MASK MANDATE, DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, CHILDCARE DOMINATE DISCUSSION AT OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

December 6, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

By Christopher Cox

The October General Meeting (GM) of the Park Slope Food Coop, held on October 25, 2022, was another in a series of tense gatherings since last summer. It was a busy night: David Moss of the Chair Committee noted that it was “the most heavy agenda we have had since we switched to the Zoom format.” The proceedings were contentious from the start, when the meeting’s open forum almost exclusively addressed the General Coordinators’ recent decision to keep the store’s mask mandate in place.

In September and October 4,615 member-owners responded to a survey about whether the Coop should continue to require masks for workers and shoppers. The results, released a week before the GM, showed that 51 percent preferred to make masks optional for all; 43 percent wanted masks to be required for all. Several members spoke during the Zoom session about feeling frustrated that the general coordinators overruled the majority. “There was a questionnaire and the general coordina-

tors didn't like the answer to that questionnaire, so they just decided to disregard it," said member Dani Liebling. Another member, Meilin Mehri, agreed: "The majority vote was disrespected. It was not honored." One member compared the decision to the election denial of Donald Trump and his supporters, calling it "Mar-a-Lago-esque." The general coordinators who spoke in defense of the mask mandate said that the poll was too close to warrant changing the policy. Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, speaking for the other general coordinators, held that the "vote" was actually an "advisory survey."

As with the uproar over the disciplinary action taken against Holtz several months ago, members seemed surprised that the Coop doesn't always work in a transparent—and transparently democratic—way. Until the GM specifically instructs the general coordinators otherwise, they have the power to run the Coop as they see fit. "We must decide things for the Coop where this [meeting] has not directed us," Holtz said. Because the process of bringing an agenda item to a vote takes so long, the coordinators' decisions tend to stand for a long time. That arrangement itself has been a source of tension at the General Meetings.

> WE MUST DECIDE THINGS FOR THE COOP WHERE THIS [MEETING] HAS NOT DIRECTED US.
>
> *GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ*

The Holtz affair came up again during the October meeting's open forum. Several members asked why the proposal to reinstate Holtz's lost wages was not on the agenda. Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi, who had said at the last GM that she would be sponsoring the proposal, said that she had withdrawn it after some of her fellow coordinators had talked her out of it. Chi read a statement to that effect at the October meeting: "After listening to my co-workers, I no longer believe that that proposal was the best path forward. And I never [want to] go against the wishes of the majority of

the staff and…[T]he opinion and the needs of the staff, to be honest, matter more to me than the opinions of membership because we're the ones who work there 40 hours a week…. I never meant to make any of my co-workers feel disrespected," Chi concluded. "I was trying to do what I believed was right and I realized that in many ways I was wrong."



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

The rest of the meeting took a more positive turn when the treasurer reported the state of the Coop's finances to the member-owners, and several votes were taken. The Coop's finances are better than they were last year, Holtz reported, but the Coop still has not reverted to a break-even level of revenue. The upshot: the Coop will not be returning to the 21 percent markup anytime soon. General Coordinator Joe Szladek also informed the meeting about the Coop's Halloween plan to give out apples to trick--or-treaters.

In her report from the Committee Oversight Committee, for whom "transparency is the sole focus," Rachel Porter noted that most of the Coop's many committees had been forthcoming with information about their activities, with the exception of the Agenda Committee and the Personnel Committee, who were stonewalling.

The Agenda Committee had a chance to respond to Porter's complaint during the

next part of the meeting, when members voted on elections to the Agenda Committee, the Dispute Resolution Committee and the Hearing Officers Committee. David Warren, up for a two-year term (his first) on the Agenda Committee, explained why they were often slow to respond to questions from the membership: the committee's policy is to only respond to emails on the Tuesday following the GM. Warren was elected to the Agenda Committee; Lee Bantle to the Dispute Resolution Committee; and Marian Hertz, Andrea Hirshman, Liam Malanaphy, Julie Vasady-Kovacs to the Hearing Officers Committee.

Next there was a discussion and vote on a proposal sponsored by the Equity, Access, and Community Committee (EACC) to collect member demographic information in a survey. EACC members Paul Warren and Isiris Isaac spoke in favor of the proposal. The survey had been years in the making, Warren said: "The committee has worked since 2016 to develop this demographic survey, where we would be voluntarily collecting demographic information about Coop members." The goal was to create a "demographic profile of who the Coop membership actually is."

Isaac stressed that collecting the information would allow the Coop to serve its members better, especially people of color and those with disabilities. She called it "a snapshot of the population of the Coop." The survey would be anonymous, and the committee promised to protect the confidentiality of those who filled it out. It was a way to find out "who we are, essentially," Isaac said.

> COLLECTING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WOULD ALLOW THE COOP TO SERVE ITS MEMBERS BETTER, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE OF COLOR AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES.

Most of the members who spoke after the presentation were in favor of the proposal. Beth Ann Mastromarino asked how the committee would ensure a robust response rate. Cheyenna Weber assured everyone that this kind of survey was in line with best

practices of food co-ops nationwide. Beth Ruck said she wanted the survey to become part of the orientation process of joining the Coop.

The proposal passed, by a vote of 83 to 42.

The final agenda item was a vote on returning childcare to the Coop. The childcare room on the second floor had been closed since the start of the pandemic. Recently, that room has served as a space to prepare some of the bulk items for the shopping floor. Now members Lauren Belski and Brian Russ offered a proposal to open it to families again.

Belski and Russ, who are both schoolteachers, began with an economic argument. Hiring a babysitter during a parent's Coop shift negated the cost savings of being a member in the first place, they said. If the Coop needed all the members it could get, then reopening childcare was a surefire way to get families to come back—and to attract new ones. "The word on the playground," Belski said, "is if you bring childcare back, I'll come back."

"Many members who quit will come back," Russ added. "And honestly, where did they go? They went to Fresh Direct, they went to Jeff Bezos, they went to this corporate model of grocery shopping." Belski and Russ closed by submitting their proposal: to reopen childcare within 60 days of the vote.

The debate that followed again broke down along staff vs. membership lines. Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner, worried that disrupting the bulk-item bagging before the holidays would be too disruptive. "How do you think that the Coop is supposed to operate during the busiest holiday period, which is from November to January?" he asked. "How are we supposed to stop all operations in order to resume childcare, which serves a very important but small percentage of membership?" One member, Maya Solovey, replied, "The Coop has done it before and it knows how to do it again." Another member, Juliette Kennedy, said that restoring childcare was an equity issue.

The difficulty of the 60-day timeline came up again and again. Receiving Coordinator Craig Roberts, said that he was in favor of childcare returning to the Coop, but that more time was needed to figure it out. “It’s a short-term process that needs a long-term solution,” he said. The debate seemed to be reaching an impasse—and the possibility of a failed vote loomed—until Holtz suggested a revised proposal. Rather than bringing childcare back within 60 days, members could vote on a timeline that he described as “as soon as possible during 2023.”

That deadline, with its combination of flexibility and rigidity, appealed to Russ and Belski, who quickly adopted it as their own, and the motion moved to a vote. After a tallying delay, the results were announced: 134 in favor to 18 against.

In 2023, the Coop will have childcare again.

Christopher Cox’s book, The Deadline Effect, *is now out in paperback.*

CURRENT COOP MASK POLICY TO CONTINUE

December 6, 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

THE MASK SURVEY

December 6, 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

MASK POLICY VOTING

December 6, 2022



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)

TENSIONS RISE AT THE SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING

December 6, 2022



By Sara Ivry

Like autumn leaves in a howling gale, insinuations flew at the September 27 General Meeting of the Food Coop when attendees turned attention to a proposal concerning Joe Holtz, the Coop's general manager and treasurer, and the penalty he faced last summer in response to violating staff COVID protocols. Imposed by the Personnel Committee, the disciplinary action consisted of a 30-day suspension without pay and

barred entry for Holtz to the Coop for that same time period.

“We believe an injustice has been done and should be remedied,” said Gillian Chi, a Coop receiving coordinator and buyer, who presented and wrote the proposal with member Dorothy Siegel. They drafted it, they said, with Holtz’s knowledge but not at his behest. The proposal seeks twin outcomes: the payment of Holtz’s garnished wages and the issuance by the Coop of a public retraction of the punitive action.

“This treatment was unprecedented,” Chi said, adding that ”at least 25% of paid staff have violated COVID protocols at one time or another,” or so she has observed. She said she has seen staff remove masks, eat in areas where they should not, and more. “Perhaps warnings were given. But nothing more. None of us were suspended without pay.”

LIKE AUTUMN LEAVES IN A HOWLING GALE, INSINUATIONS FLEW AT THE SEPTEMBER 27 GENERAL MEETING OF THE FOOD COOP

“The ultimate motivation to our proposal is not just to reverse one decision about one person,” Chi said. “The real issue is, can the Coop be a good employer? Can we be confident our employer will have high ethical standards?”

Having offered an overview of the evolution of, and limits to, the power of the Personnel Committee, Chi maintained that the committee lacks the right to hire or fire people without general membership consent.

“Membership has authority to redress this harm,” Chi said, and she and Siegel want their proposal to go before the membership for a vote at the next general meeting.

Jean Callahan, a member of the Personnel Committee, defended the actions of her committee, clarifying that it is a body elected to advise on hiring and firing matters. It

did not act on a whim and consulted with a labor lawyer, she said. “We considered a full range of responses. We decided [the punishment] was a fair and proportionate response.”

Moreover, the rifts over whether Holtz was singled out for punishment or deserving of it belies a bigger issue “undermining the morale of the paid staff.” In the course of the Personnel Committee’s investigation into Holtz’s action, some Coop staff expressed fear of reprisals for being whistle blowers and requested anonymity in their conversations.

“Some were fearful of Joe’s power,” Callahan said. “At the moment there are some deep and painful divides. Individual staff members feel silenced and unsafe.”

Among them was General Coordinator Ann Herpel, who said the very fact that this proposal was on the agenda at the General Meeting represented a form of retaliation against those who complained about or investigated Holtz, and that there is much more to the story of Holtz’s infraction than what has been reported previously or presented by Chi and Siegel.

> MEMBERS WILL NO LONGER BE REQUIRED TO SHOW PROOF OF VACCINATION TO WORK A SHIFT AND UNVACCINATED WORKERS MAY RETURN TO WORKING THEIR SHIFTS.

“I’m really dismayed that people are saying that the members have the final say on personnel issues,” Herpel said. “That could have a chilling effect… Why would people complain or participate in investigations if they thought that this body would make a final decision that could overrule a decision by another body that investigated? Why would anyone participate?”

According to Herpel, the Personnel Committee has taken action against general coord-

inators in the past “without controversy,” she said, “which leads to the conclusion that Joe Holtz is not accountable” given that the penalty imposed against him is being challenged and may lead to him being given a pass for his transgression.

“I’m angry. I’m dismayed. I’m appalled. I feel unsafe,” she said before departing the meeting.

Terry Meyers, a staff member in the accounting office, similarly defended the Personnel Committee’s action. What the proposal is saying “is that the leadership does not have to follow the rules. That innuendo and excuses mean more than an investigation involving statements from, I am sure, more than one person. People in power should be held to higher standards, not lesser standards,” she said. “Joe being away for 30 days did not hurt the Coop, though it created more work for staff. Reversing the decision of the committee would.”

Others sided with Chi and Siegel, questioning the mandate of the Personnel Committee and the lack of transparency in policies and proceedings.

“It’s our Coop. We own it. We are responsible for making sure it’s a safe and fair employer,” said Cheyenna Weber. “I also encourage the Personnel Committee to bring a proposal for a Human Resources Committee.”

And Siegel, like Herpel before her, said she was dismayed by the turn of events but did not blame the Personnel Committee, whose disbandment she originally planned to propose. She moreover took umbrage at the slurry of innuendos this entire episode has begat.



A file photo of Joe Holtz, the Coop's General Manager and Treasurer

"A lot of this rancor, 'if only you knew what really went on you wouldn't feel this way,' but then you can't expect members to accept insinuations or the red meat of Joe McCarthy," Siegel said. "The last thing I want is for Ginia Bellafante to write an article about the precious Coop where people are wounded and people are fired and people throw out accusations about each other." She added, "I'm sorry it has come to this."

[Editor's Note: On October 1, Chi emailed the office to drop this proposal and it will not be going up for a vote at the October meeting.]

Controversial though it was, the conversation about the proposal was not the only issue raised at the meeting.

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky announced that as of November 1, the Coop would comply with Mayor Eric Adams' new rules regarding COVID protocols at work. Members will no longer be required to show proof of vaccination to work a shift and

unvaccinated workers may return to working their shifts. Whether shoppers will be required to wear masks in the Coop will depend on the will of the membership, who are invited to respond to an online survey on the matter that was live until October 12.

In response to a question about determining what is suitable for composting and what could go to a soup kitchen, Astrinsky said members on produce shifts might benefit from more information on how to determine what should be composted. She invited anyone to make some kind of illustrated poster detailing, she said, “This is compost. It has things growing on it. It’s too mushy. It’s not going to make it two days. We want sample images, maybe a little blurb.”

Astrinsky shared the news that a property adjacent to the Coop has been leased by the Board of Education and will be undergoing some kind of construction, which will limit or potentially eliminate bicycle parking as well as have other potential and unforeseen impacts on the Coop. She also announced the hiring of part-time Receiving Coordinator Tanya Steinberg and full-time staffer Masha Bezlekina in a role supporting perishables like meat and bread. Astrinsky said Food Processor Gabriel Feliciano has left his position.

“It’s been a very long time since our staff have had any celebration or party to acknowledge their hard work throughout this time,” Astrinsky said. “We have decided to hold a staff party, which hasn’t happened in two, three years now.” To that end, the Coop closed at 5 p.m. on October 6 so that all staff might attend.

> LEADERSHIP NOW NEEDS TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS LIKE WHETHER TO ADD BACK SHOPPING HOURS, WHETHER TO ALLOW MORE SHOPPERS ON THE FLOOR AT ANY GIVEN TIME, WHETHER TO INVESTIGATE AND IMPLEMENT A HOME DELIVERY OPTION, AND WHETHER TO RESTORE CHILD CARE AS AN INCENTIVE FOR PEOPLE TO SHOP AT THE COOP.

Donning his metaphorical treasurer's hat, Holtz reported that the Coop is operating currently at a loss, but is optimistic that a typical fall surge in shopping, along with a rise in membership, could help ease the Coop out of that hole "if we control expenses adequately," he said, "but it's a big 'if' during this inflationary time."

He noted that in October 2020 the General Coordinators marked up prices to 25% from 21%, with the intention of returning to the 21% mark up when membership returned to full work conditions or the Coop was breaking even. The General Coordinators plan now to discuss whether these conditions are being met to their satisfaction. Holtz also said that the Coop is owed tax credits of $1.5 million that represents the part of the $6.2 million from government support that we are still waiting to receive, and that leadership now needs to consider questions like whether to add back shopping hours, whether to allow more shoppers on the floor at any given time, whether to investigate and implement a home delivery option, and whether to restore child care as an incentive for people to shop at the Coop.

Labor Committee member Eric Frumin shared both good and bad news. He reported on the Coop's collaboration with the Fair Food Program, which supports agricultural workers in Florida and Georgia, noting that the Coop pays a six percent premium for tomatoes from these growers. That translated most recently to $4,100 that the Coop paid to make sure the workers in Florida earned good wages and worked in environments free from sexual violence.

Frumin's bad news related to Amy's Kitchen Company, which has been dogged by reports of abusive and unsafe working conditions in its factories and by its hostility to unionizing efforts. Frumin said the Coop had sent a letter to Amy's CEO last spring, which was ignored. They resent it to no avail before turning to help from the National Coop Grocers, a membership organization of 149 coops nationwide.

"One of the disturbing thing we learned is that Amy's has failed to disclose important information on rates of injuries," Frumin said. "Its largest factory in Idaho has a 20 percent rate of disabling injury. This is triple the industry average in frozen foods. And

it goes against the Coop’s mandate.”

A long-time Food Coop member, Sara Ivry worked as a shopping squad leader before joining the Gazette earlier this year.

REPORT ON THE 7/27 GENERAL MEETING

December 6, 2022



GM Reacts to Holtz Suspension, Debates Coop Mask Requirement

By Hayley Gorenberg

COVID-19 controversies dominated the July General Meeting, from the first moments

of the freeform Open Forum to the discussion on whether the Coop should continue requiring masks.

Several members used the Open Forum to assert their opposition to the Coop's requirement that members—as workers—be vaccinated against COVID-19. Some complained they had not been allowed medical exemptions from vaccination. Others claimed that the Coop should not require vaccination, believing it would not slow transmission of COVID-19.

> "WHAT ARE THE LIMITS AND CHECKS ON THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE'S POWER? I BELIEVE THAT WE ALL DESERVE ANSWERS, AND I WOULD LIKE TO DEMAND ANSWERS."
>
> ***RECEIVING COORDINATOR GILLIAN CHI***

Coop bookkeeper Kathy Hieatt urged members to read the *Linewaiters' Gazette*'s July 25 article on the Personnel Committee's month-long suspension of General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, which concluded on July 30. Hieatt called for an explanation of the committee's rationale.

"You took away a month of his salary. He may need that to exist, to pay his rent or his mortgage," said member Bhakti Sondra Shaye. "It felt bad to me, and it makes me feel terrible about the Coop—and I love the Coop. I feel this is extraordinarily extreme."

"What are the limits and checks on the Personnel Committee's power?" asked Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi, who had previously objected to barring Holtz from Coop premises for a month. "I believe that we all deserve answers, and I would like to demand answers."

Personnel Committee member Yolanda McBride responded that the committee is elected and invested with authority by the General Meeting to advise the general coordinators on human resource functions and to hire, fire and discipline top staff, in consultation with the general coordinators. McBride asserted that the disciplinary penalty meted out to Holtz was not personal, "was based on facts uncovered in the investigation," and would have been imposed on any Coop general coordinator. McBride said the *Gazette* article covering Holtz's 30-day suspension without pay, plus barring him from Coop premises was "not an accurate reflection of the facts based on what was gathered in the investigation." Referencing confidentiality requirements, McBride did not provide any specific information (see sidebar below).

Responding to McBride's reference to confidentiality, member Rachel Porter noted that confidentiality could be waived (as Holtz had done in speaking with the *Gazette*). "The Coop, I think, has too long suffered from hiding behind confidentiality," Porter said.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED

The GM elected members to serve on the newly created Committee Oversight Committee, which will facilitate regular reporting to the GM and the *Gazette* on Coop member committees' work. All who stood for election were voted in: the originator of the committee, member Rachel Porter; attorney and mediator Diana Colon; 12-year Coop member Brian Shuman; Kristian Nammack, who previously served on the Environmental Committee and expressed a proclivity for shopping "European-style" (visiting the Coop four or five times each week); member Ned Lochaya; and Sara Bouzas, a member since 2011 who works as a Spanish interpreter in courts and jails, and so places a premium on listening carefully "as required by my job—and I do this in my life as well."

FINANCIAL REPORT

General Coordinator Joe Szladek presented a brief financial report indicating that the Coop's rate of loss had decreased and that a recent eight-week period showed the or-

ganization had started to turn a profit before a usual summer downturn while many members are out of town.

Szladek predicted the Coop would likely run in the red for the year overall, estimating the potential for a $100,000 deficit. “That’s a pretty small amount, given what we’ve dug out of,” he said, emphasizing, “it’s not just about one year; it’s also about the trajectory.”

Szladek flagged that the 25 percent pandemic markup is still in effect, highlighted the number of new members signing up as a “really positive” indicator, and noted efficiencies gained through the new online workslot system, as well as the decision to extend the usual shift cycle to working once every six weeks, instead of the previous requirement to work every four weeks.

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORT

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky reported “a string of wallet thefts,” and cautioned members to keep valuables with them and lock lockers when using them. “Don’t leave your bags strewn about in your cart,” she said. “Let’s all be vigilant.”

She said police had been informed of the thefts, and that the general coordinators were discussing further security measures.

Ending on a positive note, Astrinsky highlighted that Sycamore honeydew melons, peaches, cherries and corn are in season and are “luscious and delicious and sweet.” Watermelons abound, with seeds and without: “They’re both really, really, really good. Buy them!”

TO MASK, OR NOT TO MASK?

Member Elizabeth Tobier, who had submitted a discussion item noting that New York State had largely lifted mask requirements, presented slides that she said supported her argument for lifting the Coop’s mask mandate.

GC Astrinsky had noted earlier in the meeting that the Coop "as an employer and business" has the right to mandate masks, and reported a falloff in members' readiness, with a "huge uptick in having to hand masks to people to come in and shop."

"I believe that masks do work," countered a member who became a temporary worker during the pandemic and, as such, had to wear a mask for full working days—far longer than a typical shift or visit to shop. "This is not a huge sacrifice," the member concluded.

Another member noted New York's still-high transmission rate, urging, "Until cases start to go down, the mask mandate needs to stay!"

A member who said she is immunocompromised voiced concern that information presented about masks had been inaccurate to the point of being "completely debunked," and that lifting the mask mandate at the Coop would put her "at great risk."

> "WE ALL FACE FATIGUE ON MASKING. BUT I AM WILLING TO CONTINUE BEING FATIGUED."
>
> *STAFF MEMBER JASON WEINER*

A member who said she worked with health-care providers said that "now would be a terrible time" to change the Coop's mask requirement. "We owe it to each other," the member said. "We have been saving each other's lives, and we need to keep doing that."

"Masks work; that's why hospitals use them," another member said.

Staff member Jason Weiner read a prepared statement referencing the Coop's "many immunocompromised members," acknowledging that there was "no question" that

“we all face fatigue on masking.” But he promoted policy based on science, rather than fatigue, concluding, “I am willing to continue being fatigued.”

Masks provide a measure of safety that allows the Coop to maintain its volume of shoppers, said General Coordinator Ann Herpel. She said that cutting the use of masks could lead us to reconsider increasing shopping capacity and likely deter many members from working, ultimately steering the Coop in the “wrong direction” and hurting the organization financially.

Toward the conclusion of the discussion period, one member suggested a medical committee to help the Coop assess its policies as needed.

Hayley Gorenberg joined the Coop in 1993 and became a Gazette *reporter soon thereafter.*