REPORT

December 30, 2025



December 9, 2025

By Oluwakemi Aladesuyi

Since the Coop began offering work credits for meeting attendance, General Meetings have been well attended, and the October 28 meeting was no exception.

Open Forum

The Open Forum session focused on how the Coop could support the community as SNAP benefits faced expiration during the government shutdown. A small discussion group was proposed to address this concern. While it appears that SNAP benefits have since been extended for at least another year, the discussion raised important questions about how the community can continue supporting its members through ongoing economic challenges.

Reports

General Manager Joe Szladek made a financial report for the last 36 weeks. Several one-time expenses contributed to higher personnel costs, including a retirement party for Joe Holtz, consulting fees to help recruit a new general manager and IT support.

Other trends of note:

- Debit transaction fees have increased, though the Coop will be switching vendors soon and will charge lower fees.
- Healthcare expenses are growing faster than inflation each year, becoming an increasingly large portion of personnel costs.
- Sales per member have declined since the Coop switched from a four-week to a six-week work cycle (that is, post-Covid).

On a positive note, sales in the prepared foods section continue to expand.

Looking ahead, the Coop is considering hiring another receiving coordinator as well as staff with significant financial expertise.

One member questioned whether the Coop could rely more heavily on member-led squads rather than hiring additional staff, noting that some coordinating roles had previously been handled by members. The response to that question emphasized that

work remains in members' hands, with staff primarily helping to speed up processes.

General Coordinator Matt Hoagland reported on the recurring shift system. Popular positions like office work and checkout fill quickly, but early morning lifting shifts have been difficult to staff.

The International Trade Education Squad (ITES) then presented information about how current tariffs are creating uncertainty across the supply chain.

Elections

Several elections took place during the meeting. The first was for the Hearing Administration Committee, which hears disciplinary issues. The vote tallies were as follows:

Irene Bunnell: 123 YES 2 NO

Stephen Klein: 80 YES 23 NO

Sam Klugman: 121 YES 2 NO

Members also voted to fill several open seats on the Agenda Committee, which reviews items proposed for discussion at General Meetings. Since the October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza, what is and isn't allowed to be discussed at Coop General Meetings has been particularly contentious, especially regarding whether the Coop should support the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) movement.

Dominique Bravo explained that those who had spoken publicly about "political issues" were not considered eligible candidates for open seats on the Agenda Committee, a criterion that was decided by current committee members. Agenda Committee vote results are below:

Dominique Bravo: 94 YES 29 NO

Matt Cecil: 99 YES 20 NO

Robbie Gottlieb: 126 YES 3 NO

Alice Procter: 125 YES 2 NO

Finally, Rebecca Schoenberg-Jones was elected Corporate Secretary, a result which met with boisterous applause.

Member Presentations

The pandemic served as a revealing moment for the Coop, exposing fundamental questions about how the Coop operates and how members engage with one another. One of the most significant issues that emerged was the question of how members should meet and participate in decision-making processes.

Yejia Chen presented a proposal to introduce online asynchronous voting, a system that would allow members to review agenda items in advance and vote on them remotely.

Chen gave a robust presentation arguing that this approach would increase participation by making the voting process more accessible to members who might not be able to attend meetings in person as well as for the neurodiverse.

Following the presentation, the proposal sparked a lively discussion that touched on several practical and philosophical concerns. Members raised questions about the costs of implementing voting software and what post-pandemic communication should look like within the Coop more broadly.

A central concern centered on the Coop's parliamentary procedures: how would on-

line asynchronous voting accommodate the spontaneous amendments and adjustments that typically occur during live meetings? In traditional in-person elections, members have the opportunity to comment and make slight modifications to proposals in real-time. Would an asynchronous system allow for similar flexibility? Some suggested that voting software could enable discussion forums and commenting features, though this raised additional questions about whether such forums would require moderation.

Members also expressed concern about potential drawbacks of a hybrid voting system. Would early voting actually disincentivize attendance at meetings, causing people to miss important discussions? If votes were tallied both asynchronously and in person, would this create equity concerns between different voting methods? There was uncertainty about whether asynchronous participation would truly increase engagement or simply fragment it.

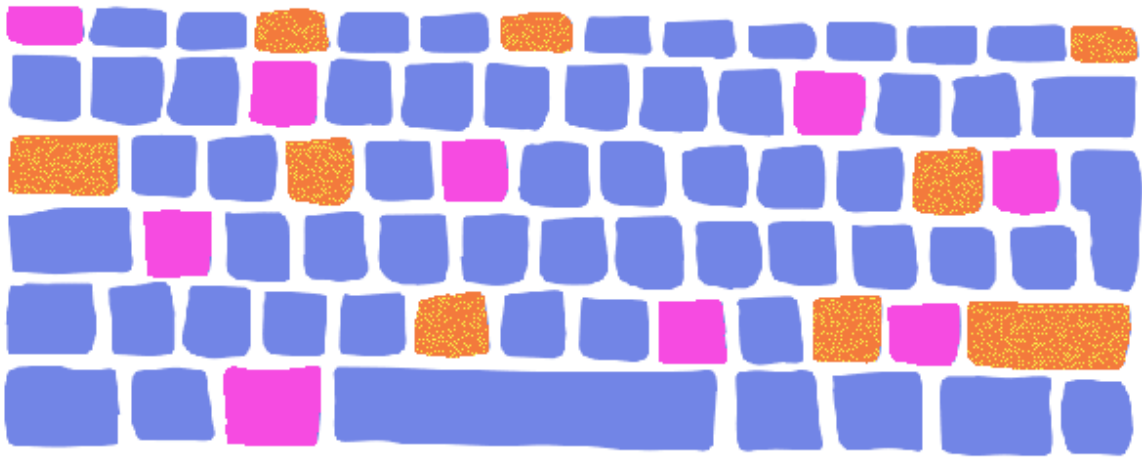
Overall, the discussion revealed concerns that the proposal felt somewhat haphazard in its approach to timeline and synchronicity. While the intention to increase accessibility was clear, questions remained about how to preserve the deliberative, collaborative nature of the Coop's decision-making process in a hybrid model.

Oluwakemi Aladesuyi is a journalist, yoga teacher and potter.

NOVEMBER 18, 2025

December 30, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



CONGRATULATIONS COOP RUNNERS

Dear Members,

Congratulations to Coop members who completed the New York City Marathon on Sunday, Nov. 2. The marathon travels through all five boroughs from its start in Staten Is-

land to the finish in Central Park, passing nearly right by the Coop on its route in Brooklyn along Fourth Ave. On Marathon Sunday, the whole city embraces the spirit of generosity, cheerfulness and bonhomie that I hope we all bring to our community year-round. I wish you all a speedy recovery, and I do believe we carry epsom salt in aisle four to help you along!

Barry Leybovich

FOOD COOP PRODUCT REVIEW

Dear Gazette and PSFC,

I think it would be highly useful for Coop members if the *Gazette* had a product review section with reviews provided by members. I have recommendations, good and bad, that I'd like to share, and would like to hear others' recommendations as well. It would also make members aware of products they didn't even know we sold—like cat-butt magnets or drying racks for plastic bags. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Michael Katz

DISCLOSE THE LEGAL OPINION NOW—"CONFIDENTIALITY" IS NOT A VALID EXCUSE

Dear Coop members:

The topic of the alleged legal opinion (a) stating that hybrid meetings can be imple-

mented without amending the bylaws and (b) validating the practice of allowing the board to vote on matters that do not appear before it as member-initiated agenda items has been an ongoing topic of discussion. (See voluntary article, June 24, 2025, and letters to the editor and General Coordinator responses on Aug. 26 and Oct. 28, 2025.)

The General Coordinators have stated that the legal opinion is not in writing. On the basis of 20 years in commercial litigation in which I reviewed and drafted legal opinion letters, I say that that proposition is literally incredible. It calls into question (a) what question the GCs presented to the unidentified attorney(s) who rendered an opinion and (b) whether the attorney(s) examined the governing documents of the Coop and conducted an evaluation of the events of April and June 2025 in the context of New York law. The decision to change Coop practice on the magnitude of what is happening without a proper legal opinion is plausibly a breach of fiduciary duty.

In the Aug. 26 issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* I called for disclosure of the fabled legal opinion. GC Joe Szladek responded there that the opinion is confidential. That response is not valid. No law is stopping management from disclosing to the membership whatever shred of writing shows the legal reasoning—which they should do for an opinion that supposedly legitimizes the end of the Coop's historical governance structure and calls into question whether the Coop's bylaws and guidelines mean anything. Even if the legal opinion were confidential, nothing prevents management from making a limited waiver of confidentiality with whatever redactions are necessary.

Disclose the opinion now.

Sincerely,
Noah Potter

Editors Note:

Noah sent a version of this letter to the LWG on Aug. 29, 2025, for inclusion in the

Sept. 16, 2025 issue of the LWG, though it was not published. Noah intended to deliver a version of the letter to the Chair Committee at the Sept. 30 meeting but he was sick that night and, at his request, a fellow member delivered the letter to the Chair Committee to be read (in accordance with the meeting rules). The Chair Committee did not read the revised letter due to his absence. The report on the meeting in the LWG noted a comment during the meeting that he should submit the letter to the LWG.

General Manager Response to Noah Potter's Letter

Dear Coop Members,

Following the April 29 Board meeting, the General Coordinators sought legal guidance from attorneys with extensive experience in cooperative governance. This was not a request for a single, formal legal “opinion,” but part of an ongoing and broader dialogue about the Coop’s governance practices and legal compliance. We have consulted these attorneys numerous times to clarify questions of authority, process and best practices under cooperative law.

We approach these consultations thoughtfully and thoroughly—asking questions from multiple angles to test the consistency and reliability of the attorneys’ guidance. Our goal is to ensure that all perspectives and member concerns are represented in how we frame our inquiries, and that the resulting advice supports sound, transparent decision-making.

Based on advice from the Coop’s governance attorneys, and as previously shared with members:

- The Board has the authority under the bylaws to take the action it did on April 29.
- A bylaw amendment is not required to allow hybrid General Meetings.

Maintaining confidentiality in communications with legal counsel is both standard and essential. This confidentiality protects the Coop's ability to seek candid, independent advice and to meet its fiduciary responsibilities to the membership. While we share the conclusions of our legal consultations when they directly affect Coop operations or members—as we have done here—the underlying attorney-client communications are privileged and not disclosed. This approach is consistent with standard practices across cooperatives, nonprofits and other member-owned organizations.

Respectfully,
Joe Szladek
General Manager

I MET WITH A SAILOR FROM THE GLOBAL SUMUD FLOTILLA

Dear members,

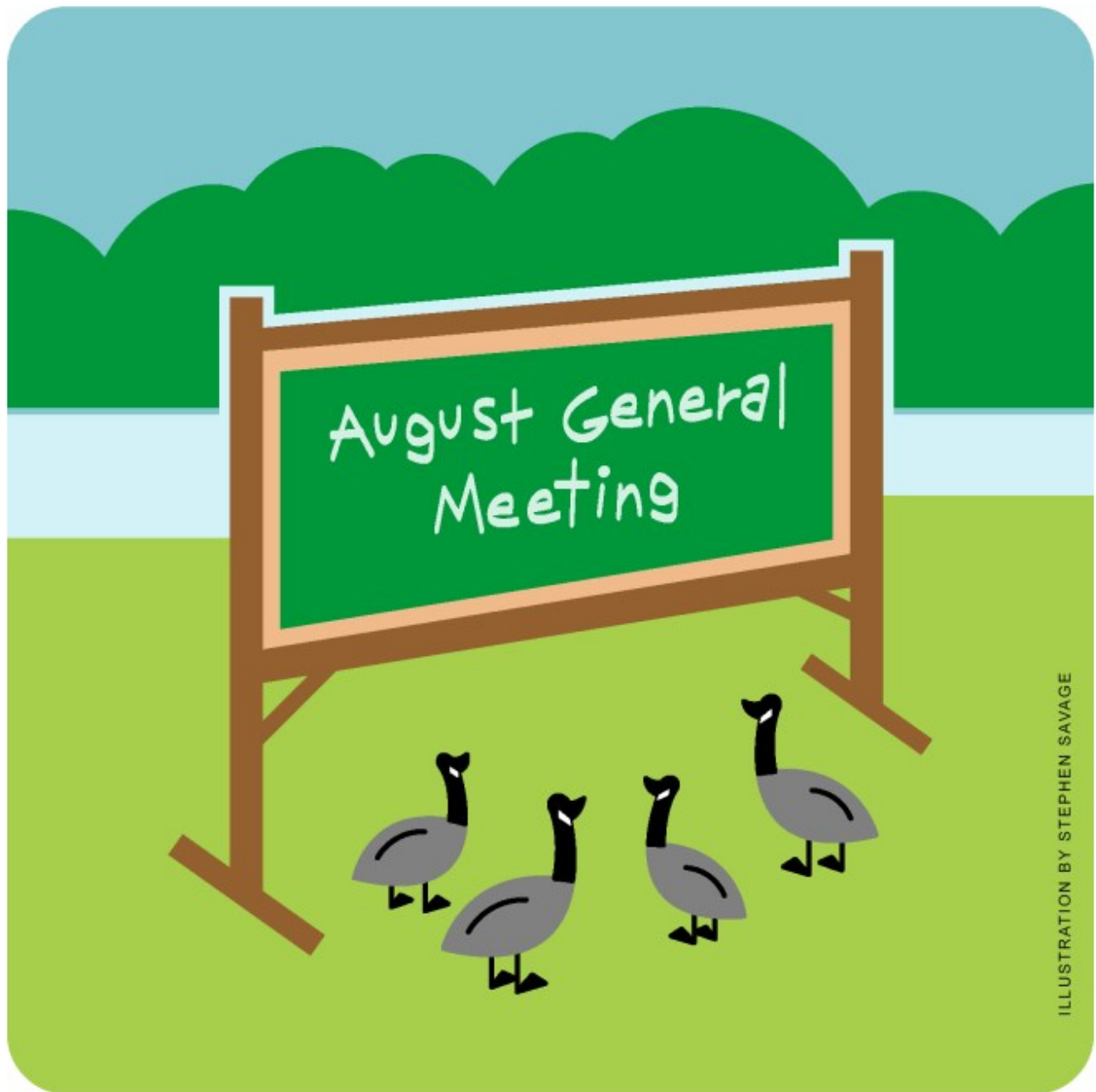
On Friday, Oct. 10, 2025, at my local coffee shop in Gowanus, I met with a sailor from the Global Sumud Flotilla, an international civil-society maritime initiative aimed at challenging the Israeli blockade of Gaza. This person across the table from me shared that they were only a few days removed from having been taken from international waters at gunpoint by Israeli forces while attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians, a mission they described as a moral and legal obligation under the Genocide Convention.

I was struck by this person's bravery and could not help but reflect on the inertia of our cooperative over the last two years to not even table a vote for the boycott of Israeli goods. Have we become so numb that we fail to recognize the humanity of Palestinians? A better Coop and world are possible, just as the many boats sailing toward Gaza have inspired so many to believe.

Sincerely,
Damien Neva

AUGUST GENERAL MEETING: NEW APPOINTMENTS AND DEBATE OVER HYBRID MEETINGS

December 30, 2025



October 7, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

With the end of summer on the horizon, more than 100 Coop members attended the August General Meeting at the Picnic House in Prospect Park, where they approved a slate of new appointments. The Coop's board also debated a contentious proposal about moving toward a hybrid meeting structure next year.

OPEN FORUM

The meeting started with Open Forum statements. Some were straightforward, such as member requests to make the cilantro and parsley less wet and reinstate work credit for attending General Meetings.

Others were written statements that called on the General Coordinators to share the legal opinion that upheld the Coop's Board of Directors actions in the April 2025 General Meeting, when they voted to approve a referendum on hybrid meetings.

One member, Pam Thomas, presented an idea for a new kind of boycott, against LesserEvil popcorn, whose CEO, Charles Coristine, is the father of a staffer of President Trump's DOGE initiative, Edward Coristine.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Joe Szladek, the Coop's new general manager, reported that the Coop's year-to-date sales through July 20 were up 9.3 percent over the previous year.

He attributed the increase to longer opening hours, growth in membership and inflation. The Coop's gross margin—the money left over after subtracting the cost of goods from sales—increased by about \$600,000. However, operating expenses have gone up a little more, by about \$700,000.

The increase in operating expenses is partly related to one-off expenditures, such as the roll out of the new electronic shelf price labels, which make it easier to update prices, for approximately \$50,000 and an increase in electronic payment service charges from our current provider of approximately \$40,000.

MEAT REPORT

Masha Bezlepkina, the Coop's meat and prepared food buyer, presented a summary of recent farm visits, which were an opportunity to review practices at our supplying

farms.

Interestingly, she noted that she is a vegetarian.

“So I knew nothing about meat, but I can differentiate between steaks now,” she joked. “These farm visits were very educational for me.”

The Coop strives to source meat from small farms and small farm partnerships. Bezlepkina explained that “the idea is that when you support small family farms, you allow them to make more profit. If farmers are more profitable that means they will care about the soil, and that means the animals will be healthy and the meat that comes from these animals will be more nutritional.”

Following a member vote in 2002, the Coop can sell only 100 percent grass-fed and grass-finished beef. Bezlepkina reported that this typically requires around one acre per animal in a herd. For example, Slope Farms—a longterm farm partner of the Coop—has a herd of 100 to 120 animals located on its 97 acre farm.

Bezlepkina said a new partner for the Coop, Hickory Nut Gap Farms, sources beef from farms in North Carolina, Georgia and a few other southern states, where they can graze the animals year-round by moving them between mountainous regions in the summer, and coastal regions in the winter.

The farm partnership is interested in better making the nutritional case for its 100 percent grassfed beef. “They talk a lot about nutrition,” Bezlepkina said. “However, they are very interested in actually testing it. They submitted some of their meat samples to organizations for testing, and they would like to develop standard tests.” These tests will aim to demonstrate the nutritional benefits of grassfed cattle.

Member Robbie Gottlieb asked about whether the Coop was also selecting farms based on how they treat workers. Bezlepkina stressed that the Coop sources meat from “super tiny” farms, often only run by one person, where “these farmers are fa-

natics. It is really hard, but they love their jobs.”

The least encouraging outcome from the educational visits was on the outlook for the price of beef. “Usually the markets go up and then they come down,” said Bezlepkina, “but this market is just going up and up.”

COMMITTEE REPORTS

International Trade Education Committee member Bart DeCoursy provided a brief narrative of what he believes are the negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its successor, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). He said the pacts have resulted in a “a dramatic increase in the agribusiness market share concentration and, as a result, small farmers were hit the hardest.”

NEW COORDINATING EDITORS FOR THE LINEWAITERS’ GAZETTE

The first agenda item was the election of Co-Coordinating Editors for the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*. Petra Lewis, an editor for the Gazette since 1999 and a member since 1994, explained the role. “Coordinating editors are responsible for overseeing the Gazette’s editors, writers, art directors, photographers, illustrators and production teams,” she said. “They play a crucial role in the quality, content and overall direction of the Gazette.”

Six candidates responded to a job posting in November, of which three were presented for election for the Co-Coordinating Editors roles: Eric Baldwin, Lily Rothman and Whitney Curry Wimbish. (Rothman is the managing editor of *Time* magazine.)

In response to questions about how the Co-Coordinating Editors would review guidelines for selecting submitted work for publication, Baldwin said they do not want to “be the voice of the Gazette, but to guide that process. I believe that all of us are in agreement that that’s the role of an editor, to shepherd along your voices and make sure that this is a communal plural voice.”

All three candidates were elected.

ELIGIBILITY FOR POSITION OF TREASURER

Bookkeeping Coordinator Terry Meyers—along with Membership Coordinators Jana Cunningham and Yuwie Tantipech—led a presentation for the second agenda item: a vote to modify the language in the PSFC Guide to General and Annual Meetings to tighten the eligibility requirements to be elected as Treasurer of the Coop. The suggestion would specify that any candidate for the position “must, at the time of the election, be an upper-level management staff person who is chiefly responsible for the financial operations of the Coop.”

The item was presented as a common sense clarification of existing precedent: for the past 25 years of the Coop, the Treasurer has been an upper-level management staff person. Meyers said that “for the bookkeeping department in particular, having a member worker in the role of treasurer and thus not fully versed in all the financial aspects of the Co-op and only on site intermittently would be untenable. It would simply make the smooth functioning of the Coop impossible.”

Many members spoke in support of the motion from the floor; however, there were some comments with a note of caution. Adam Rosenberg was concerned that the candidate pool for treasurer would be overly restricted by the motion.

The proposed motion was voted by members to instead be considered an amendment to the Coop’s bylaws. It passed by a vote of 97 to 35, more than the threshold for a bylaw amendment, which requires a two-thirds majority.

HYBRID MEETINGS

Most of the drama occurred after the monthly meeting, during the board meeting that followed.

The procedural wrangling began with a complicated dispute between a Coop member

and the Coop's corporate secretary about the previous monthly meeting's draft minutes, which led to those minutes not being approved.

The draft minutes will be amended and then presented again for a vote at the September meeting.

The discussion then turned to an issue that has roiled the Coop over the last year: whether to adopt a hybrid meeting format. Board President Brandon West took the stage.

"I know there's been a lot more conversation at the board meetings than usual, but I wanted to take this time to do this one more time and talk about something that's very pertinent and important to everyone at the Coop," he said.

West noted that a recent referendum about hybrid meetings reached a simple majority typically needed to pass motions, but fell short of the supermajority that would be needed to amend a bylaw.

West continued: "We need to be able to come to a decision about how we conduct a general meeting and it needs to not be weighed down by the conversation about BDS to the point that it shuts down our ability to function as a Coop."

BDS is the movement to boycott products from Israel, and questions have been raised at past general meetings about whether the hybrid meeting proposal is an effort to promote a BDS vote at the Coop.

West said that, after consulting with General Manager Szladek about the set of proposals, some Board members decided to make a motion to direct that general meetings be in hybrid format beginning in January 2026. West then explained a process for appointing a Hybrid Meeting Subcommittee to present the proposed details to the membership.

Szladek later clarified to the Gazette that his role was not in initiating or authorizing the decision, but in serving as a reference point for Board members on the governance lawyer's advice, as previously shared in an email to the membership sent on May 23 by Joe Holtz, Szladek's predecessor.

That email noted that such Board actions are legally allowable, though far outside the nearly 50 years of General Meeting precedent.

There was some confusion over the details for how this Subcommittee would be established, and concern about the limited consultation that the Chair Committee had in supporting this process. Members of the Chair Committee objected to the lack of consultation.

Fellow Board Members Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai, as well as Szladek, voiced support for the proposal, but collectively the Board agreed to continue discussion for another month and present the directive to a Board Vote at the next General Meeting, an approach suggested by Szladek.

Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.

OCTOBER 7, 2025

December 30, 2025

Letters to the Editor



HYBRID MEETINGS ARE COOPERATIVE JUSTICE

Dear Coop community,

As someone who works to make technology more accessible for people with disabilities—many of whom are too often excluded from participating fully in daily life—I've been heartened to see the Board move forward with establishing hybrid meetings.

The truth is, much of our world is designed with the assumption that everyone can participate in the same way. But we know that's not the case. Hybrid access gives us the chance, right here in our Coop, to help level that playing field. It's a concrete step toward inclusion, making sure that more members are able to join in one of the best parts of living in our great city: the democratic process of cooperative governance.

In a time when disability rights are being challenged across the country, it is especially meaningful to see our Coop taking a different path—one that centers equity, care, and community. Hybrid meetings are not just about technology; they're about affirming our cooperative values and ensuring that no one is left out.

I encourage the Board to continue leading in this direction. It's an opportunity to live out the spirit of cooperation we all value and to strengthen our community by making it more welcoming to everyone.

In solidarity,

Matthew Bambach

PEACHES

Dear Coop members:

In the Sept. 16, 2025, letters to the editor, there is a letter by a member who had peaches that "were not very good." I would like to reply that this season, I had amazing, delicious, juicy local IPM yellow peaches almost every time. I let the peaches sit out a day or two to soften and ripen. I was sorry when I shopped last week that there were no longer any local IPM yellow peaches. I look forward to them next season.

Sincerely,

Julie Gabriel

IN SUPPORT OF HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Coop community:

I've heard that the Coop Board is considering hybrid meetings. I'm writing to fully support hybrid meetings so those members who wish to attend in person may do so, and those many more (busy parents, disabled, crowd-avoidant folks) who may wish to attend online may also do so.

Approving hybrid meetings and hybrid voting strikes me as a logical, rational move to include as many members as possible.

Kind regards,

Daniel Millman

Member since 2014

YES TO HYBRID MEETINGS

To the editor,

I have been a Coop member for the last 11 years, since moving back to New York City from California. As much as I would like to attend every meeting, it is just not possible for me. I am very interested in what happens at the Coop and am completely in favor of hybrid meetings. As the saying goes, no one is smarter than all of us—hybrid meetings give all members an opportunity to be part of the discussion and to vote on the

many important issues that are discussed. I urge the Board to approve hybrid meetings so we can move on and start working together for the benefit of all members.

In Cooperation,

Joy Millman

IN SUPPORT OF HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Gazette:

I am writing to support the PSFC Board in implementing hybrid general membership meetings for our beloved Coop. Participating in our Coop's democracy should not be hindered by an inability to show up to a physical space (because of Covid concern, childcare needs, or myriad other reasons). The recent vote showed that a large majority of the members who voted support hybrid meetings. Thank you in advance, PSFC Board, for making this a reality.

Sincerely,

Steve Quester

BOARD VOTE TO ENACT HYBRID MEETINGS

To the editor,

I'm relieved to hear that the Coop board will likely hold a vote on hybrid meetings soon and that it is expected to pass. Those members who voted have already made it

clear that the majority prefers more accessibility to decision making. We want the wider membership to be able to participate fully, only fair given that we're all owners.

I'm confident that the Coop can (in this instance anyway) show the world what democracy, inclusiveness and tolerance look like in an intolerant time.

Best regards,

Sierra Smigelsky

PRESERVING A COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

Dear Coop community:

Did a lack of decorum at August's Food Coop General Meeting signal tacit approval to blacklist members? A member was allowed to belittle and vilify fellow members who signed the petition opposing the Israeli government's escalating mistreatment of the Palestinian populations.

Singling out a member by name and publicly accusing them of being unfit for participation in Coop activities because they signed a petition smells a bit like McCarthyism, no?

What cold wind is blowing through what was formed as a socially democratic institution?

We, all members, are responsible for preserving this very special cooperative community.

Sincerely,

Pam Thomas

HYBRID MEETING FORMAT!

Hello Coop Members!

I am soooooo excited and in complete support of our Board for passing this crucial ability for all of us to be able to attend and make important decisions about our beloved Coop. Thank you to all who made this happen! It is so hard to attend monthly meetings and now we can all do this from the comfort and ease of our electronic devices from anywhere in the world! I am currently overseas tending to sick elderly parents and do not know when I'll be able to return. And being able to attend a meeting virtually is the only way I can be a vital part of our community. So another big thanks!

Sincerely,

Una Weiss

EVERYBODY GETS A VOTE!

Dear Coop members:

Having been away for some months, I am now gratified to learn that there will, in fact, be a way for ALL of us to vote on Coop matters after all! The Board will meet and discuss the matter of hybrid voting, that is to say, voting both in person and from home, in the near future. Moms and/or dads in need of child care or elder care, those

who are disabled and can't get to the park, those who are immunocompromised and risk illness and even death as did my own (and only) brother last June from exposure to Covid, those for whom a walk at night through a City park is a little too daunting... we ALL will get to vote on all Coop matters from the comfort of home or office if we prefer not going to meet in person. Our Board will take the information gained by previous discussions, forums and votes and will make it happen!! Finally!!

The crisis of governance with which we've been confronted will be resolved democratically, and by all Coop members, in the near future. What a relief! The Coop gets more democratic while the rest of the country gives in to bullies. That's why I love our Coop. We can undergo difficult change and the bullies don't win. This gives me hope for us all.

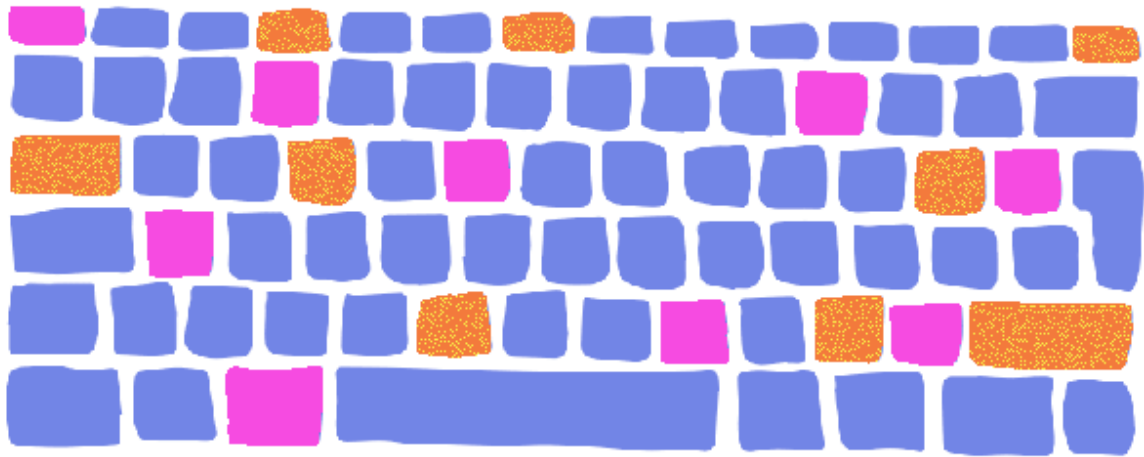
Sincerely,

Carol Wald

AUGUST 5, 2025

December 30, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



YOU'RE INVITED: AUGUST GATHERING TO SUPPORT COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN ALABAMA

Friends and fellow members,

My name is Carmen. While recent Coop contention has felt particularly high-stakes

and long-standing, members have always contested the terms of Coop self-governance. As a Coop kid, I began learning the skills and commitment necessary to facilitate collective decision-making. (Mostly, I learned to feed infants in childcare bagel-eighths to assuage them and to make sincere and short small talk with elementary school teachers. But worker-ownership is important too.) The Coop feels like a home and a possible future. I have strong feelings about the content of this and other conflicts, but I feel much more excited by the membership's investment in processes of worker ownership and conflict resolution.

Because of the Coop, I began studying worker ownership, learning popular education, and working with the Sand Mountain Cooperative Education Center in Alabama over a year ago. We use cooperative ownership to teach. We use education to build cooperative ownership. Groups of teachers, students, and workers gather to build popular education and worker ownership in Alabama. For more on the story and programs, please visit the website.

At 8 PM on August 9, a group of us will gather at Blockhill in South Slope. Come to learn, talk, and drink! Seriously.

Join us!

Excited to see you soon,

Carmen Lopez Villamil

MORE FREE EXPRESSION, JOY, AND FREE CLASSIFIED ADS

Dear Gazette and Coop Community,

How important are community and art to us?

I understand that having a robust community bulletin board in the stairwell is a fire hazard and cannot be returned to its past glory. I feel the loss to our community is large and nothing has been done about it. The Coop used to support our Coop-member-owned businesses in the stairwell and in the printed *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Can the digital *Gazette* please resume a robust and accessible classifieds section?

And can we go a step further in community engagement? I'd like to see us make space available for visual art at the Coop. A great opportunity is on the wall to the right of the exit, behind the cashiers. Presently, there's nothing on the brick besides a new "please don't scam EBT benefits" flyer in a plastic sleeve.

I hope we can offer available unadorned wall space to Coop artists in a fair, equitable and enriching way. Maybe seventeen artists can have a three-week showing each year. Randomly scheduled or first-come-first-served, simply let it schedule out for as long as necessary.

If we are here for health and wellness, then let's allow art to be an integral part of our communal and personal well-being. Let's share in how cleansing and inspiring art can be. Also, this would support our artists!

Finally, can we agree that beautification of our space should be the next step after everything is functional?

Our ship is in order, now please, let's have more free expression, joy and free classified ads.

In community, art, and peace, with best wishes and gratitude,

Wally Wallach

PSFC member since 2011

Editors' note: Members of the Gazette lament the loss of our stairwell bulletin board

as well and are indeed working on a digital Classifieds section.

COORDINATORS' REPORT IS AWESOME, NEEDS A HOME ONLINE

Dear Fellow Members:

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky presented an awesome report at the June general meeting. We learned about the intricacies of keeping our refrigeration and cooling systems operational. Then Elinor told us about the outstanding work by our buyers to keep the Coop supplied in the aftermath of the UNFI cyber-crash. Last, we heard about new staff members. It was great. I want more of it. Keeping the Coop going is so much more than just putting things on the shelves and working the checkouts. And it's really interesting, too.

It would be so wonderful if the coordinator's report could be on video and accessible online so anyone in the Coop could view it at any time. I think this could really boost engagement and feelings of ownership within the Coop community. I hope, if the GC's are amenable, we can get some members to look into the feasibility of doing this.

In Cooperation,

Barbara Mazor

WILL A BATHROOM CLEANER AND LIFTER BE 'AMERICA'S FAVORITE COUPLE'?

To the Cherished Editorial Team,

In the middle of the night, scrolling Instagram, I saw a contest/fundraiser hosted by *Variety* magazine and Jeff Goldblum for “America’s Favorite Couple.” The perfect click-bait for a sleepy romantic who loves talking about her partner and tries to donate regularly (time, clothes, blood, what have you). I enjoyed answering questions like “how did your love story begin” and “what’s your favorite memory” and fell asleep with a smile shortly thereafter. The next week, I found out we were finalists! I’ve never campaigned for anything, but campaigning for love and charity felt like a nice place to start. I designed a poster with a talented young artist that was an illustration of our first date and started sending out the page to friends to either give a free vote or donate to one of the charities for the chance to give a few more votes.

While at my lifting shift the following week, I mentioned the contest to my fellow members. Several of them said they wanted to vote for me as soon as they had reception again (outside of the basement) and that we should tell the *Gazette*! The contest runs through August and you can vote here. I’m not sure if this is a letter, or an announcement or just a note to another special human I haven’t met yet, in any case, thanks for reading.

Grateful for all that you do and to be a part of this incredible community with my partner, Michael Hernandez-Stern. The groceries are good too (especially the cheese!)

Warm regards,

Jewell Hernandez-Stern

THE COOP IS UNGOVERNABLE

Dear Members,

The Coop is ungovernable.

At the April GM, a member said, “We have not only this hybrid vote sabotaged by right wing Jewish extremists, but it’s happened in the past many times.” This filthy slur of “Jewish” was not blunted by “right-wing” or “extremists.”

And yet while proclaiming responsibility to run the GM “impartially” every meeting, the chair committee reacted spinelessly, diminishing Jew-hate to “name-calling” and letting the member continue. Standard business ethics across the US would result in immediate expulsion from the meeting and the organization, and I support full expulsion. But the DRC will not touch it, nor did the *Gazette* report on it. So I see all three committees as complicit in degrading safety for Jews at the Coop.

April’s GM culminated in BDS’s illegal takeover of the Coop’s general meeting by forcing through a referendum on hybrid voting, not for the sake of Palestinians but for what many see as supporting a global call for violence. Again, the chair committee did worse than nothing and simply surrendered their own authority. It should have been stopped by the board of directors, but, stocked with BDS-friendly members, they abandoned their responsibility to the membership at large.

What can you and I do? Contact management and protest with severely reduced shopping until management and committees uproot what Baila Olidort recently called “evil.” Regarding the June GM: While I applaud Joe Holtz’s stewardship, and his warning to the membership about a take-over of the board of directors by BDS’s undemocratic machinations, we cannot rely on last-minute surprises by management. BDS is cancerous to our Coop. It needs excision.

Jesse Rosenfeld

SHOULD ISRAEL BE BOYCOTTED?

Dear editor,

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has claimed that Iran is “months, maybe weeks” away from developing nuclear weapons. But Netanyahu has made this claim repeatedly for the last thirty years at least, as we’ve seen from a CNN montage of news clips circulating on the internet of him doing so.

Recall the pressure campaign in the runup to the disastrous 2003 invasion of Iraq, based on that same bogus narrative about weapons of mass destruction. Such allegations have been repeatedly used to justify our country’s many interventions, all in service to Israel—and of no material benefit to us. Such allegations justified the bombing destruction of Libya, which turned the nation with the highest standard of living in all of Africa into one now running slave markets. They justified funding a terrorist war against the state of Syria that finally resulted in that country’s destruction.

Israel is known to possess many nuclear weapons, albeit undeclared. And both the CIA and Mossad have found no evidence that Iran seeks nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, Israel initiated an unprovoked surprise bombing of Iran on June 13.

The basic plan of the Zionist project is to transform the Middle East to Israel’s liking. In 1948, Israel’s declaration of statehood necessitated the violent displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs into refugee status and triggered war, all for the purpose of ensuring a Jewish majority in a state with a substantial minority of non-Jewish Arabs.

A recent Pennsylvania State University poll reported in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz that 82 percent of Israelis wanted the Palestinian population of Gaza removed en masse, and that a stunning 47 percent would be comfortable with having them all killed.

If there was ever a country that needed to be boycotted, that country is Israel.

David Barouh

OPPOSING WAR CRIMES ISN'T ANTI-COOP

Dear Coop members:

PSFC Members for Palestine have been labeled anti-Coop outsiders. I'm 70, Jewish, Brooklyn-born and a 47-year Coop member, not an outsider. Neither are over 3,500 other members, horrified by Israel's genocidal apartheid government. We demand nothing more than respect and equal treatment from an organization we care deeply about.

For over a decade, a small group of pro-Israel members, currently called Coop4Unity, have worked ceaselessly to prevent a boycott of Israeli goods, blocking any effort toward the most peaceful vehicle for political and social change: economic boycott. They have sought support beyond our Coop, including from the NY Post and Bronx Congressman Ritchie Torres, who has taken \$1.5 million-plus in donations from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a lobby with huge financial influence in federal, state and local elections.

With tacit and overt support from GCs, led by former GM Joe Holtz, pro-Israel members disrupted meetings, and intimidated fellow members who advocate peaceful protest. A member of Coop4Unity filed a lawsuit against the Coop. Result: the Dispute Resolution Committee froze all cases related to Israel/Palestine, leaving unprotected members facing doxing and public harassment from Coop4Unity. Another Coop committee, the Diversity, Equity, and Access Committee, was also banned from work on all issues related to "the Middle East."

Coop4Unity's disproportionate power was evident in Holtz's huddling with them (e.g., April 29 GM) and his Coop-wide personal attack on Board candidates Taylor Pate and Dan Kaminsky, instructing members to vote against them. Joe Szladek, our new GM,

can bring to an end this era of unchecked, uncooperative and biased behavior.

Opposing war crimes isn't anti-Coop, just as demanding reproductive freedom isn't anti-life. People following traditions of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and boycott against South African apartheid deserve respect and fairness from our Coop. We are insiders, committed to core PSFC values: democracy and food justice.

In solidarity,

Alyce Barr

Coordinator Response to Alyce Barr's Letter:

Dear Coop members,

I'd like to respond to claims in Alyce Barr's above letter that reference Coop staff and committees:

The letter accuses the general coordinator team of giving "tacit or overt support to disrupt meetings or intimidate others." That is entirely untrue. Our role is to run the operations of the Coop and uphold its policies and procedures. Some have misinterpreted this as taking sides, but we are simply following long-standing practices to support the Coop's sustainability.

On the status of DRC complaints as referenced in the letter: The recent volume and complexity of cases related to Israel and Palestine have slowed the DRC's response. They are actively working to develop a process to handle them, and we truly appreciate the time and effort they're putting in to move things forward.

I'm not aware of any ban preventing the EACC from working on issues related to the Middle East, as the letter suggests.

The letter also mentions Joe Holtz ‘huddling’ with members of Coop4Unity at a GM, but I think we should be cautious about linking conversations to political allegiance or assuming someone is acting on another’s behalf. I’ve recently spoken with members on both sides of issues to listen, understand their perspectives, and help find constructive paths forward for the Coop, and will continue to do so. I know other staff and members have done the same, and I hope that continues. That kind of open communication is essential to keeping our Coop strong and supporting a respectful, cooperative culture.

*Respectfully,
Joe Szladek
General Manager*

MOVE TO REJECT REMOTE MEETINGS RIPPED FROM MAGA PLAYBOOK

Greetings:

On Tuesday, June 24, the vote in favor of hybrid meetings was narrowly defeated, by a hair. The results showed that a minority of Coop members (barely more than a third) have successfully denied the vote to those unable to attend GM meetings for a host of reasons (we all know what they are).

Undoubtedly, that minority is a heterogeneous group and some may have had honorable, procedural reasons for doing so. There is also no doubt a sizable minority—perhaps majority—of that group who dishonorably voted against hybrid in order to quash the possibility of a successful subsequent vote they didn’t want to happen: a vote in favor of a boycott of Israeli goods.

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Deny voting rights of people because they may use their vote to favor certain policies or legislation you strongly oppose? Yes, it’s out of the

MAGA playbook. Afraid of a potential voting result? Disenfranchise the ones who may make it happen and cover yourself with Orwellian doublespeak. That's why I use the word "dishonorable." There's not only no honor in that, there's none of the courage it takes to live up to the democratic principles of equal rights. No one ever said democracy is easy.

Sincerely,

Allan Novick

LET'S JOIN THE MODERN ERA AND USE REMOTE MEETINGS

Dear Sir or Madam:

Recently, I voted in favor of allowing members to participate in General Meetings (GMs) remotely. It's fairly clear that some who did likewise hope this will promote their anti-Israeli BDS ambitions, which I do not share (and also voted against board candidates who do promote BDS). But really; it's the 21st century, and few of us can cram into a small space in Prospect Park, and Coop members should be able to participate regardless.

I'm sorry that the motion to enable remote meetings failed (barely), and hope the issue will arise again. Among other things, I live in Lower Manhattan, and yes, I do my shift and shop at the Coop faithfully, but it's not an easy stretch, and I'm probably not going to spend time on the subway to go to a GM.

If remote GMs are permitted, it won't be to my benefit, because I'll have to faithfully show up at every general meeting and vote against anti-Semitism. The city with the largest Jewish population in the world is not Jerusalem, nor yet Tel Aviv. It is New York. I don't believe the Coop should tell our Jewish neighbors, "Your kind are not wel-

come here.” (I am not Jewish.) Nor do I support Netanyahu’s genocidal regime, but I don’t believe the Coop should have a foreign policy. (And if it does, can we talk about Russia and China?)

But sure, participation in the GM should be open to all, and technology makes that easy.

We should go there.

Regards,

Greg Costikyan

THE COOP IS NOT A POLITICAL ORGAN

Dear Editors:

I have been a member for approximately 35 years. In my experience and with one notable exception (BDS) Coop controversies have been largely about operations, including expanding the store, pension fund management, plastic bags, meat, beer, vendor labor and management practices, etc.

As a cooperative food store the mission is to provide good food to working members at low prices. Simple enough.

At its core the organization’s social compact is founded as a jointly owned business and economic unit for the benefit of its members. It is not a social justice or humanitarian organization like the ACLU, Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders among many others.

By its mission it is not a political party or an organization for promoting political causes. Political controversy by its nature encompasses diverse opinions, and large-scale community organizations prosper best when diversity is acknowledged and accepted.

There are many injustices in the world and specific advocacy organizations to champion those causes. Politics are personal and I respect a person's decision to not buy a particular product because they find it offensive for any reason. Members can make their own decisions.

In the past the Coop has been a place where we have come together with a single common purpose: to eat good food at low prices. Politicizing the Coop by successfully promoting controversies beyond the scope of the cooperative mission will only offer a false victory. It will not result in meaningful outcomes beyond talking points and continuing to divide the Coop community, which is not the objective.

In cooperation,

Glenn Brill

JULY 15, 2025

December 30, 2025

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

DON'T DISENFRANCHISE ME

Greetings:

Now that we know nearly two-thirds of member voters want remote access to the general meetings, and that we are free to have hybrid meetings without a change to the bylaws (legal advice received by senior staff after the referendum was happening),

can we please reopen meeting access? Since it's not a boycott or a bylaw change, all we need is a simple majority to approve, if we even need a vote.

For reasons of work/childcare/medical/mobility and room capacity, we can't all participate otherwise.

Sincerely,
Lisa Guido

DEMOCRACY, GENERALLY COORDINATED

Greetings:

As recently noted by outgoing General Manager Joe Holtz, Coop members have the right under New York State law to participate in our democratic processes virtually. But our bid to enshrine that right into our bylaws has failed, winning 66.45% of a vote that required 66.67%. That slim margin is a testament to how critical the General Coordinators' fearmongering was in defeating a commonsense proposal rooted in a desire to expand access and maximize participation at the Coop.

The GCs will tout the PSFC's commitment to democracy and member input. They'll invite you to General Meetings where you can "have your voice heard." But after a year and a half of obstruction, obfuscation and the blatant misuse of their bully pulpit, I speak from experience when I say they'll only let you participate if they think they'll still be in control at the end of the day.

Sincerely,
Morgan Võ

LOOKING FORWARD WITH OPTIMISM

Fellow Members,

This summer I will turn 70 and will have been a member of this Coop for more than two-thirds of my life.

As I move into the next decade, our Coop moves into a new phase of its life, with Joe Szladek in the role of General Manager. Welcome and congratulations, Joe.

As a clear-eyed optimist, I imagine the possibilities and work as hard as I can to achieve it. At this moment, I have great hope for what our Coop can achieve under the leadership of a forward-looking General Manager.

Like all Coop leaders, a GM needs to be even-handed and open, fair in their treatment of every Coop member and constituency. They can help us become a truly democratic organization that uses all available tools, so that 17,000 members have the best possible chance to engage in policy- and decision-making. At a moment when a literal majority of Coop members want the opportunity to attend General Meetings online (while the still undecided Hybrid Referendum leaves that up in the air), they can help us transition to hybrid, fully virtual or asynchronous decision-making.

This means leaving behind an overly nostalgic and often unhelpful “we’ve always done it this way” perspective, choosing instead a more analytical stance. It’s time to review how well things actually worked before and consider what needs to change to meet the current moment.

During my 30-plus years working in NYC public education, I learned from and with every child I taught, every teacher and principal I coached and every parent who trusted their child with me. As Joe Szladek assumes his important new role, I look forward to

his willingness to learn from and with all members and his commitment to our mission: food, social and environmental justice.

In solidarity,
Alyce Barr

THE COOP HAS CHANGED—EXCEPT FOR THE LEADERSHIP

Dear Coop members:

“The city has changed,” said NY-7 Rep Nydia Velázquez on Democratic Primary night. “Zohran knew it. The other candidates didn’t see it. And that is why we are here celebrating this beautiful moment.”

The Coop has changed. Everyone knows it, especially younger people, disabled people, members targeted by racism and Islamophobia, shift workers, supporters of Park Slope Food Coop for Palestine and so on. The Coop leadership doesn’t see it. And that is why it’s not hard to imagine the Coop’s eventual fade.

Kerry Carnahan

MORE DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP: ONWARD!

How disheartening to read that the referendum for hybrid meetings failed to pass. The odds were stacked against it though and I believe that the majority of members do care about greater access to the decision-making process. So...let’s forge ahead!

My co-worker Jason Weiner drafted a robust proposal last year. Member Yejia Chen al-

so came up with a solid plan this Spring. The original hybrid meeting proposal, from CJ Glackin & Morgan Võ, has good recommendations too.

I hope that the General Manager, the Agenda Committee, the General Coordinators and the Membership at large will agree to quickly usher these forward. There is always a lot to do, we are all pulled left and right, but this is urgent. With proper planning we can come up with proposals to vote on in the not so distant future. We have to be agile and steadfast about this. We also have to be transparent, accountable and stop the on-going back-stabbing, slandering and other shenanigans.

The above proposals and ideas could be fully discussed at the next GM; small committees of members and/or staff can be organized to generate ideas and research feasibility with regular reporting, clear timelines and deadlines. The Coop can perhaps postpone other projects to focus on this issue. This is not rocket science. It's a business decision related to priorities and allocation of resources.

I encourage all members to push for this in the coming months, and not let it be buried under other priorities or by institutional inertia, nay-sayers and pushback. If we don't stand behind reforming the system to allow greater participation, the Coop will only pay lip service to a core principle: "Democratic Member Control." And skeptical members will have a point: The Coop is just another "glorified buyers club" with performative democratic values.

In solidarity,

Delphine Selles-Alvarez

Membership Coordinator at the Coop

NEW DEMOCRACY 2.0

Dear Coop members:

We best serve the democratic process when we allow everyone to come to the table. Regardless of technology enhancements, our biggest accessibility limitation will always be time. If we continue to only allow members to participate in discussion and voting on Tuesdays at 7 p.m., we disenfranchise anyone unavailable then. Whether it's the inability to travel, log on or simply focus due to other constraints like family, location or just life, those members can't participate.

We need a system that won't require someone who lost the affordable connectivity program to be pressured by personal cost to participate. We need to give parents and people who work nights time to digest information and not be forced to divide their attention. We need ways that give members with different learning styles and accessibility needs the same info as those at the GM.

I believe it's important to recognize that nowhere in the principles of cooperation does it say that members must agree with each other. Cooperation is finding common ground. The Coop is not meant to be a cookie cutter of anyone's beliefs. That's what makes it beautiful, messy and home to us all. Conflict is inherent in this space. Dis-course is a necessity to allow these different opinions a voice. Our current system does not give time or ability to receive, process and respond. It limits participation, it limits engagement, it limits understanding and most importantly it limits factual information and transparent communication.

It keeps us from properly hearing each other. It makes us react and not engage in the best ways. It keeps us from making as much progress as we could.

It's time for **a new Coop democracy**. Please attend the July General Meeting to discuss my agenda item.

Sincerely,

Jason Weiner

Membership Coordinator at the Coop

SPECIAL PRIVILEGES FOR HOLTZ?

Dear Coop members:

In his June 6 email, Joe Holz says that “I’m speaking today only for myself and not on behalf of the staff or General Coordinator team.”

If Holtz is speaking only for himself, as one member equal among many thousands of other PFSC members, how is it that he was authorized to send his email to all members on the PFSC email database? Are all members, speaking only for themselves, able to send emails to the entire PFSC email list when they wish?

*Sincerely,
Erich Hahn*

JOE HOLTZ’S ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

Dear member owners,

Joe Holtz’s abuse of authority in using the Coop’s mailing list to send a message to each of us about how to vote in the upcoming election is outrageous. I’ve been an active member of our beloved Coop for more than two decades, so I have heard Joe’s opinion on many things over all these years. But this is next level, to use our member directory to send a personal message about how to vote.

Joe Holtz’s intervention is straight up election interference and an egregious abuse of his power and privilege. Not only is it outrageous that Joe did this himself, I would like to understand which General Coordinators allowed him this access and which General

Coordinators knew about this email before it went out and didn't have the judgment to see this as an inflammatory smear campaign against our own members? Please explain.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Sullivan

IS THE COOP LOSING ITS PROGRESSIVE SPIRIT?

Folks,

I'd firstly like to congratulate and welcome Joe Szladek to his new role. It's tough taking on a leadership role from a set of founders, as I know from my experience advising many startups and nonprofits around the world.

I joined the Coop because good food is good politics—if not, why buy organic or biodynamic? But the recent developments at the Coop have left me feeling insulted, condescended to, and frankly, unwelcome. The spate of missives from the GCs was bad enough, but Joe Holtz's email decrying board candidates was the height of paternalistic hypocrisy. If the candidates aren't allowed a similar platform to rebut any smears against them, is this really a democracy?

The contrast with Brooklyn, and the rest of the city—in light of the mayoral primary—couldn't be more stark. The recent elections have proven that the electorate has uplifted candidates such as Mamdani, Hanif, Lander and others who have espoused justice for Palestinians and a variety of progressive causes. This begs the question: Has the Coop become a conservative institution with a set of ossified principles and bound by inertia? What happened to the kind of spirit that led to Chilean products being boycotted (under Pinochet)? Are we going to be so out of step with the community around us?

Maybe I should give up expecting better and go somewhere else.

I was honestly expecting Joe Holtz to email us all urging us to vote for Cuomo. Perhaps he still will?

*Regards,
Jayanth Eranki*

SEEKING ANSWERS ABOUT ALL-MEMBER EMAIL

Dear Editors:

I'm confused—how and why was an overly political and biased email on the Board elections from Joe Holtz sent to all members using the Coop's official 'no-reply' mailing list? I do not consent to my email being used by the Coop in this manner for any political and/or campaign message, and have never received one until now.

Additionally, was Holtz's letter meant to coerce, convince and/or rationalize in some way that Coop members need to agree to carry even one single product, let alone several, from a country openly and defiantly committing genocide in front of the entire globe with full U.S. support of funding, intelligence and weapons? Again, confused and would like an explanation.

*Sincerely,
A.L. Steiner*

MOURNING FRIEND'S FAMILY, CALLING FOR BOYCOTT

To my fellow members,

I have a good friend who is Palestinian and grew up as a farmer in a village called Khuza'a, southern Gaza. I mentioned him in a letter early last year (a letter that was originally refused for publication by the Gazette).

In the last month, I learned from him that his entire village was completely erased by Israel (there is no other word for it). Over 50 of his relatives were killed. The fate of the rest of the over 15,000 residents is by and large unknown, a tragedy in itself.

Khuza'a's population was not that far off from the size of the Coop's membership.

Among false narratives from the General Coordinators that a mere boycott of Israeli goods would destroy the Coop—narratives then used to prevent discussion and demonize members—I make the same appeal as in my previous letter: Let's keep our focus on the real destruction happening in Palestine.

*In cooperation and solidarity,
Abdi-Hakin Dirie*

FROM TAIPEI TO PARK SLOPE: IN SUPPORT OF THE COOP'S VALUES

To the Editor:

I've been a proud member of the Park Slope Food Coop for 15 years and have always valued its spirit of cooperation and commitment to providing high-quality, sustainable food to our community.

However, since the attacks in October 2023, I've been troubled by what feels like a shift in the Coop's atmosphere. A vocal minority has pushed rhetoric that feels out of step with the inclusive and cooperative spirit that has long defined this community.

As someone who grew up in Taiwan—a place where democracy and civil liberties were hard-won—I'm deeply unsettled by the selective moral outrage directed at Israel. Though imperfect like any democracy, Israel stands alone in the region in offering meaningful protections for women, minorities and LGBTQ individuals. Yet it is often the sole target of intense condemnation, while regimes like China, Russia and Egypt—whose human rights abuses are well-documented—escape similar scrutiny. Criticizing a government's policies is one thing; singling out an entire nation and its people as uniquely immoral is something else entirely.

Regardless of where one stands on this complex and emotional issue, it is crucial to preserve the Coop's core values: cooperation, inclusivity and a focus on good food and community. I greatly appreciate the dedication of our General Coordinators, whose hard work reassures me that the Coop's spirit can continue to thrive. I want to thank Joe Holtz for his decades of service to the Coop and for his recent letter—a voice of reason and moral clarity from someone who has long embodied the values of the Coop. As Joe steps back from his role, I believe his words serve as a timely reminder of what this community stands for: cooperation, respect and a shared commitment to the Coop's founding principles.

Sincerely,
Linda Wong

MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

December 30, 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 democratic 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 Szladek 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 can-

didates in person, did another round with three candidates, then a final round with Coop staff members. Szladek's dedication to the Coop and his vision "made him a natural choice," according to Jenkins.

After that, Szladek 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 flyering 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."

Szladek 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 op-

tions.

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

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 responsible. “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

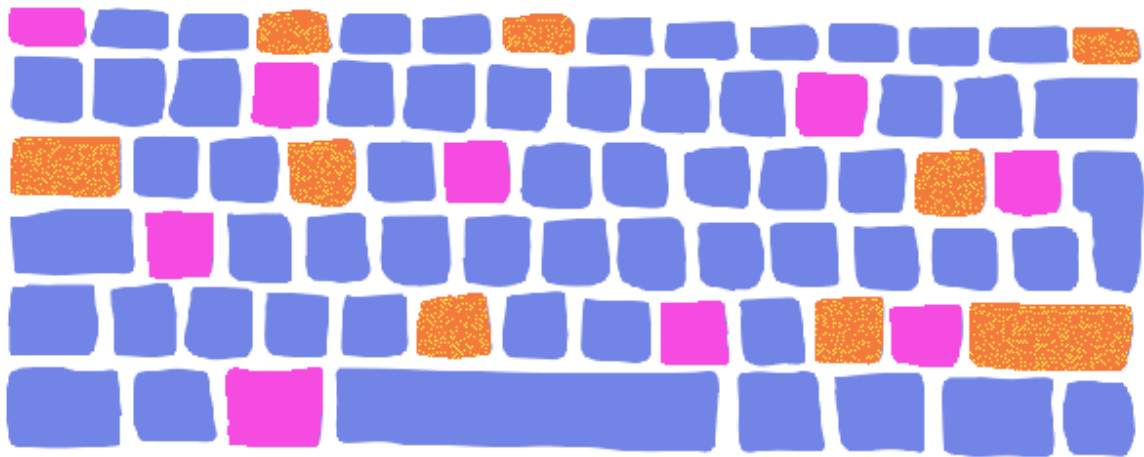
Imani Q’ryn announced that it was her last board meeting as a member of the Chair Committee after 18 years on the Board and 20 years on the committee. “It’s been an honor being on the Board and working with my fellow Chair Committee members,” she said.

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.

JUNE 3, 2025

December 30, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



REQUEST FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Coop members:

I am a long-standing Coop member and urge the Coop to put in place hybrid general meetings.

A large percentage of Coop members are simply unable to attend in person meetings due to family and work obligations, and long distances to travel. I currently care for my elderly parents in Maryland and am in Brooklyn infrequently and randomly, but I still shop at the Coop and fulfill all my work obligations. Many members are in similar situations. Not to mention elderly or disabled members who may have health or physical issues which prevent them from attending in person meetings easily. Hybrid zoom meetings have become standard throughout both the public and the private sectors in this country. The Coop has embraced the digital age in many ways, far too many to list here. Hybrid GM's make common sense in 2025 and would allow more members to participate in the Coop's democratic process.

I have read the Jan. 7 Coordinator's Corner article *Our Coop at Risk* in the *Gazette*, encouraging members to oppose the hybrid meeting proposal. I find this baffling. Only offering in-person meetings essentially disenfranchises all but a handful of our many thousands of members. It flies in the face of all common sense. With regard to the BDS boycott, lowering the boycott threshold to 50% is unacceptable. No boycott of any kind should be enacted without at least a two thirds consensus of Coop members, and in-person meetings should be allowed to proceed in a hybrid fashion. This would be a good compromise and uphold the democratic values of the Coop. But discouraging a more democratic, easily accessible GM process is not a good look, and gives the appearance that the general coordinators and the board are against member participation on controversial topics.

Sincerely,
Becky Burrows

ISRAEL OBSESSION

Dear Coop members:

I'm a long time Coop member and I joined to be part of a cooperative workplace devoted to healthy food. The idea that the Coop should be a place to fight the problems of the Middle East is simply not an appropriate or fair use of member time and resources. I think that the discussion of Palestine and Israel should be banned from the agenda of the Coop and people who cannot leave this alone should have their membership revoked.

Sincerely,
David Sher

ARE COOP STAFF OUT OF TOUCH?

Dear *Linewaiters' Gazette*:

I have been watching the evolution of the issue of hybrid meetings. I feel like the staff is trying to do what they think is right for the Coop, but they are out of touch with the democratic process and the actual will of the members. Blocking votes and overriding the board's attempt to reinstate the membership's voice is a sign that you're doing it wrong.

Sincerely,
Bill Beckler

UPHOLDING DEMOCRACY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN OUR COOP

To the Editor,

As a longtime member-owner, I am deeply concerned by the ongoing delay in issuing a referendum on hybrid General Meetings, despite a clear directive from the Board. The Board, elected by and accountable to the membership, has called for this referendum to give members a voice on an important issue of accessibility and participation.

The continued postponement—now stretching to 18 months—prevents us from exercising our democratic rights as members and undermines the cooperative values of openness, equity and democratic member control that are foundational to the Coop. Seeking further legal opinions at this stage appears to be an unnecessary barrier, especially given the Coordinators' previously stated opposition to hybrid meetings. As member-owners, we expect our paid staff to respect the decisions of the Board and the will of the membership.

I urge the General Coordinators to follow the Board's directive and issue the referendum by the end of May. Anything less is a disservice to our Coop's principles and to the rights of its members to participate fully in our governance.

Sincerely,
William Clark

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

Dear Editors,

Many thanks to the Board members who listened to the requests of the membership expressed at the April General Meeting and voted to move the long-delayed hybrid

meetings proposal to a referendum.

For me the General Meeting was a hopeful exercise of democracy. The chair committee extended the open forum time enabling more voices to be heard; a Board member, a member of the agenda setting committee, and many members shared their perspectives. The lively response to a member's motion to provide a path forward engaged the whole room in thinking about how Coop decisions are made and who makes them.

I came away with a new understanding that every General Meeting is a portion of a Board meeting "that is devoted to receiving the advice of the members" (Coop's Bylaws, Article VI, 2). Soon we will all have the chance to vote on a proposal to allow more members to give our advice to the Board through hybrid meetings.

*In cooperation,
Kathy McCullagh*

REMOVE ROGUE DIRECTORS

Dear Members:

The April 29 General Meeting was an exercise in mob rule and a rejection of the rule of law, a fundamental principle of democracy.

The Coop is a corporation governed by the laws of New York state. It operates under its bylaws and governing documents, including the Guide to the General and Annual Meetings, which states:

When the Coop incorporated, the members decided that the Board of Directors (BOD) would be required to meet openly and vote only on issues that were taken up and vot-

ed on by the membership.

The Guide affirms the role of the Agenda Committee:

IV. Agenda of the General Meeting

A. The Agenda Committee impartially sets the agenda of the General Meeting.

C. The Agenda Committee will assemble the items, prioritize them, and submit them for publication in the Linewaiters' Gazette 5 to 12 days prior to the General Meeting.

The bylaws further state:

ARTICLE VI - MEETINGS

The membership shall be given notice of each such (Board of Directors) meeting prior to such meeting. The directors shall inform those members who shall be present of the nature of the business to come before the directors and receive the advice of the members on such matters. The portion of the Board of Directors meeting that is devoted to receiving the advice of the members shall be known as the General Meeting.

On April 29, Directors Tess Lavoie-Brown and Keyian Favai conducted a board meeting that violated these governing rules. Without proper process and member input, they authorized a referendum to change the bylaws. Director Tim Hospodar voted in support of this breach.

These Directors failed to uphold their fiduciary responsibility and violated members' rights.

They must resign—or be removed.

Voice your opposition. Please sign the recall petition.

Barbara Mazor

coop4unity.org

FINDING “VALUE” IN THE COOP’S COLLECTION AND AGGREGATION OF PERSONAL DATA AND OPINION

To the editors:

Why take the Coop’s demographic survey?

I oppose efforts like this and think them unlawful.

The PSFC survey email reads: “organizations like our Coop regularly find value in collecting such information in order to assess needs.”

What needs?

Where is the need for “value,” if that value works to divide us?

It’s needless surveys like this and the hunt to gather, aggregate and mine “value” from intrusive data collection among individuals in voluntary community like ours, of race, sex and the like that speak of identity, that trouble me. All this surveying has divided us, has got our country into the hands of an alliance of clever despots who feed on occasions like this, in organizations like ours, to denounce voluntary communities who accrue social data from individuals, without inner aim, without clear purpose. And it’s intrusive, divisive and needless. Of what value then?

Respectfully submitted,
Allen Tobias

A BIG THANK YOU

Dear Coop Members:

Because there were so many members wanting to speak during Open Forum, I never got a chance, so here goes: I'm 71 years old, and my husband is 76. We're both immunocompromised but make it to almost every GM (wearing masks) because we love our Coop and want to participate in democratic community gatherings. We risk our safety every month so that we can attend.

It was enormously gratifying to learn that the Board authorized a vote by our ENTIRE membership online about finally ratifying having monthly GM's online and in person!!

A big thank you to those who helped make this vote possible after 17 months of delays!! Democracy is messy but it works!!

*Sincerely,
Carol Wald*

THE TRUTH COMES LIMPING AFTER

To the editor:

I could give you my legal perspective of the April 29 Board of Directors meeting (I'm an appellate attorney well versed in corporate governance disputes), but I will let the Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine speak for themselves. Here is their Instagram video and email telling you exactly what happened: PSFCM4P were so angry that they took over and ended the meeting; Directors Tess Brown-Lavoie and Keyian Vafai discussed an issue that was not on the agenda; and they decreed that the Coop will issue a referendum on hybrid meetings because the PSFCM4P demand hybrid

meetings now.

The General Coordinators implored Tess and Keyian to stop because their action was illegal under the Coop's bylaws. The bylaws are the rules the Coop follows when making decisions as a cooperative corporation. Why was their action illegal? The word "illegal" means against a law, and bylaws are laws.

Our bylaws require Directors to make decisions at a Board meeting, but the PSFCM4P ended the scheduled meeting. Our bylaws also require that the entire membership be informed of "the business to come before the directors." Our Guide to the General Meetings (rules clarifying our bylaws) require a minimum five days advance notice of an agenda item so all members can decide whether to come "give advice to the directors."

Tess and Keyian, leaders of the campaign to boycott Israel, gave **no** advance notice of their agenda—not even to their fellow Directors Imani Qryn and Joe Holtz. PSFCM4P proclaim their takeover was "democracy" in action. It was great political theater, but not democracy. Democracy requires following laws. The PSFCM4P letters here are also not democracy. They are words of an *activistocracy* taking totalitarian control—over you and our beloved Coop.

Sincerely,
Zara Watkins

OUR RIGHT TO DECIDE

Dear Coop Members,

I am a longtime Coop member who has occasionally dipped a toe into PSFC governance. When I did so, I experienced firsthand the undue influence that the General Co-

ordinators often exert. Thus, I appreciate the way in which the group Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine has worked alongside other democracy-minded members to make our General Meetings hybrid.

I was angry when I read the GCs' latest column, where they try to argue that caring about the fate of people who are being bombed and starved by a country heavily supported by our own government somehow equates to being the vessel of an ideology, driven only by a single issue. *Even if* PSFC4Palestine's only motive for supporting hybrid meetings was to make it easier to vote on a boycott, wouldn't that still be a good thing? But that's not all they care about, as I know from conversations with a few of them. It's just that they reject the GCs' effort to define "cooperation" in narrow, apolitical terms.

In the most recent *Gazette*, I read that the General Coordinators have refused to say whether they will issue the referendum on hybrid meetings as directed by the Board at the April GM. Now I find out that Joe Holtz says they are getting legal advice about next steps. Once again, employees of the member-owners are acting like bosses or corporate CEOs who can do whatever they please. I am grateful to those on the Board who stood up for the membership and our right to decide this question via referendum.

Sincerely,
Winston McIntosh

PETITION TO RECALL MEMBERS OF THE COOP'S BOARD

Dear Coop,

We are collecting signatures for a recall of three members of the Coop's Board of Directors: Tess Brown-Lavoie, Keyian Vafai, and Tim Hospodar. These board members

voted “yes” when Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine illegally forced through a referendum on hybrid voting at the April GM. They did so without notifying membership, as required per our bylaws, thus stealing yours and everyone else’s vote.

Please add your name to the Recall Petition [here](#).

Sincerely;

Jesse Rosenfeld

BDS VS. COOP(ERATION)

Dear Coop members:

I understand why BDS wants to isolate Israeli companies from selling their wares in the US and elsewhere, like I understand why Hamas exists. Without a doubt, Israel’s war on Gaza is horrendous beyond words, as has been violent aggression toward the Palestinians since even before the founding of the state of Israel.

However, what I don’t understand is that BDS is spending its time and efforts on achieving the goal of getting Israeli products boycotted from the Park Slope Food Coop of all places. You don’t resolve a severely polarized conflict by sabotaging the essence of a non-political entity that actively strives for inclusivity and diversity, and has done so successfully for 50 years, with great effort by many.

Take your fight to the corporate world of commerce instead. That’s where your fight gets the ROI on your time and efforts you’re looking for by upping reach and scale. And if a difference can be made, it’s on the scale of corporate profits.

So again, don’t pick on a Coop that embraces, models and nurtures cultural unders-

tanding and collaboration. Taking the BDS fight to the Coop defeats BDS's purpose on two fronts—fighting a fight where it shouldn't be fought, and not fighting the fight where it could make the difference BDS seeks. Fighting the Coop is a waste of many people's time and energy, not in the least of those who support BDS and its mission.

Thank you!

Erik Schurink

BDS IS TOO TOXIC FOR EVENT SPACES—AND FOR US

Dear fellow Coop members:

I was one of dozens of members who couldn't get into the April general meeting due to capacity constraints. It was a frustrating but enlightening experience, as it became clear in talking to fellow members on the line that many are missing the plot. There was anger about the cancellation of our contract for the theater at City Tech, and rage at an apparent move by an unaffiliated NGO that led to City Tech backing out, but zero reflection on why City Tech would take such a push seriously.

Why such drama about a process issue at the Coop? For anyone not following along, the animating force for the push for hybrid meetings is to make it easier to vote on boycotting Israel at the Coop in alignment with the BDS movement. No matter our feelings about the wars in the Middle East and the terrible plight of people there, the BDS movement is widely perceived as toxically antisemitic. It is so toxic that many city institutions want nothing to do with it, whatsoever. That's why it's been hard to schedule large venues to hold such meetings, and that's why Coop BDS activists are pushing so hard for virtual meetings instead.

So, I pose the question to my fellow Coop members: if even a whiff of association with BDS is considered too toxic for public spaces in the city, why isn't it for us? We would-

n't—and certainly shouldn't—tolerate affiliation with racist and hateful outside groups of other sorts; why are we putting up with this? There are many ways to support the Palestinian cause without aligning with outright anti-Semites.

I can only hope that my fellow Coopers don't realize who they are trying to get in bed with. Time to wake up.

Sincerely,
Josh Suskewicz

THAT “OTHER” ISSUE

Dear Coop members:

Why has there been such controversy over the hybrid meetings proposal? It's a virtual no-brainer that such meetings would be a boon for greater participation in the Coop's democracy, so why has the proposal been on the table for so long without a vote? But of course we know why; we know that the reason has nothing to do with the subject of hybrid meetings itself, but rather that such meetings might facilitate a vote on that *other issue*—the proposed Israel boycott, and the drive by certain Coop factions to prevent that vote from ever happening, lest it succeed. All else has become secondary to that goal, come hell or high water. Larger venues have been difficult to find, and when one has been found, it has been mysteriously sabotaged and called off. Thus, the hybrid meetings vote has become a casualty to that *other issue*.

But a solution is evident, and easy to implement. During the COVID years, when in-person meetings were thought to be dangerous, meetings were held online. The coordinators are responsible for arranging General Meetings, and simply interpreted online meetings to be the equivalent of in-person ones. Thus, meetings continued to take place. Nothing in the bylaws prevents that. By the same logic, controversial pro-

posals judged to demand larger venues can simply be held online. Coordinators need not spend time and money searching for a large in-person venue, only to see it cancelled, victim to specious arguments and dirty pool. They can simply notify the membership via their normal email announcements of the coming General Meeting, that it will be held online, and send along the links announcing the agenda and setting up the voting. So why is this charade that a venue cannot be found going on?

Sincerely,
David Barouh

CASTING ASPERSIONS INSTEAD OF VOTES

To my fellow members and General Coordinators who've tried to stop the referendum on hybrid voting:

You tried, but failed, to inhibit our democracy as a way to avoid engaging in an honest conversation and vote on the issues of BDS.

I am a Jewish descendant of Holocaust survivors. In the 1930s, there were Americans who saw my people's plight as their burden, and helped get my grandpa out of Germany. When genocide is happening, neutrality is impossible; we are either complicit or opposed. Today at the Coop, we can do our part by standing in solidarity with the people of Palestine by boycotting goods from Israel, the state committing genocide against them.

Instead of engaging on the issues, I have mostly seen anti-hybrid/BDS campaigns simply cast aspersions on us as a group. There are baseless rumors that we are violent. We have been doxxed. One member in a previous *Gazette* letter wrote that we are "holding the Coop hostage"! At the 4/29 GM, we were even scolded by a Board member for acting dangerously because, the reasoning went, by demanding that the

Board issue a referendum on hybrid voting we were not letting our own voices be heard. We've waited over 18 months for the Board to allow a vote on increased accessibility to voting; I trust everyone can see the rhetorical gymnastics here.

I am proud we won a referendum on hybrid voting. We have a governance that clearly does not wish to have this conversation, but we still succeeded. Ultimately, we need a robust conversation and vote on these issues. For example, does supporting a state that is intentionally starving an entire population uphold our mission to "oppose discrimination in any form"? Don't change the subject; let's discuss and vote about it.

Sincerely,

Rosie Lopeman, artist, teacher and member of PSFC For Palestine

REFLECTIONS ON HYBRID GENERAL MEETINGS

Dear Coop members:

"More people will attend a Hybrid General Meeting than one at the Picnic House."

Surely this is the thinking of members who are vehemently demanding that we establish permanent Hybrid Meetings.

Based on the evidence below, this may not always be the case.

Elizabeth Tobier's April 22 letter gave the attendance at 35 Zoom GMs during Covid. Every Coop member was free to participate in these meetings while eating dinner and doing household chores.

The average attendance from May 2020 to August 2023 was 150. Attendance was highest the first few months but then dropped precipitously.

In September 2023 the GM returned to the Picnic House. Minutes of 17 meetings through March 2025 are posted on our website. They tell how many members voted, when there was a vote.

The average number of votes cast in these elections was 159.

This shows that MORE people have been attending GMs at the Picnic House since we ended Covid Zooming!

Picnic House attendance was greatest in October 2024 when there were Personnel Committee and Masking Mandate votes. Were these members attending a meeting for big decisions?

I am left considering what effect the issue of boycotting Israel is having on the extremely intense Food Coop conversation about whether or not to establish permanent hybrid meetings. In my opinion the boycott issue is the MAIN impetus and this gives me the creeps.

I have no doubt that if hybrid meetings were established and there was a vote on a boycott, a record number of members would chime in, even if the voting system was put in place hastily.

IF, and I repeat IF, members sanction hybrid meetings, we'd better take our time setting up a flawless system free of fraud potential, that will also give members sufficient time for considering issues.

Sincerely,
Andy Feldman

HIDING GEHIND “DEMOCRACY” FOR STAGING A “COUP”

Dear Coop members:

The monthly GM has typically about 200 attendees, or only a bit more than one percent of the membership base. Whatever decisions are made on that day reflect the will of that motivated and engaged one percent; in no way does it reflect the will of the 99% members who do not vote. To call it democracy and the will of the membership is a farce.

The lack of engagement of 99% of the membership is a shame, but understandable, and not unexpected. After all, people lead busy lives, and schlepping to a two-hour evening meeting in the park to discuss the formation of a work-rules or recycling committee is asking a lot.

The lack of participation in our Coop’s governance becomes particularly worrisome, however, when a small group of highly motivated actors coordinate their activities with an outside group to take over the control of the Coop. Indeed, it only takes 100–150 people to gain the majority vote during those monthly GMs.

The Coop must rethink its governance, to protect itself from bad actors!

Sincerely,

Bruno Grandsard

150 MEMBERS LEFT WITHOUT A VOICE

To my fellow members —

An article from the May *Gazette* describes how, at the April GM, board member Imani

Q'ryn spoke to attendees about the risks of the board issuing a Coop-wide referendum on hybrid meetings. She warned that "what we're doing right here is very dangerous... hold your power. Do not give it to us." Sadly, I was among those excluded from the Picnic House due to capacity issues and couldn't hear her statement from my spot near the front of the 150-person long line of members who had hoped to get in. A tall room divider blocked our view of the meeting through the windows, the shut doors prevented us from hearing what was said, and we were told that if we did anything beyond quietly standing in line, someone would call the police.

Respectfully, Q'ryn's statement frustrates me. "Hold your power" rings a little hollow to those of us stuck outside. What power should we hold? The power of the first 250 people who show up to make decisions for the rest of us? If "the Coop is built on discussion" as Joe Holtz says, then why are there over a hundred people waiting in line who can't make their voices heard? I don't see any danger in issuing a Coop-wide mail-in ballot to make a decision, especially on a matter that has already seen so much discussion and faced so many logistical hurdles.

I agree with Q'ryn that the membership should hold our power and not give it away—and hybrid GMs are exactly how we can do that.

Sincerely,
Robert Lord

LET THE REFERENDUM ON HYBRID MEETINGS HAPPEN!

Dear Fellow Park Slope Food Coop Members,

I just sent the following message to the Coop General Coordinators:

I am horrified to learn that rather than carrying out the clearly demonstrated will of

the membership of the Coop to hold a vote on whether or not to allow hybrid general meetings, the GC's are hiring lawyers!

This is ABSURD! Let the members vote on the question.

I was at the GM at the end of April and the twisted logic expressed by Joe Holtz and Imani Q'ryn arguing against the decision by the Board to go ahead with a referendum was astounding.

How on earth can stopping a referendum from happening be described as a defense of democracy?

LET THE REFERENDUM HAPPEN!

In solidarity,

Judith Loeb

DISENFRANCHISEMENT IS WRONG

To the editors,

If what has been reported is true, and the General Coordinators are seeking legal advice on how to prevent members from attending General Meetings virtually, then we have truly arrived at a moment of crisis.

To spend Coop resources (our money) disenfranchising members who otherwise can't attend and have their voice heard for reasons like physical disability, lack of childcare and needing to work is an outrageous dereliction of duty.

We should be better than this.

*Thank you for your attention,
Walter Kaplan*

REFERENDUM AS THE ULTIMATE VOICE OF THE MEMBERSHIP?

To the Editor:

It seems reasonable that a vote impacting members incapable of attending General Meetings (GMs) must happen in a way that allows for the votes by those otherwise excluded. Increasing the capacity of an in-person venue by fourfold only responds to one of the myriad factors that prohibit the membership-at-large from deeply participating in the cooperation of this organization. Allocating a new space for only ~6% of membership remains imperfect to survey, respect and understand the thousands of voices that cannot reach our community as easily. Yet we promise each other equal voting rights in principle.

As a data guy, I wrestle with the fact that science can theorize using small samples, but this runs counter to ICA's Statement on the Cooperative Identity (1995) which defines equal voting rights as "one member, one vote." More to the point, why is this clause truncated from the ICA's Cooperative Principles as they appear in the About section on foodcoop.com—who removed it from our website? Honoring that our Coop has a unique governance structure, as a member of the Board of Directors I acknowledge that I require the advice of every member willing to vote in favor of or against innovating the meeting structure in a way that impacts our governance structure. I recognize it is inappropriate to vote on this topic at a Board meeting without first welcoming the voice of every member. Sample size of N , in this case, will not suffice.

In a way, it's ironic the scheduled vote, of which the membership was notified, did not happen at the April 2025 GM. Although I have studied the advice of hundreds of mem-

bers via email, dozens of articles in the *Gazette*, and in discussion and Open Forum at many GMs, only a referendum will provide each member one vote.

Sincerely,

Tim Hospodar, Member of the Board of Directors who accepted the advice of the members present on April 29 to commence the Board meeting without further discussion in an expedited effort to solve this conundrum

DON'T MOURN—ORGANIZE!

Fellow Members,

I grew up knowing the deep and lasting harm of political and identity smear lists. My father was jailed in the US for labor organizing, then captured and locked in solitary confinement in Spain, for fighting Franco. In a deal to gain his freedom, he was forced to silence his political voice.

On a list of Jewish teachers, my mother faced a quota system that prevented her from working in her own town. Her brother was similarly denied access to engineering school.

Fast forward to 2025: the US is again collecting names, lists, and punishing speech. Here at our Coop, General Coordinators—people we pay to lead—are using labels like PMP* to marginalize anyone who speaks in favor of hybrid meetings, condemns genocide or advocates boycotting products from an apartheid state. They publish names of Board candidates to vote for (or not), based on the spurious assumption that members who voice ethical objections to crimes against humanity are “ideologically driven” and therefore unconcerned with the good of the Coop.

In GM comments and Coordinators’ Corner editorials, GCs are creating a narrative in

which anyone who advocates for a system that allows more than 250 of us at a time to participate in governance—or condemns forced starvation—is somehow less a Coop member than those who work to avoid a vote on hybrid meetings, block discussion of a boycott or remain silent.

All member-owners have the right to equitable treatment by the GCs. All member-owners deserve respect and a system of governance that enables their ideas and proposals to reach the wider Coop membership for discussions and votes. All member-owners have the right to share individual thoughts and to gather in groups to express support for their ideas. Organizing in this way should not put anyone in the GCs' crosshairs.

*In their May 13 Coordinators' Corner column, General Coordinators used the acronym PMP in referring to Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine

In Cooperation,
Alyce Barr

GCS DON'T APPEAR TO WANT THE MOST QUALIFIED CANDIDATES FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear Fellow Members:

In reading statements from the candidates for our upcoming Board election, I was favorably struck by the following:

Taylor Pate joined the Central Brooklyn Food Coop because she “was interested in organizing with other black folks and creating a grocery store that was built for those that have historically lacked access to fresh food in Central Brooklyn.... With inequality and lack of access to quality food in NYC,” Taylor believes “it’s crucial to keep the

Coop affordable, and for members to have access to information about the food supply chains that impact the food that we buy.”

Dan Kaminsky has “worked on campaigns, in nonprofits and in the office of a state senator” and in addition serves on Community Board 7. Cooperatives have been a central part of Dan’s adult life, including “a cooperative tour company called Social Justice Tours and... Bluestockings, a collectively run bookstore in the Lower East Side.” Dan participated in a cooperative bike messenger company and in housing cooperatives throughout Brooklyn.

In my eyes, these statements reflect cooperative values, period. Yet in the latest post from the General Coordinators, I read that these people represent “ideologically--driven member groups” that they are hell bent on advancing one issue, that they couldn’t give a hoot about the overall welfare of the Coop. It’s as if we were talking about members of some fringe sectarian political group—you know, the kind you see at rallies handing out newspapers dripping with rhetoric that reflects their current party line. What does this caricature have to do with a food justice advocate or a Community Board member?

Let’s maybe set aside the GCs’ (very self-interested—they are afraid they won’t get to run the whole show anymore) scare-mongering and evaluate the candidates on the merits?

In cooperation,
Annabel Bruno

COOP LEADERS SHOULD HELP, NOT HINDER, OUR DEMOCRACY!

Dear fellow Coop members:

After reading publications in the *Gazette* casting unfair suspicions on my board candidacy, I'd like to share my response with the membership.

I've valued creating friendships, building relationships with staff and being part of a Coop that aligns with my values, in particular to support an alternative to grocery corporations, encourage democratic decision making and have access to high quality and affordable food. This is an inherently political act. Some of the first cooperatives in this country were instrumental in the Civil Rights movement and the end of slavery. Cooperatives are political institutions by design.

I'm running for the board because I believe in coops as ways to build economic power, create community and effect change. I'm highly qualified to act as a board member to serve the will of the membership, as you can see in my board candidacy statement.

Members have exercised their democratic power, for example, by voting to ban Chilean grapes during the Pinochet regime. I'm proud to echo the thousands of members calling for a ban of products from Israel, a country that is perpetuating a genocide.

I've been devastated by the efforts of a few members to ostracize and harass those who wish to exercise their member power by putting a boycott to a vote. I've received unwelcome emails and threats, and have been publicly doxxed. It's disappointing that GCs have used bureaucracy to hamper members exercising their democratic rights.

All members, including myself, should feel safe in exercising their rights. If certain members—supported by the GCs—continue to suppress efforts to allow membership to vote for hybrid meetings and any form of a boycott, this sets a dangerous precedent by obstructing the will of members to take part in democratic decisions about an organization in which we're all deeply invested.

In solidarity,
Taylor Pate

THE APRIL GM WAS A SUCCESS FOR DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP

Greetings:

I attended the April 29 Coop general meeting. I did not know what to expect after the cancellation of the City Tech venue and the agenda committee decided to strike the hybrid meeting vote from the agenda. Along with the majority of the people in the room, I was outraged that an outside group, with the support of a pro-Israel minority in the Coop, are strong arming the Coop from exercising the right to vote.

The Board's vote to issue a referendum reflected members' will and it was only enabled by active participation in the April's General Meeting. The membership is fed up with 17 months of delays on this important issue. Hopefully, the General Coordinators, the Agenda Committee and Joe Holtz will not drag their feet or, worse, overturn the decision to have a direct mail-in vote on a hybrid vote meeting. Let us sustain the Coop's tradition of membership democracy by facilitating, instead of resisting, a membership vote on the right to boycott Israeli or foreign companies that profit out of Palestinian oppression.

Sincerely,
David Diaz

IS THIS WHAT “DEMOCRACY” LOOKS LIKE?

Dear Coop members:

My partner and I hired a babysitter at \$25/hour for four hours to attend the GM on 4/29/25. Usually, one of us stays with the kids when attending meetings and working shifts because we can't afford childcare otherwise. One must give up our right to vote so the other can attend, since proxy voting isn't allowed. We both planned to vote for hybrid so both of us could finally vote and not waste \$100 on childcare. Since City Tech was forced to cancel, we attended the meeting anyway. Here are my experiences:

- I approached the chair committee to request that the proposed motion to adjourn the GM be rephrased in accessible terms because it was very confusing for many members. The chair responded very condescendingly. He should have known to present the vote in a neutral way.
- The chair and staff weren't honest that City Tech was sabotaged by “End Jew Hatred.”
- A group of people in the rear alcove loudly heckled speakers. No one silenced them. An older white woman from that group approached a Black mother to ask her to quiet her toddler's laughter. I called her out on her racism since she never once told her white friends to quiet their shouting, which was far louder and angrier.

As a Black woman and a mom, I felt unwelcome and unsafe and left the GM in tears. I have no time for haters. I'll only attend future GMs when they're hybrid. At least the Board agreed to a referendum so we can finally vote on hybrid. But why do we even need to vote? Why can't all GMs be hybrid so that we can all vote? The Coop should be an example of what democracy can look like, not emulate our dysfunctional two-party political system.

Sincerely,
LaShaun Ellis

SOME QUESTIONS FOR PSFCM4P

Dear Coop members: Explain to me how it works, Part 1

Members 4 Palestine wants the Coop membership to join the BDS movement. I've tried communicating with M4P about how the BDS agenda will bring about resolution to the "Israel-Palestine conflict" but the BDS belief system seems to prohibit dialogue with anyone who asks questions.

Here are some questions I'd like to discuss with M4P concerning the three main BDS demands:

1. Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands

Focusing only on the West Bank:

Does BDS expect that Hamas will take control when the Israeli military leaves?

What will happen to the Palestinian Authority?

What is necessary to prevent a State of Palestine in the West Bank from destabilizing Jordan?

2. Full equality for the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel

What categories of inequality need to be addressed?

Does BDS support organizations that are fighting discrimination in Israel?

Does BDS propose reform legislation?

3. Right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.

What's the number of people who want to return?

If Israeli law does not provide a procedure for transferring property title from current owners to returners, does BDS propose legislation?

What if property was in a town that was razed and is now under a national forest or a new neighborhood?

How long will this process take and who will pay for it?

Some general questions:

If you support a secular democratic State of Palestine, do you repudiate Hamas?

What kind of Israeli coalition government could implement the BDS agenda?

I've seen no indication that the BDS movement offers serious policy proposals.

I've seen no indication that anyone in M4P has thought through how the demands they want the Coop to adopt can be met. Maybe that's why they refuse dialogue.

Sincerely,

Noah Potter

HELP FEED PEOPLE IN GAZA

Dear Coop Members,

If you are Jewish and are at all bothered by the atrocities Israel is committing against the people of Gaza, you might want to sign this statement by Jews for Food Aid for People in Gaza:

It's obviously no substitute for the long-obstructed vote for BDS at the Coop, but it is a little something.

Thanks,
Robert Rosen

LET US VOTE!

To the Editor,

Let us vote!

I want to thank the Board of Directors for voting to issue a referendum on hybrid General Meetings. It should never have taken this long. Member-owners shouldn't have to fight this hard just to participate in our Coop democracy.

Which begs the question: When did voting become so controversial at the Coop?

This April, after an outside harassment campaign targeted (and thereby canceled) the venue secured for the hybrid GM vote, Coop leadership moved the meeting to a smaller space and quietly removed the hybrid GM vote from the agenda. This vote had been secured for this GM after more than 15 months of member democratic efforts.

At the meeting, there was no explanation, no accountability and no mention of the disruption or the agenda change in the General Coordinators' report. Again, where is the accountability for our member democracy?

If we want accountability and a stronger Coop democracy, then we need better visibility of member voices. One way to do this is by restoring the Coop Bulletin Board—a physical space where members could share ideas, stay informed and engage. That board was essential for transparency and connection.

Since its removal during COVID, we've been pushed into isolated conversations—just those on our shifts or whoever we happen to bump into in the aisles. That's not a community—that's a silence. And with that comes apathy, confusion and a loss of accountability.

We need hybrid meetings. We need a bulletin board. And we need leadership that represents, not overrides, member voices.

Vote YES on the referendum. This is about access, accountability and whether we still have a member democracy.

*In cooperation,
Rosa Palermo*

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

December 30, 2025



PHOTO BY LEILA DARABI

May 13, 2025

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 meet-

ings, 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.”

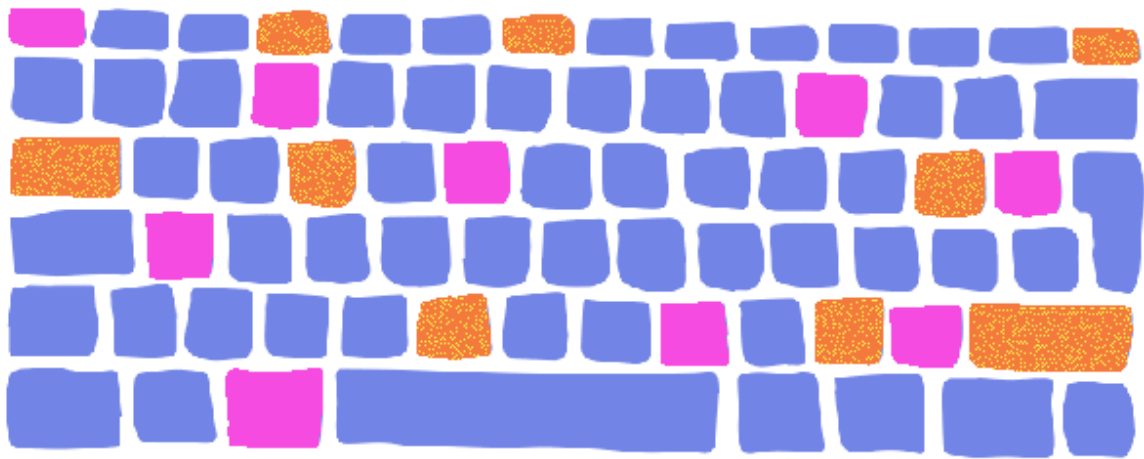
Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She posts photos of the food

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.

MAY 13, 2025

December 30, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



SEARCH FOR OPEN WORK SHIFTS IN YOUR CALENDAR APPLICATION!

Fellow members,

Everyone is familiar with the work shift system. You sign up for a labor shift every six weeks or so for the privilege of shopping at the Coop.

With the freelance system, there's a small calculus involved to determine whether you should sign up for a shift: are you actually free to work at that time?

I have a convenient solution for this problem! I created a calendar that mirrors the Coop's open shifts and you can add it to your favorite calendar application like Google Calendar, Microsoft Outlook or Apple Calendar.

Primarily, you can now view open work shifts against your personal calendar for assurance of your availability at the work shift time.

You can also do other intuitive stuff like keyword search for shifts, copy shifts to your calendar, and navigate to the shift sign up page on the Coop website to confirm the shift on your Coop account.

Hopefully, this eases your work shift planning. I pray you are never labor suspended at the Coop ever again.

You can find the links to add the open work shift calendar to calendar application here: <https://github.com/rexledesma/foodcoop-shift-calendar>.

In solidarity,

Rex Ledesma

NAOMI GATHERING!

Dear Coop Members,

Is your name Naomi? You are invited to a Naomi-only gathering to discuss Naomi Klein's book, *Doppelganger*. *Doppelganger* is about, among other things, being repeat-

edly confused with another Naomi.

- When: May 31, 2025 at 2:00 pm (rain date June 7, 2025 at 2:00pm)
- Where: Prospect Park Long Meadow, as north as you can get before hitting the paths (about a five minute walk from Grand Army Plaza)
- Why: For fun!

You're welcome to come if your name is Naomi. If your name is Naomy, Nomi, Noemi, or something similar, please join us as well. Bring a blanket and a snack to share, or not, and your copy of *Doppelganger*. (We will try to get Naomi Klein to show up, but no promises.) Tell all the Naomis in your life!

Sincerely,

Naomi Becker, One of the Coop Naomis

THE MYTH OF PLASTIC RECYCLING

Dear Coop members:

I read with interest the detailed and accurate environmental committee report by Stephanie Wilson about the items that NYC collects: "Recycling is Easier Than You Think" in the March 11 issue of the *Gazette*.

It is important to know what happens to all the plastic we put into those bins.

Plastics were invented in 1907. Since then, virtually ALL plastic items manufactured are still on this planet—either in landfills, as litter, in the oceans and virtually every-

where—microplastics have been found at astounding levels in every organ of our bodies! The only exceptions are plastics that have been incinerated—a process that releases microplastics and many highly toxic compounds into the air.

Plastic recycling is a myth created by petrochemical companies and chemical companies who frack ethane gas and manufacture plastics. They fear loss of market for their fossil fuel products due to increased efficiency of automobiles and green power alternatives. Therefore, plastics have become their growth industry. These companies invest a fortune in marketing touting recycling so that consumers will feel good about using plastics.

At best, only five to six percent of plastics actually get recycled (mostly in the few states with bottle bills)—and even those are mostly downcycled.

Plastic waste not only comprises a major source of deadly pollution; the extraction of starting materials and the manufacturing processes are major sources of greenhouse gases, thus climate change. Furthermore, toxic ethane cracking plants are located near poor and marginalized communities in which cancer and disease rates soar above the national average.

An excellent source of information is www.beyondplastics.org

I believe the Coop should do everything possible to reduce plastics on our shelves and inform our members about the many ruses such as bioplastics and so-called “green products” that are actually full of plastics.

Sincerely,

Will Boorstein

WHAT DOES THE COOP STAND FOR?

Greetings:

I have been a member of the Coop since 2008 and value its continued existence as a not-for-profit cooperative that provides affordable and healthy food. Cooperatives are political entities by default, because they present an alternative to undemocratic top-down for-profit organizational structures. However, there are those who want the Coop to be “apolitical” and remain silent while a country, whose defense we fund with our taxes, commits genocide.

I have been ashamed of the Coop’s inaction on the violence being carried out by Israel’s far right government in Gaza and the West Bank. At this point, I can only attribute inaction as a sign of indifference to Palestinian life and hostility towards Coop members like myself who believe in universal human rights, oppose genocide and expect the Coop to live up to its values.

In its inaction, the Coop is standing with those who demand the unconditional support of an ethno-nationalist and racist regime aligned with the Trump administration.

As the child of a torture survivor from Chile, I proudly told the story of the PSFC boycotting Chilean products during the Pinochet regime. Now, I’m ashamed to even call myself a member.

Sincerely,

Joao M. Da Silva

REPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIOR ON ALL SIDES

Dear Coop Members:

The Members for Palestine announced that the April 29 meeting at City Tech was cancelled because of a letter from an external activist group.

I read the letter sent to City Tech and found it morally disgusting: it has inaccurate statements about past general meetings, accusations based on flimsy speculation and bigoted innuendos about the Palestine Members. The group that sent the letter should be ashamed of themselves.

But the letter has kernels of truth. It is true both that the Palestine Members want the Coop to join the external Boycott, Divest, Sanction Israel (BDS) movement and that changing the bylaws to enable hybrid meetings is part one in their three-part strategy to do so (as they repeatedly state in their emails). It is also true that their effort to get members to vote for their hybrid proposal is not transparent: when they leaflet outside the Coop, they don't advertise their real motivation for hybrid (to align the Coop with BDS ideology) or why they are in such a hurry (they are eager for a BDS win).

I also read the Members for Palestine's email to their listserv sent after the meeting was cancelled. They refer to a group of their fellow Coop members as "Zionists"—not to describe those members' political affiliation, but as a dehumanizing label. It's dehumanizing because the Members for Palestine refuse to engage in any dialogue to learn about the diverse opinions of the members opposed to their BDS ideology, not one of whom supports "genocide" or "killing innocent families," and all of whom value coexistence. Instead of sincere efforts to communicate, the Members for Palestine prefer using "Zionist" as a slur to justify excluding their fellow members from the "equality," "diversity" and "cooperation" principles they claim to uphold. I find that morally disgusting, too.

Sincerely,

Zara Watkins

A VENUE FOR THE “HYBRID MEETINGS” GM VOTE

Dear fellow members:

Finding a venue for the hybrid meetings vote has proven difficult. Hybrid meetings are attractive, providing opportunity for wider participation, but some Coop members and General Coordinators have resisted them. Zionist members, by definition pro-Israel, have threatened leaving the Coop given subsequently successful hybrid and boycott votes. And Coordinators seem acutely concerned with the possibility of such an exiting of Zionist members.

(Why refer to “Zionists” rather than “Jews”? Zionism is the secular movement that established the “Jewish State,”—despite a substantial non-Jewish minority—and continues its half-century-plus occupation of Palestine. Many pro-boycott and anti-Zionism members are themselves Jews. The ultra-orthodox Williamsburg Hasidim are anti-Zionism and pro-boycott, supporting virtually every pro-Palestinian rally! Alternatively, there are far more fanatically pro-Israel Christian Zionists than Jewish ones! Clearly, both Jews and non-Jews are pro- and anti-Zionism.)

Anti-BDS letters have claimed that a boycott “will alienate a number of Coop members,” citing the Coop’s mission statement, which describes being “welcoming and accessible to all” and which “respect the opinions, needs and concerns of every members.” “Welcoming all” will obviously continue, regardless. Respecting “opinions, needs and concerns” doesn’t mean abjectly submitting to them. We cannot control how people “feel,” but foregoing a GM vote to satisfy such claims rewards what is little more than emotional blackmail. And it’s certainly not respectful of the opinions and concerns of

those calling for hybrid meetings.

Hybrid meetings—and when needed, virtual meetings—can work. No chance for disruptions like the one that occurred at the April 2015 GM, where Zionist members took over the stage, plunging the meeting into turmoil. Nothing in the bylaws prevents meetings from being held virtually, as were all the GMs during the Covid era. Those GMs did not require anything other than necessity. And neither should this proposal be denied a vote for spurious reasons.

Sincerely,

David Barouh

THE CASE FOR A MEMBER BYLAW AMENDMENT

To my fellow Coop members,

I was scheduled to present item 910 on the original agenda for the April GM.

Agenda item 910 is titled “Amending Coop bylaws, policies and procedures to ensure the Coop’s survival and success.” Given the late change in location of the April meeting, I unfortunately will not be able to present my item.

Time has passed since my submission a few short weeks ago and I’ve had time to reflect based on communications from other members from last month’s *Linewaiters’ Gazette* as well as online via various social media accounts. Now, I believe that item 910 is timelier than ever given many voices pushing towards more democracy within the Coop.

What does democracy look like within the Coop and how do we abide by its princi-

ples?

During my presentation, I planned to discuss:

1. Educating GM attendees on their individual approval and adherence to both the Rochdale Principles of Cooperation and—more importantly—commitment to the International Cooperative Alliance's (ICA) guidelines
2. Reinforcement of ICA's 2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control, which clearly outlines how democratic process is defined within a cooperative organization plus management of a cooperative's democratic governance
3. Highlight why the Coop needs to instill a bylaw amendment study committee to evaluate the existing bylaws and to ensure that, as the Coop evolves, processes to amend the bylaws will mitigate any biases through pillars of objectivity, consistency and transparency.

We are moving away from unity and members are currently being both verbally and electronically harassed for their identities, which is not acceptable. A sound, formal review group will mitigate any bias in voting and—hopefully—will ensure that we're upholding the foundational principles that we all signed up to follow.

In solidarity,

Zachary Zaban

CITY TECH NEEDED ONLY ONE REASON.

Dear Coop:

City Tech cancelled the PSFC General Meeting for April 29 and the usual single-issue boycott crew here are screaming conspiracy and racism and we-wuz-robbed. Yawn.

What they refuse to acknowledge is that the cancellation was justified. City Tech Theatre was sent a letter with a screenshot of an openly published Mailchimp announcement. Attributed to the boycott crew, it advertised the GM as a way to push forward what hundreds of millions of others worldwide see as the hateful boycotting of Israel. This announcement lay in stark contrast to the deceptively bland billing ("PSFC General Meeting" and "Hybrid Voting") sold to City Tech. Those are the facts. Read the Mailchimp announcement, then put yourself in the chair of any theatre or institutional administrator comparing these conflicting documents on their desk. I wager the eager presenters were judged as two-faced on their own merits, and cancelled like any other duplicitous customer.

This GM was an underhanded attempt to ram a hateful boycott through the court of public opinion. Those who created the GM proposal need to explain themselves, no one else. Selling wildly differing stories even in the name of human rights is still called lying. Rejection is called accountability.

What thousands of other lies and omissions has this group told us under the guise of free speech and human rights? When will our committees finally ban this cancerous, officially unrecognized, faction from our Cooperative?

Best,

Jesse Rosenfeld

THE COST TO THE COOP OF FIGHTING ONE ANOTHER

Greetings:

The controversy at Columbia University over student protests related to the war in Gaza has developed into a full-blown confrontation and quickly subsumed the institution into a chaotic spin. The same kind of thing can happen to the Coop, if we permit it. Grappling with a hot political issue offers no benefit to the store and can do it real damage.

The nation is in turmoil now, the right and left glaring at each other across a no person's land. I suggest that we suspend decisions that can foul the feelings of members toward each other.

There is always a way without violence. The Coop must keep clear of supporting either side and advocate for a settlement that ends hostility. Taking sides only perpetuates it.

Sincerely,

Rodger Parsons

HYBRID MEETINGS: WE CAN DO THIS

Greetings:

As a sponsor of the proposal to make General Meetings hybrid, I have to say that the fear of this commonsense step feels overblown. Here's a link to our proposal, including recommendations for implementation, developed alongside fellow members with professional expertise producing hybrid events.

Members express concerns that hybrid meetings will cost too much. We found the cost for what the Coop needs is low. Necessary equipment is largely covered by the Picnic House and the Coop, with additional needs being a camera and tripod, one--

time costs of \$300-\$400.

The Zoom tier the Coop currently subscribes to accommodates 300 participants, and scales up at \$0.16-0.50 per participant, depending on meeting size: for example, Webinars for 1,000 members cost \$340/month, or \$0.34/participant.

SimplyVoting, which we've used for several votes, costs \$200/ballot, accommodating 200 voters; that price also scales depending on the participant-count. Voting for 1,000 members costs \$500, bringing the cost for 1,000-person meetings to \$840, alongside the Zoom upgrade. Our rental at City Tech to vote on this proposal—had it taken place—would have cost us \$7,000+.

People also worry about privacy in hybrid meetings. I share this concern, but want to point out Zoom's safety features, which the Chair Committee utilized during Lock-down. Zoom offers watermark features to identify recordings' origins: screen recordings superimpose your email, and audio recordings are encoded with inaudible information that allows Zoom to identify the accounts from which recordings are made. If virtual participants can only register using emails on file with the Coop, we can identify anyone who might make and share a recording.

Of course, this is a big change, and we should be thoughtful about how we move forward. But hybrid meetings shouldn't scare us! We can do this.

In cooperation,

Morgan Võ

WHY DOES NOBODY SAY: THIS ENDS HERE

Dear Agenda Committee:

April 13, 2025—Cody Allen Balmer set fire to the Pennsylvania Governor's Residence in Harrisburg while the governor, a Jew, and his family were inside—for Palestine.

August 10, 2024—Kingston Avenue, Crown Heights. Vincent Sumpter stabbed a Jewish man, missing his heart by centimeters—for Palestine.

May 29, 2024—An East Flatbush yeshiva. Asghar Ali drove his car onto the sidewalk, attempting to strike a group of Orthodox Jewish students and rabbis—for Palestine.

January 26, 2025—The Park Slope restaurant *Miriam*. At 3 AM, three masked individuals defaced the storefront with red paint—for Palestine.

May 31, 2024—The Brooklyn Museum. Demonstrators graffitied the OY/YO sculpture, causing \$100,000 in damage—for Palestine.

Acts against Jewish individuals and business are indefensible. They do not ease the suffering in Gaza nor do they influence Israeli policy. They serve only one purpose: to deprive Jews of the most basic civil right—the right to safety in the public space.

In New York City, there have been more than 500 confirmed hate crimes targeting Jews since October 7, 2023.

The BDS movement rhetoric, which recasts the Jewish state as uniquely evil and Jews as imposters, inspires, encourages and incites this violence.

The Members for Palestine are attempting to amend the Coop's by-laws for the sole purpose of enabling a vote to endorse BDS.

Even if a BDS motion is defeated, simply entertaining the possibility of supporting BDS at the Coop will further normalize this false, toxic narrative—and further endanger Jews.

How is this even under consideration in a Coop that claims to be devoted to equality and inclusion?

Why is no one saying: this ends here?

Sincerely,

Barbara Mazor

IS THE COOP FASCISM ADJACENT?

Dear Coop community:

I am outraged that the vote on hybrid GM scheduled for April 29 was cancelled without any explanation. I have since learned that the cancellation was engineered by a pro-Zionist group called End Jew Hate and it isn't clear how that group got involved with PSFC's business. What is clear is that the Coop for Unity group has opposed the boycott of products from Israel since BDS was proposed years ago and their extreme rhetoric about PSFC4Pal set the stage for what occurred with City Tech.

Meanwhile the genocide perpetuated by the Israeli government against the Palestinian people continues, along with the ongoing occupation and apartheid state. The total destruction of homes, hospitals, schools across Gaza and the West Bank, the ruthless killing and starving of fellow humans is an unfathomable horror and a disgrace. By purchasing products from Israel we are complicit in these atrocities.

I joined PSFC 40 years ago and for most of those years was proud to be part of an organization that had integrity and stood for the values I believe in. I trusted that the leaders were ethical, representing our membership, choosing products that were healthy, local, humanely raised, etc. I shared in the work and enjoyed being part of a

strong collective. The bitter division and behind the scenes manipulation by the board and GCs over BDS have soured me to the coop and I am disgusted by this latest sham.

We, as a coop based on fairness and justice, should be in the forefront of the fight against fascism. Instead we are facing the same blind self righteousness dividing our country. The same fear and loathing that justifies deporting people for speaking out, or for no reason at all, is preventing a democratic vote from happening at PSFC.

Every member of our Coop deserves to be heard and vote in a hybrid GM on the question of boycotting Israel.

Sincerely,

Sarah Safford, member since 1985

STOP STYMYING THE SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP

Dear Coop Members:

A small group of extremists have once again delayed a vote on hybrid General Meetings, scheduled for April 29, through a coordinated campaign of harassment and threats against the venue set to host: last year at Brooklyn College, this year at CUNY.

To state the obvious: pressure groups use these anti-democratic tactics because they know their positions are unpopular. I agree with them on the facts: when there is a vote on continuing hybrid general meetings, it will pass easily. When there is a vote on the BDS proposal, polling suggests that it will also pass easily.

The question remains why the overly credulous General Coordinators keep folding under the pressure. Specific individuals are repeatedly preventing the smooth democratic functioning of the Coop, and the same individuals are repeatedly published in the *Gazette* trying to normalize and justify their radical positions. Why not vote?

Sincerely,

Mac Simonson

ABOUT OUR MEETINGS

Dear Fellow Members:

If we're blocked from having a large in-person meeting, we should have a plan B and use the secure online vote that we have in place for board elections and coop-wide polls and referenda. Whatever the reasons, we have been prevented from renting an appropriately sized venue at least twice.

It's the height of "uncooperative behavior" to threaten venues. Those members should face the disciplinary committee for attempting to block our GM governance and wasting everybody's time.

I'm in favor of hybrid meetings because monthly physical attendance for three hours at the Picnic House on a Tuesday night is clearly too big a burden for participation in Coop governance. People with children, mobility issues, medical concerns or work commitments all deserve a say. The pandemic prompted us to figure out other tools that we can use. This is an opportunity to fix and update Coop governance.

Sincerely,

EVIDENCE THAT HYBRID GMS ARE A GOOD IDEA

Dear Coop members:

I write to address Elizabeth Tobier's letter, which deems hybrid General Meetings a "bad idea." Tobier suggests hybrid meetings would not draw many attendees. However, I believe all Coop members deserve equal access to democracy at every meeting.

Joe Holtz estimates 150 people as the average attendance at in-person GMs. Running the numbers provided by Tobier, average online attendance was 169. Even excluding the outliers of several meetings with higher attendance, such as the May and June 2020 meetings with 500 or 600 participants each, the average is 135.

One hundred and thirty-five attendees for online GMs is not far from 150 attendees in person. And of course, hybrid meetings will combine in-person and online attendance.

Importantly, there's currently no way to accommodate more than a fraction of our 16,000 person membership in the Picnic House, whose maximum capacity is 255. Case in point: our proposal was flagged by the GCs as necessitating a larger venue of 800-1,000. It's been in the Agenda Committee's queue since December 2023, but the GCs still haven't found a way for members to vote, in spite of the significant response it's received. Our current set-up means that the proposals that are the most interesting or important to members are the least likely to be heard.

Ultimately, our proposal to make GMs hybrid is not about numbers. It's about providing access to participate in democracy. If hybrid meetings increase access for even one Coop member who's disabled, a parent or caregiver or can't make it to the Picnic House on a Tuesday night, that's worth it. More likely, this will increase access for

many members and make our Coop more truly democratic. I invite you to read our full proposal, and to advocate for it to be brought to a vote. It's a good idea!

Best,

CJ Glackin

APRIL 22, 2025

December 30, 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.

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**. I would greatly appreciate people's thoughts on this proposal!

*Thank you,
Yejia Chen*

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

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

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

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.*

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*

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

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.

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

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*

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

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*

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*

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

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*

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-hybrider 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.

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]

MEMBER SUBMISSION: VOTING ON HYBRID GMS

December 30, 2025



April 22, 2025

By CJ Glackin and Morgan Vö

We submitted the following article on March 31 to re-introduce our proposal to make General Meetings hybrid ahead of an April 29 vote, to be held at City Tech College's theater space. But on April 11, we were unexpectedly notified that City Tech had cancelled the rental. The GM then moved back to the regular venue of the Picnic House, and the vote was removed from the agenda.

This proposal has been in limbo since it was submitted in December 2023, but we remain committed to seeing it through, and urge the General Coordinators to facilitate bringing it to the membership for a vote. Members want to vote on this proposal—the GCs need to find a way to let their voices be heard.

Below is our original article, written before the cancellation. We believe that it is important to publish it for the historical record:

As Coop members committed to the PSFC's mission to "maximize participation at every level," we're excited to present our proposal to allow in-person and online participation in the Coop's General Meetings (GMs) at the upcoming April 29 meeting.

Currently, GMs are held in-person at the Prospect Park Picnic House on the last Tuesday night of each month. This presents barriers for many: immunocompromised folks who avoid large, multi-hour gatherings; parents/caregivers who can't leave loved ones for a night; people living far from the area; people for whom mobility issues make evening travel a burden. Accessibility issues may be ongoing or temporary. If you're home with a cold, you should still get to participate in the Coop's policymaking.

Members who contribute labor deserve accessible ways to participate in the Coop's governance. Online attendance is a commonsense step toward better facilitating access for all.

What's in our proposal?

The text of our proposal is as follows:

“Proposal to make all General Meetings hybrid—both in-person and online—through amending the PSFC Bylaws, Article VI, Sections 2 and 4, by appending the following: ‘Presence and gathering at meetings shall be by physical presence and by virtual presence consistent with New York Business Corporation Law Section 708(c). Meetings may be entirely virtual if a physical gathering is not feasible.’ The Coop will begin holding hybrid General Meetings within three months of this proposal’s passing. The proposal’s sponsors will finalize protocols for hybrid General Meetings, in cooperation with the Chair Committee, the GM squad, and PSFC staff. This proposal may require the GM squad to create additional work slots to facilitate hybrid meetings.”

During our September 2024 presentation, we heard questions and concerns that deserve to be thoughtfully addressed. We also heard plenty of enthusiasm, including from the Chair Committee and from fellow members, who offered different ideas around how hybrid could work, and how issues might be solved. To ensure the best experience possible for a hybrid model, our proposal now includes the three-month period defined above, in which we will work with the Chair Committee, the GM squad, and PSFC staff to optimize hybrid protocols for our Coop’s unique context.

Imagining a Hybrid GM

Here, you will find our full proposal, including recommendations for what we think a good hybrid GM looks like, developed in collaboration with a Chair Committee member and two members who approached us after our initial presentation, all of whom have professional expertise in producing hybrid events and meetings.

We stop short of including these recommendations in our proposal. We believe it is in the long term interest of the Coop that this proposal not prescribe how hybrid GMs work. New technologies and practices will arise, and it shouldn’t take another propos-

al to utilize them in our GMs. The “Guide to the General and Annual Meetings” is already set up this way: it doesn’t say that we need a projector or a PA system, but we use those technologies because they improve the effectiveness of our meetings.

We believe our recommendations demonstrate that hybrid GMs are achievable for our purposes here at the Coop. Hybrid GMs would provide a significant step towards maximizing participation in our collective decision making. We hope that you, too, want to see a more participatory PSFC, and we look forward to seeing you at the April 29th GM, at City Tech College.

COORDINATORS’ CORNER: CLARIFYING OUR POSITION ON HYBRID MEETINGS

December 30, 2025



March 11, 2025

By the General Coordinator Team

Over the past several months, discussions surrounding hybrid General Meetings (GMs) 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 *Line-waiters' 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.