JAPANESE DELIGHTS AT THE NEW PARK SLOPE OUTPOST OF MITSUKI

June 4, 2025



June 3, 2025

By Emmett Lindner

When Jay Cao was a child in Fujian, China, he would delight in the sweet treats that his uncle brought home after trips to Japan. Many of the candies were not available in his country, and one of his favorites was a small metal box with a confection inside.

The joy that Mr. Cao felt from the simple snack brightened his mood. He didn’t realize that emotional connection would also provide a roadmap for his career.

Later in life, as he thought about what to do with his future, that memory kept coming back to him, and Mr. Cao decided he wanted to bring the experience to others. So, in 2022, he opened the Japanese market Mitsuki, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, a store filled with candies, salty snacks and toys shipped directly from Japan.

“When you are a child, you know the piece of candy can be making you happy for the whole day,” Mr. Cao, 32, said from his Park Slope office. “It’s kind of a reward.” He continued, “I always remember the candy made me happy.”

> ITEMS INCLUDE STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE KIT KATS, “LIME & TART” FLAVORED PRINGLES AND CHOCOROOMS, WHICH HAVE A CHOCOLATE, MUSHROOM-SHAPED CAP.

New Yorkers seem to have the same reaction Mr. Cao did all those years ago. Business did so well that he opened a second location in Manhattan, and a Mitsuki arrived on 7th Ave. in Park Slope this past March.

The store is 1,300 square feet of items you’d be hard pressed to find elsewhere, many of them shipped directly from Japan. Items include strawberry shortcake Kit Kats, “Lime & Tart” flavored Pringles and Chocorooms, which have a chocolate, mushroom-shaped cap affixed to a crispy cracker stem.

But it’s not always snack hour at Mitsuki. A wide array of hot and cold foods, including shrimp shumai, pork and chicken gyoza and house-made onigiri bring customers in for just about any meal of the day.

“I really like that they have specialty Asian items. That’s really important to me,” said Coop member Joy Wang during a recent visit to Mitsuki. She added that she is a fan of the sandwich and salad options at the Coop and “felt like this was a version of that, but Asian.”

MR. CAO CONSTANTLY KEEPS TRACK OF WHAT IS SELLING WELL AND WHAT ISN'T AND PUTS NEW ITEMS ON THE SHELVES TO GET A BETTER SENSE OF PATRON APPETITES.

Mr. Cao endeavors to keep his customers satisfied, but also pleasantly surprised. He constantly keeps track of what is selling well and what isn't and puts new items on the shelves to get a better sense of patron appetites.

"Every couple weeks you're going to have to create new sushi for the customers," Mr. Cao said. "We don't want to make every week the same," he said, adding that "we want you to have something new."

Mr. Cao is, in a way, continuing a family legacy. Before he came to the United States in 2010, his parents moved to Long Island and opened a Japanese restaurant. When Mr. Cao arrived, candy was again a comfort. His parents worked long hours, but would often come home with a sugary treat or a cookie for Mr. Cao.

As an undergraduate, he attended Baruch College where he majored in business management. When the pandemic happened, Mr. Cao was deeply affected by the empty streets and the fear that took over the city. He thought: *How can I make a difference?*

"We spoke to the family, and we said: 'Hey, we should do something, try to rebuild, try to make the new year great,'" he said. They looked for a space to open up a shop for a new business that would "try to let people feel something amazing."

MR. CAO DECIDED TO NAME THE STORE "MITSUKI," WHICH MEANS MARCH IN JAPANESE, TO SIGNIFY SPRING.

They decided on creating a store whose aim was to bring people the same happiness Mr. Cao remembered from all of those years before. He decided to name the store “Mitsuki,” which means March in Japanese, to signify spring. “That’s when everything is hope, is new,” he said.

When they first opened their doors in Park Slope in March, they did a two-day give-away and handed out roughly 3,000 rice balls both days to customers who lined up at the door. There was no purchase required, Mr. Cao said: “We just want to show the love to our community. We know that Park Slope is family-based, the people who live here. We want to make the kids happy.”

And he didn’t want Mitsuki to be the kind of place where people quickly made purchases, but one where they could sit with those feelings of calm. There are stools that face the street where customers can enjoy their shrimp chips or milk tea; flags are strung from the ceiling; and artworks are framed on the walls.

After that, if you’re looking to cook at home, Mitsuki has you covered. There are frozen noodles and fish and pantry staples, including soy sauce, sesame oil and stir-in curry bricks. And there is plenty to keep children tantalized while you shop, with toys like model cars, building blocks and bunny-themed stationery for sale.

“I go to H Mart, and this is kind of like that,” Daniel Horgan, a Coop member, said in front of the beverages on display. He picked a small pastry up from a shopping basket and held it out. “There’s a very fancy store in Manhattan and Tokyo that has them.”

As for what he thinks about Mitsuki, Mr. Horgan said: “I’m glad they’re here.”

THE THREAT OF HIGHER TARIFFS ON GOODS SHIPPED TO THE US HAS CAUSED MR. CAO SOME STRESS. SOME OF HIS PRODUCTS HAVE SHORT SHELF LIVES.

Mr. Cao had wanted to open a Mitsuki in Park Slope as his second location, because he was drawn to the community and tranquil environment. He thought the combination of families and a slower pace of life than other parts of the city would make an ideal place for a market that strives to bring customers something different in a soothing setting.

But, in the current state of the world, it isn't always easy to remain optimistic.

The threat of higher tariffs on goods shipped to the U.S. has caused Mr. Cao some stress. Some of his products have short shelf lives, and there is a narrow window for them to leave Japan and arrive in Park Slope.

"It's a big impact for us, because we receive the notification from the distribution, the manufacturer, they say shipping may be delayed," Mr. Cao said. If it takes too long for certain products to reach Mr. Cao, that could mean they'll arrive expired. He pondered: "If they delay, does that mean I have to destroy all of my inventory?"

"That's the biggest challenge for us, currently," he added.

But to walk through Mitsuki, you wouldn't be aware of these behind-the-curtain challenges. Mr. Cao said the Park Slope location averages hundreds of customers a day, and he's glad to recognize the faces of regulars.

"Some customers, they work at home or they get off at the bus station, they always say hi," Mr. Cao said. "People stop by the store, not necessarily to buy anything, they just want to say hi."

"You go to the airport, they have the room for you to sit and relax," he added. "We want to make sure Mitsuki becomes that spot for those people."

Mr. Cao also reaches wider audiences through the store's social media pages—the Mitsuki Instagram account features videos that take customers through the space, down

aisles that hold items like strawberry and butter salt popcorn, and photos of people enjoying their takeaway sushi on a park bench.

But while in the store, Mr. Cao hopes patrons can take a break from their day for a moment of peace, and find a little joy just as he did as a child opening a piece of candy.

“You’re going to smile when you’re going out,” Mr. Cao said.

WALKING AND TALKING: THE INS AND OUTS (AND OCCASIONAL AWKWARD SILENCES) OF A HIGHLY COVETED COOP SHIFT

June 4, 2025



By Liz Welch

November 26, 2024

One of the greatest perks of being a Coop Member is not having to worry about schlepping your bounty home (if you happen to live within walking distance) or to your preferred mode of transportation, whether that be by train, car, bus or bike. The orange vested PSFC walkers, whose job is to accompany you while you push your cart back home, are such a mainstay of Park Slope that when I posted on a local Facebook page that I was looking for stories about this bespoke service, one woman commented that while she has never been a “cart returner” (the official work slot title for walkers), she dressed her toddler as one for Halloween one year—to huge fanfare.

A friend suggested that I write this story after the person who walked her towards her home in Gowanus one afternoon refused to take her to her door. He would not cross 4th Avenue, the edge of the boundary printed on the large maps that are attached to the sturdy carts that can handle the sometimes cobblestone and mostly potholed terrain.

“I live one block away,” she explained to her walker, who’d dug his heels into the sidewalk. “Are you sure you can’t help me?” she asked, as she unloaded her bags onto the street.

“Insurance reasons,” he insisted. “If a car hit me outside of the bounds of the map then the Coop would be in legal hot water.”

“But what if a car hit you during the other 59 days and 21 hours of your life between shifts?” she asked, trying to reason with him. “Then who is legally liable?”

The stickler was unmoved, so my friend called her husband and waited for him and their children to meet her and help her shlep a great many bags home.

The story left us both wondering: Was this legal liability excuse true? Who came up with it? Why?



Longtime (and soon to retire) Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz set the record straight: “The boundaries are not about insurance at all. That is complete non-truth. The boundaries were once closer in and then they were expanded… only once, I believe.”

General Coordinator Ann Herpel added the reason for the boundaries is really about time and fairness: the Coop does not want walkers to be gone for too long as there could be other members waiting to be walked back at the Coop. The Coop also strongly advises that walkers do not enter another member’s house.

According to the five walkers who were interviewed for this story, though, those boundaries are still open to interpretation. All the walkers interviewed for this story decide on a case by case basis. Shoshana Dornhelm, a member since 2016, recalls being taken advantage of once when she first started walking 8 years ago. “One man took advantage of my newbie status and took me all the way to Eastern Parkway and Washington Avenue!”

> ONE TIME I WALKED A WOMAN WHO TOLD ME ABOUT HER SEX LIFE! AND THEN SHE SAID, ‘DON’T WORRY! I’LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!’ BUT WHEN I DROPPED HER OFF, IT TURNED OUT THAT SHE LIVED IN THE SAME BUILDING AS MY RELATIVES.

The cart return shift was created for a surprising yet sensible reason. “To discourage members from bringing their cars to load outside the Coop, thereby causing the Squad One firefighters to arrive at life threatening emergencies later than they would have,” Holtz explained. “Picture a curbside filled with members’ cars and members loading into their cars. Picture other members needing to double park. Picture traffic coming around the double-parked cars. Picture a Squad One fire truck trying to go toward 6th Ave.”

We think you’re a hero, Joe! As do the following five cart returners who spoke with the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* about why they love this shift and how they each interpret the (not set in stone) rules.

BELLA MUCCARI

Member since 2010

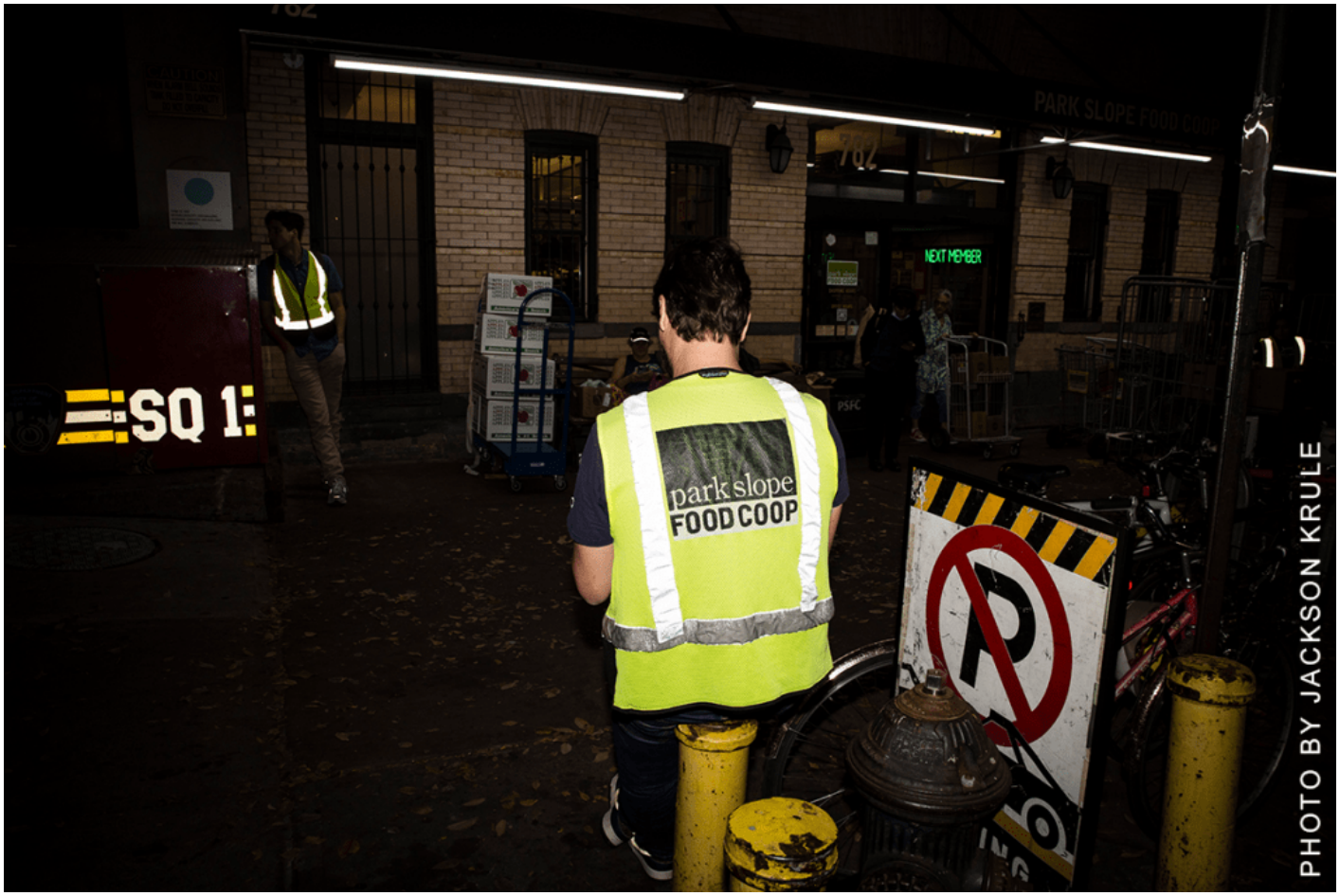
“Before Covid I did a morning receiving shift—but I always wanted to do walking! I was furloughed during the pandemic, so doing this shift was great! That was my exercise: When I did the shift, I was walking between 20,000 and 30,000 steps a day! I was in such good shape. I also banked a ton of shifts. Right now, I have 44 stored up, all from walking.

My experience has been mostly great. People appreciate that you are doing them a favor. While the rules are, ‘Don’t go outside of the range,’ I decide on a case-by-case basis. I always try to be thoughtful and considerate. And I almost always say, yes.

There was one time when a woman who was younger than me told me to run and help her get to her bus. I did not do that. She missed the bus and said, ‘Well now we have to walk all the way to Flatbush!’ And I did do that.

Members share all kinds of interesting information with me: I once walked a guy from Scotland, and told him I was visiting his country that summer. He gave me tips of places to go in Aberdeen!

Another time, I walked a woman who told me about her sex life! And then she said, ‘Don’t worry! I’ll never see you again!’ But when I dropped her off, it turned out that she lived in the same building as my relatives.”



MARIE ROMANO

Member since 2001

“Prior to Covid, I worked in the Coop’s office. I loved it and really enjoyed helping members with their accounts. After Covid, the set up in the office changed and I preferred to have a shift outside. I started the walking shifts as FTOP and then signed up for a regular shift.

I love being outside and at the same time helping members walk their carts to a destination. In addition to the walking, the sidewalks in the front should be cleared of debris and carts returned to their proper place.

The majority of people that I walk with drove to the Coop and parked nearby, so those are typically short walks. If someone says, ‘I need to go beyond the boundaries…’ I will take them if it is a block. My goal is to always service the members. For example, if I’m coming back from a walk, and see a shopper emptying their cart on 7th Avenue, I will offer to walk back with two carts. The shoppers are grateful, kind, love the Coop and always come first!”

SHOSHANA DORNHELM

Member since 2016

“Walking shifts are the best shifts the Coop has to offer, hands down! If I couldn’t be a walker, I don’t think I’d even be a member anymore. I love everything about it—being outside, getting exercise, even when the weather isn’t perfect. It doesn’t even feel like work to me. Plus, I prefer talking to people one-on-one more so than with people in a group setting, like how they described the coveted cheese packing shift during my orientation. That shift sounds like a nightmare to someone like me!

When it comes to walking people outside of the limits, I don’t mind going a block or two out—I believe that’s a good ‘buffer zone.’ Most people will let me know upfront if they’re in those ‘outer limits’ which I appreciate. In my experience, not many people have pushed those limits, but there have been some. When I first started eight years

ago, before limits were posted on the carts, one man took advantage of my newbie status and took me all the way to Eastern Parkway and Washington Avenue!

My most memorable walk was during the marathon last year. A family parked their bikes across 4th Avenue and Union Street, and we had to weave with the full cart through the runners (and then right back across, alone!).

I've had some really amazing conversations with people over the years. I've met journalists, doctors, people who have immigrated from other countries and people who have been here their whole lives. I especially love talking with people who have gone or are going through career changes, because I'm going through that too and it's encouraging to share the successes from our experiences.

> SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO NOT WANT TO TALK AT ALL… IF THERE'S EVER AN AWKWARD PAUSE, I CAN ALWAYS ASK IF THERE WAS ANYTHING INTERESTING IN THE PRODUCE AISLE. IT NEVER FAILS!

I was nervous during my shifts when I first started walking. There was a lot of pressure to strike up light hearted, positive conversations with strangers. Over the years though, I've grown to be more attuned to people's energy and their social needs. Some people seem to not want to talk at all, which is great too—I'm always happy to daydream on my own for a bit. Having to read people's moods like this has helped me grow in all other areas of my life. And if there's ever an awkward pause, I can always ask if there was anything interesting in the produce aisle. It never fails!"

HANNAH DIAMOND

Member since 2012

"I missed the community of the Coop during lockdown—walking was the first shift that became available. I had previously worked checkout, which has similar advan-

tages in that I got to meet a whole cross section of Brooklyn. In day-to-day life we don't often get to talk to new people or meet people with lives very different from my own. As a walker I talk to people of all different ages, backgrounds, professions, etc.

I love talking to people and learning more about my community. I've talked to authors and directors and then read their books & watched their movies. I learn about jobs I never knew existed. I sometimes walk people back to their beautiful brownstones and hear how cheaply they purchased them in the 1970s.

I also have 'regulars' who shop regularly at the same time, so I see every shift. I work by myself so in a way it's like having co-workers. We can catch up without really knowing each other.

Everyone at the Coop has an interesting story, and walking is the best way to hear as many as possible."

HEATHER HOPE

Member since 2010

"I'm a night owl. The walking shifts are usually posted after midnight. I check around 12:30 a.m.—and then sign up as soon as they are posted.

As for the rules, you are not obligated to push someone's cart. But I had one woman who was so pregnant she looked ready to pop. Her house was on 8th Avenue, so the walk was all uphill. I was happy to push for her. Another time, I walked an older man with mobility issues, so I offered to push his cart.


ILLUSTRATION BY OLEXA HEWRYK

Recently, I was walking a woman who had a newborn baby strapped to her. I had just started to seriously look for work after a long stint not working. As we were chit chatting, I told her I was looking for a part time job. As it turned out, she was on maternity leave and the owner of this local business! She asked me a few questions of what exactly I was looking for regarding employment and when I shared my previous work experience, she thought I could be a good fit.

She gave me the email of the person who was hiring. It was so kind! When I sent that person a message, I learned that the job had been filled. A month or so later, I got another email for another position. I had an interview with them on Friday."

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

WILL A MASSIVE "SKATE GARDEN" BE THE COOP'S NEXT NEW NEIGHBOR? TWO MEMBERS HAVE THEIR (VERY DIFFERENT) SAY

June 4, 2025

PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

By Susannah Jacob

Supporters and opponents are rallying for and against an advancing plan to build a skate park in Mount Prospect Park—the nearly eight-acre, altitudinous, tree-filled patch overlooking Eastern Parkway and abutting the Brooklyn Museum and Botanic Garden.

In his January State of the City Address, Mayor Eric Adams announced a $24.8 million project to build four new skate parks in Brooklyn and the Bronx. As reported by *Gothamist*, *The New York Times* and others, the 40,000-square-foot "Brooklyn Skate Garden" in Mount Prospect Park will consume an estimated 12% of the park's total surface area, according to the Skatepark Project, famed skater Tony Hawk's private foundation, which is a consultant to the city on the park's design and management. Skate Garden opponents counter that the Skatepark Project's calculation includes fenced-off and inaccessible portions of the park, and it would eat up at least 40% of the park's core area. The design is not yet firm.

Everyone agrees that the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" will be among the largest skate parks on the East Coast. While the "Skate Garden's" location has been decided, its design is still open to public input. On May 1, the Parks Department hosted a Community Input Meeting over Zoom, drawing some 400 participants to discuss the design of the "Skate Garden." The Parks Department held a previous meeting on March 25. Opponents object that both meetings restricted speakers to discussing the design of the "Skate Garden," not its location.

Mount Prospect Park is about a ten-minute-walk from the Coop and a regular destination for many members and their families. *The Gazette* interviewed two longtime Coop members, one who opposes and another who supports the plan to build a skate park in Mount Prospect Park.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

THE SKEPTIC

Aidan Screwvala, 22, was born in Prospect Heights and raised in Park Slope. She is a self-described “Coop kid.” An “extreme New Yorker, [who] finds something comforting in small, cramped spaces…and battling crowds to get my grapes,” Screwvala says. She has fond memories of attending the Coop’s daycare as a child, and bargaining with her mother to push their groceries up the hill in exchange for an ice cream bar. Today, her favorite shift is checkout.

She shares a similar, lifelong affinity for Mount Prospect Park. Flatbush Avenue divides the park from Prospect Park, lending Mount Prospect Park a sense of remove and relative calm. It was a safe place to sled on a snow day, away from the busy hills and bigger kids in Prospect Park; the place she posed for prom photos; and where she goes today to touch grass. “Prospect Park can get so busy,” she said. “When you want quiet, Mount Prospect Park is a tucked-away, slice of park to go to instead.” It’s a park, she says, with a well-sized clearing where dogs can run loose, without their owners worrying about their pets running too far.

Screwvala majored in Economics, Environmental Studies, and Philosophy at Goucher College. Her concentration, environmental economics, focused her schoolwork on balancing economic growth, expansion and preservation. She returned to Brooklyn after graduating in 2023. In January, she learned of the plan to pave a portion of the park. “It made no sense to me,” she says. “I thought the climate crisis was well understood by most if not all New Yorkers. The more I read, the more confused I got. I read people saying the park is under-utilized, just dust, but I see people there every day from my bedroom window.”

Screwvala joined the Friends of Mount Prospect Park as an intern. The group is opposed to the “Brooklyn Skate Garden’s” location in Mount Prospect Park. Alongside a college classmate she recruited to join the effort, Screwvala recently helped deliver a presentation during a news conference listing “inconvenient truths about paving Mount Prospect Park.” Among these: its considerable size, its impediment to rain drai-

nage and potential to increase flooding; its $11.16 million price tag of public money; and its lack of community input on the site's location. While the site's proponents argue it was chosen by over 3,000 people through participatory budgeting, the Friends of Mount Prospect Park argue the site was voted on in District 35. The chosen site is located in District 39, where no community meetings were held to decide its location.

> "PROSPECT PARK CAN GET SO BUSY," SHE SAID. "WHEN YOU WANT QUIET, MOUNT PROSPECT PARK IS A TUCKED-AWAY, SLICE OF PARK TO GO TO INSTEAD."

Screwvala emphasized she does not oppose the "Skate Garden," just its location. She wants the city to renovate an existing skate park, and make trees and greenery integral to such a project. "It's a wonderful project, a fantastic idea for a currently paved space that can be turned green," she said, referencing a central aspect of the plan to make the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" a sustainable, natural setting with trees and greenery. "Paving green space and adding back some trees to compensate for concrete will not be enough. It's a very important distinction between looking green and being green—being environmentally advantageous for our city, storing rainwater, adding shade, reducing heat. If it's paved, it will not do those things."

Finally, Screwvala seeks to raise awareness about the project among Coop members. "I've learned that far too many members of this community have no idea that this is happening," she said.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

THE SKATER

Patrick Cranston, 47, has been a member of the Coop since 2007 (he is a production editor on the *Gazette*, but favored food processing for many years prior). He supports the skate park's location in Mount Prospect Park. During the pandemic, Cranston taught his now 10-year-old daughter, Hazel, to skate as a way to be active and spend time outdoors. The father and daughter duo quickly learned that skate parks are "the leftover places where there is nothing else people want to build there." Under the BQE, next to a sewage treatment plant and the Belt Parkway, beneath the F and G train overpass near Carroll Street, the city's present skate parks are marred by grime and exhaust, Cranston said. The verdant new location is central to the project's mission: to locate skate parks in actual parks. "Hazel has asthma, the point [of the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" in Mount Prospect Park] is intentionally putting it in a nice park with access to green space that legitimizes the sport as more than a place they stick in the worst space in the city," he said. There is no skate park in Brooklyn Bridge Park, but there are roller hockey rinks, sand volleyball courts, and soccer fields, he observed. "Skaters are tired of being shunted to the last place."

In 2020, Cranston and his daughter became involved in the participatory budget approval process, which allows New York City residents as young as twelve years old to vote on community initiatives like repairing school bathrooms or updating playgrounds. When the "Skate Garden" project was awarded, they attended the ceremony together. "Over 3,000 people voted for a slice of our pool of city council money to fund this idea, it was enough to show the city this was an idea the community was behind," Cranston said.

> "THE POINT IS INTENTIONALLY PUTTING IT IN A NICE PARK WITH ACCESS TO GREEN SPACE THAT LEGITIMIZES THE SPORT AS MORE THAN A PLACE THEY STICK IN THE WORST SPACE IN THE CITY."

Cranston cites the potential for a redesigned park to improve the park's drainage. Its undecided design retains potential to build a sustainable park, while offering a green space for skaters to go, as well as their fans. "Hazel's mom doesn't like to go to skate parks because there's nowhere to sit," Cranston said (a skate park within a park would offer seating). He said he shares many of the opponents' goals to make the skate park a more sustainable place.

"We all want the same thing: green space. I know there's a lot of concern from people about how loud it will be, but there will still be a playground and a space for dogs. I hope people will be open to imagining a different use of the park," Cranston said.

Susannah Jacob is a native Texan and PhD student of US history. She takes pride in her proficient operation of the slotted, plastic bag-taper machine in the Coop's bulk department.

Correction: An earlier version of this article misstated the number of people who chose the skate park's location. It is 3,000, not 300,000.

WHAT'S GOING ON NEXT DOOR?

June 4, 2025



By Dan Bergsagel

On your way to the Coop recently, have you noticed the building site next door? Ever wondered what's going on behind that construction fence? Well, I've been digging into the history—and the future—of our neighboring lot.

The short stretch of Union Street from the Coop to the corner of 7th Avenue has been remarkably stable over the last half century, even as the surrounding neighborhood

has experienced significant change.

A visitor in the late 1970s would have seen the Park Slope Food Coop, Fire Department Squad Company 1 and Dixon's Bike Shop, with the latter's charming yellow mural painted on the wall directly adjacent to the Coop. Today, everything is largely the same, except that the beloved Dixon's bicycle mural was suddenly whitewashed in summer 2017 to much community furor.

Eagle-eyed members still mourning the loss of the mural may have noticed that the formerly muraled wall itself mysteriously disappeared this spring and was replaced by a construction fence. So what exactly is going on next door?

> CHRIS DIXON, CO-OWNER OF DIXON'S BIKE SHOP, REMEMBERS THE SCHOOL FONDLY—ALL FIVE DIXON SIBLINGS ATTENDED ST. FRANCIS XAVIER.

The lot behind the former mural—between the Coop and 774 Union Street—is part of a larger property owned by the Diocese of Brooklyn that connects through the block to 763 President Street. The Diocese's property forms a large L-shape that wraps around the Coop to the south. Starting in 1914, the site housed the St. Francis Xavier School, teaching local children from kindergarten through eighth grade—until St. Francis Xavier closed its doors in 2018 to merge with the Queen of All Saints Catholic Academy in Clinton Hill.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

A look behind the construction fencing.

Chris Dixon, co-owner of Dixon's Bike Shop, remembers the school fondly—all five Dixon siblings attended St. Francis Xavier. Chris remembers that his first-grade teacher, Sister Kathleen Sullivan, who had become the school principal by the mid-1970s, readily agreed to the Dixons painting and maintaining the mural on the school's wall to overcome issues with unsightly graffiti.

The wall holds particular significance for Chris Dixon, as behind it lay St. Francis Xavier's school yard, located on the lot adjacent to the Coop. After the school premises closed each evening, Chris and his friends would climb back over the wall into the yard to play games like stickball. Some of the newer neighbors objected and would occasionally call the police to clear them out.

COOP STAFF AND MEMBERS HAD EXPECTED A NEW SCHOOL TO OPEN ON THE

SITE IMMINENTLY. HOWEVER, THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR PASSED BY LAST MONTH WITHOUT THE ARRIVAL OF NEW STUDENTS.

“We weren’t allowed in the yard after school,” Dixon recalls, “but the cops didn’t want us playing stickball in the street either. So, they would tell us to clear out of the yard just until they had gone, when we would simply climb straight back over again and carry on playing.”

Childhood exuberance in that yard was responsible for the scar Chris still bears on his forehead. At that time, there was not only a school, but also a hospital within a few blocks. Dixon’s misadventures were ably repaired at the conveniently located former Samaritan Hospital in the Skene Sanitorium buildings at 759 President Street (converted to a housing co-op in the 1980s).



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

A bird’s eye view of the construction lot.

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky explains that, since the school's closing, the Diocese of Brooklyn has undertaken a large internal renovation of the school building. As part of this renovation, it completed work on the [redacted]eparating the rear yard of the Coop from the former main school building. This work required the Coop to temporarily relocate our composting and recycling storage area into the adjacent former school yard.

The Diocese completed their renovation work and in March 2022 it leased the building to the New York City Department of Education. Coop staff and members had expected a new school to open on the site imminently. However, the start of the school year passed by last month without the arrival of new students, and if members peek through the construction fencing, they will still see an active construction site.

> ONCE THE MECHANICAL INSTALLATION WORK IS COMPLETE, THE YARD WILL BE REPAVED AND, CRUCIALLY, THE MASONRY WALL WILL BE REBUILT NEXT TO THE COOP ON UNION STREET.

Surprised by the delay, I reached out to Tamar Smith, a manager in the External Affairs department at the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA), to find out what is holding things up.

Smith confirmed that the school is scheduled to open its doors in 2024. It will serve approximately 450 students from pre-K through fifth grade. The school couldn't open this year because the SCA is completing its own renovations after the Diocese's building work.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Another angle of the lot.

The SCA is renovating interior spaces—installing new flooring, lighting, updated wiring and electrical systems, updated fire alarm systems and additional bathrooms. The SCA hasn't needed to make any major structural renovations to the building.

The construction work in the former school yard lot isn't a major structural renovation, but rather a trench dug directly next to the Coop boundary wall. The SCA began digging this trench in June this year to install underground piping and conduits for a chiller unit that will be placed in the yard to serve the new school.

Once the mechanical installation work is complete, the yard will be repaved and, crucially, the masonry wall will—the SCA assures—be rebuilt next to the Coop on Union Street. As the school opens its doors next year, members can look forward to the Coop's largest neighbor returning to the important role it played in the community back in the 1970s. Would it be too much to also hope that the Department of Education could bring back the Dixon's Bike Shop mural? Fingers crossed.

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