

# CURRENT COOP MASK POLICY TO CONTINUE

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Members,

The letter from PSFC about the General Coordinators' decision to continue current policy includes a sentence that is questionable: "Although making masks optional received the most responses, the General Coordinators consider these numbers too

close to consider changing the current policy at this time.”

The data provided in the letter:

51%: Masks are optional for all member workers and shoppers.

4%: Masks are required for members working inside the Coop and optional for shoppers.

That makes it 55% support making masks optional for shoppers’ vs. 45% prefer to keep the current policy for the shoppers. In an election, a 55 to 45 win would be a landslide. I really wonder about the “the numbers too close” perception. I agree if we look at question 1 to make masks optional for all is just 51%. The General Coordinator could have decided to make masks optional for the shoppers.

Regards,  
*Amol Kaikini*

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THE MASK SURVEY

November 16, 2022

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Members,

A “survey,” rather than a “vote,” is nonbinding, allowing the surveyors to interpret and deal with the results as they see fit. The coordinators’ mask survey polled members on whether masks should be mandatory or optional for shoppers, and for workers.

But the coordinators multiplied two simple and logical categories—“shoppers” and

“workers”—into four complex combinations, which produced these results:

51%: Masks are optional for all member workers and shoppers.

43%: Masks are required for member shoppers and members working inside the Coop.

4%: Masks are required for members working inside the Coop and optional for shoppers.

2%: Masks are optional for all member workers and required for shoppers.

Based on this combination of categories, they arrived at a majority (51%) for masks being optional for both shoppers and workers, which they assessed as “too close to consider changing the current policy at this time.” But by uncombining these four categories into the two logical questions, “Should masks be optional or mandatory for shoppers?” and the same question for “workers,” one sees that 55% of members voted “optional” for shoppers and 53% of members voted “optional” for workers, more substantial majorities, which is less easily characterized as “too close” to consider.

But let’s also consider the fundamental assumption underlying the “survey” itself, the assumption that such a policy is—quite naturally—for the coordinators to decide. But is it? Are the coordinators any more knowledgeable than members about COVID-19, or about the efficacy and absolute necessity of masks? Is this not a cooperative, run democratically? And so are the coordinators thus exceeding their authority in unilaterally continuing a mask mandate after the City has ended its own such mandate? Shouldn’t this be a decision for the General Meeting to make?

*David Barouh*

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## JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I missed the issue of the *Gazette* in which Joe Holtz's suspension was reported.

I'm appalled at the severity of the punishment. I share shops and mass transit with un-masked people whose vaccination status and exposure to the virus I don't know. One COVID-exposed person wearing an N95 doesn't even register on my radar, especially since, as I hope we all know, mask-wearing people are protecting others more than they're protecting themselves.

As well, I might point out that we're all taking the vaccination and exposure status of our fellow shoppers on trust. A month's suspension without pay or the ability to shop is a Twitter-mob-worthy response to Mr. Holtz's infraction.

Sincerely,  
*Jolanta Benal*

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PAY JOE HOLTZ

November 16, 2022

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I have been a member of the PSFC since the 1970s. I was dismayed to learn that General Manager Joe Holtz was punished with a month's suspension without pay because he came to work, wearing an N95 mask, while awaiting a PCR test result, a test result that came back positive. What he did was a mistake. The severity of the punishment the Personnel Committee meted out was also a mistake.

Joe, a co-founder of the PSFC, has served and continues to serve the Coop very well. A reprimand is deserved. But taking away a month's pay from a highly effective manager is too much.

I recommend that he be refunded his month's pay. A reprimand? YES. Losing a month's pay? NO.

Sincerely,  
*Irvin Schonfeld*

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**MASK POLICY VOTING**

November 16, 2022



# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I was disturbed to read the email of October 21, 2022, on the voting results for the mask policy. More than 4,600 members took time to vote on the issue, and there was an 8-point margin between masks optional for all (51%) and masks required for all (43%). The voting presented the idea of a democratic decision-making process of majority rules by voting. We were only then to learn that the General Coordinators made

a wholesale decision that the 8- point spread was too close (based on what?) and decided internally to keep the masks.

If a small minority can decide the outcome in spite of the voting, and regardless of the actual counts, I wonder where that leaves us. Better not to ask for a vote at all.

*Olivia Rokotuiveikau (Stinson)*

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## MEMBER SHOPPING

November 16, 2022

Hello,

The recent mask survey made me think of another aspect of the pandemic aftermath. What I am referring to are the “carrots,” or the limit on the number of members that are allowed to shop in the Coop at any given time. I am not certain whether there have been discussions around this topic. I am very much hoping that this rule will remain implemented indefinitely.

My husband and I both have full time jobs, and so our only opportunity to do a big shop is on the weekends. Although we would typically shop during less popular hours, like Friday or Saturday night, once in a while we would have to do our weekly shopping on Saturday or Sunday midday. It was dreadful, and stressful, as many members may recall. The amount of people, shopping carts, workers and stocking carts allowed not an inch of breathing room. There was nowhere to stand, no way to turn, not to mention pass someone, or reach for a food item. The checkout line went all the way down the freezer aisle, and between the members in line and the stockers it was virtually impossible to get something out of the freezer.

I used to feel like I was in an episode of “Survivor” trying to hunt for food for my family among many obstacles and competitors. Shopping on the weekend required skills like acrobatics, war tactics and deep sociology. The experience was truly gruesome. My quality of life drastically improved (despite COVID-19) when the Coop occupancy started being regulated and controlled during the pandemic. I do not mind standing in line outside, in the heat, in the rain or in the midst of winter, knowing that inside awaits a humane shopping experience. During Covid the occupancy restriction was protecting our physical health, but I believe that it should remain in place for the sake of our mental health. I am hopeful that many members agree with this sentiment.

Sincerely,  
*Ula Bochinska*

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## FLOORED BY JOE HOLTZ’S SUSPENSION

November 16, 2022

Dear Coop,

As a PSFC member for the last 34 years, I’m floored by the Personnel Committee’s punitive measures against Joe Holtz for wearing an N-95 mask and coming in to work without knowing he would test positive for Covid that day. The man might have improved your quality of life for decades and withstood any number of uncalled for insults, but he is *not* a fortune teller.

Hayley Gorenberg’s detailed reporting in the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* presents the facts, and I concur completely with the letter written by Cynthia Blyer that outlines the Personnel Committee’s unprecedented, uncalled for, unjust and downright bizarre punishment. I add my voice to those who demand, as Cynthia did, that the committee:

1. Reimburse Joe for the month of July.
2. Keep in mind that we are running a cooperative, not a gulag.

Cynthia stressed that Joe would be the first one to speak up if another staff member were treated like this, or about any kind of unfairness in our community and in the world.

I will be attending the upcoming General Meeting on September 27 to speak to this agenda item. If Joe is not reimbursed and all punitive measures rescinded at that meeting, I urge Coop members to protest the abhorrent and extremist actions of the Personnel Committee with an emergency referendum.

*Jessica Greenbaum*

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## DEARTH OF SHIFTS

November 16, 2022

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I would like to open by saluting the tremendous amount of work and consideration that have gone into the evolution of shift assignments. This is no mean feat. The introduction of recurring shifts, however, has upset what to me felt like a nicely poised system that offered maximum variety to all working members. Having not signed up for a recurring shift (it's untenable for my schedule), I now realize the folly of my inac-

tion—gone is the variation of available shifts. I realize I will garner little sympathy; I too must adapt to the cold, hard truths of this new order. Still, I cannot help but feel something is lost now that member labor is much less fluid than it had been all these months since its return. I'd love for blocks of recurring shifts across the board to return to the open labor market for anyone who simply cannot commit to a recurring shift. Selfishly, I still think this would do wonders for the rest of us.

*Damien Neva*

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## FTOP RULES TOO RESTRICTIVE

November 16, 2022

Dear Coop,

With the recent return to recurring shifts, I find the Future Time Off Program (FTOP) policy that states you can only schedule two shifts at a time too rigid and not well publicized.

First, it does not appear anywhere in the Workslot Policy Agreement. Second, the two places it does appear—on the “Shift Calendar” web page and Section III, paragraph 7 of the Membership Manual—it is buried in the text and not easy to notice.

More importantly, the PSFC seems to encourage members to add credits to their shift bank credit but then limits members' ability to build up credit by limiting them to two scheduled shifts at a time.

In the Membership Manual, for instance, it states, “You need to work at least one shift per cycle but you are welcome to work extra shifts. Those additional shifts will add credits to your bank. There is no limit to the number of credits you can have in your

bank.” And then adds a little later, “You may have up to two scheduled shifts at one time, with no more than 2 shifts on the same date.” These two statements seem to be at odds with one another.

Moreover, when we accept the Workslot Policy Agreement, we agree that “Whenever possible I will cancel farther in advance, so other members have the opportunity to claim the shift(s).” Here, too, the FTOP policy makes it difficult to do so. For example, I will be traveling in November but cannot cancel my November shift and choose an alternate slot until I work my next shift in September. By that time, I fear the slots that are most convenient for me will be taken.

The system needs to be more flexible. Let’s increase the number of shifts that can be scheduled at one time.

*William Yotive*

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## JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION

November 16, 2022

Dear Editors,

I want to add my voice to those who have called for transparency from the Personnel Committee regarding the Joe Holtz suspension. The committee said the *Linewaiters’ Gazette’s* article about the suspension was inaccurate but did not indicate why. They claim privacy issues preclude them from being transparent. I understand wanting to protect Joe’s privacy, but he has been open about the situation. Has the committee asked Joe if he would waive his right to privacy in this case? If it’s the privacy of committee members they want to protect, that concerns me. Shouldn’t the membership know how the personnel committee makes decisions? Don’t they act on behalf of the

membership?

A 30-day suspension without pay is a harsh penalty for what seems to have been an inadvertent violation of rules that don't appear to have been clearly disseminated. Let's have the Personnel Committee admit to a mistake here and restore Joe's lost wages.

In cooperation,

*John Wilson*

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## **JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION**

November 16, 2022



# Letters to the Editor



Dear Editors,

I am writing to express my dismay at Joe Holtz's egregious suspension. I don't dispute the facts of the case; Joe's coming in to work while awaiting results of a Covid test was not the best choice, but the punishment is excessive. To withhold a month's salary from anyone is shockingly misguided, but to do so to a founding member of the Coop, someone who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Coop for decades, not to

mention someone integral to keeping the Coop functioning during Covid, is short-sighted and beyond comprehension. Shame on the Personnel Committee. The only way to make this right is to return Joe's docked salary. If that is not possible, I suggest a bonus in the amount of this lost income—let's call it an acknowledgement of the outstanding work he has done for the Coop over the years.

Best,

Helene Davis

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IMPROVING EQUITY AT THE COOP

November 16, 2022

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

Consistent recognition of opportunities to be and do better for the collective good is an important part of our Coop's legacy. While past efforts to pursue diversity and equality are appreciated, contemporary objectives pertaining to anti-racism and equity must be jointly defined and clearly communicated moving forward. At this inflection point, we need a shared understanding of what diversity and equality means, and

how this lives at the PSFC. Participation and accountability are fundamental to equity; members and leaders across the organization and its committees should be trained around these mutual goals, with information easily accessible and disseminated to our community.

The Coop must facilitate clear governance and informed decision-making, particularly as we navigate the new normals and unintentional silos created by the pandemic. - Transitioning the general meeting online was a prudent step in this direction, and making digitized transcriptions of minutes available would better enable members to learn about issues under consideration and revisit the context of resolutions reached. Recording future meetings could be an excellent inaugural use of the PSFC YouTube channel, which was established in May 2020 and is linked on our homepage, yet currently contains no content.

We are invested in cultivating an egalitarian, engaged environment that engenders belonging and improves the Coop for all members. With the board elections approaching, we advocate voting for candidates committed to working collaboratively to implement forward-thinking plans that prioritize racial justice and equity. These issues are tantamount to fiscal solvency, and the future of our Coop is at stake.

Signed,

Christhian Diaz, Mandira Ghai, Annabelle Heckler, Leigh Howard, Raj Kottamasu and Trish Adobea Tchume

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I MISS YOU ALREADY

November 16, 2022

# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Coop,

I'm leaving the PSFC after 20 years.

For most of that time, I've been traveling from Harlem (yes, we lived in the Slope when we joined) to work doubles (I picked up my wife's shift because it made our life so much easier for only one of us to take time out of a weekend when our boys were young) and shop weekly.

But soon, our second son will leave for college in the fall and having to drive to Brooklyn to shop for two, plus having to work the 5+ hours, is just too much.

I probably could have kept it up because I truly enjoyed working with the same people every four weeks for years. I was the Squad Leader for the Saturday 5:45 a.m. shift, and the one after, for 10-ish years, and our community was organically formed based on the shared reasoning that we decided to wake up at an ungodly hour on a weekend to get our shift out of the way.

But because of COVID-19 and not having regular shifts, I'm giving it up. I know the one constant in NYC is change and everything must adapt to new circumstances, but this one is just too much for me.

I'm not signing up for any new shifts and have enough banked to last late into the summer, so if you read this and happen to see me, let's catch up, commiserate, and say goodbye.

I miss you already.

*Doug Vitarelli*



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## OPEN FORUM SUGGESTIONS

November 16, 2022



# Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

The recent GM was interrupted by Zoom complications, causing delays and schedule changes. Here are some suggestions I had hoped to make at the Open Forum:

I suggest that the *Gazette* use a procedure that is standard in digital publications: allow live links in articles, reports, and letters. Submissions can remain within the *Gazette's* word limits while providing readers who are interested access to more informa-



tion.

Also, I suggest that a video recording of the question and answer session with candidates running for the Board be available on the Coop website. There was a limit on the number of members who could join the March GM, and some people were unable to hear what candidates had to say.

As members, we can offer solutions to problems that interfere with the transparency and democracy of our miraculous enterprise!

Thank you for your consideration of these ideas.

*Willy Naess*

*International Trade Education Squad (ITES)*