

FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING: FIRST VENTURE INTO HYBRID

March 24, 2026



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

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By Zach Schiffman

The Coop held its first-ever hybrid general meeting on the evening of February 24,

drawing roughly 103 members to the Picnic House in Prospect Park and another 123 participants on Zoom. Chair Maribeth Batcha opened the meeting with a plea for patience and good humor, acknowledging the technical ambition of this new undertaking.

“We did test this out last week,” she said, “but this is the first time going live.” By the end of the evening, the hybrid format had largely delivered, though not without some early hiccups, including an open Zoom link that turned out to be shareable to anyone. (Luckily, no one sent it around.)





PHOTO BY AZIKIWE ABOAGYE



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Clockwise from top left: Chair Maribeth Batcha opens the night's general meeting, members raise hands, members Jan and Leo join the meeting via zoom, members raise hands.

OPEN FORUM

A member named Gabriel started the Open Forum with a shout-out to the hybrid committee and mentioned a community art project, *Poppies for Palestine*. A written statement from member Noah Potter was read aloud by Chair Batcha, in which Potter objected to allowing members to vote remotely as a violation of the Coop's bylaws, which he argued had not been properly amended to permit it. Batcha noted there would be no votes at that evening's meeting.

Joe Holtz, the Coop's former general manager, raised a practical question about the new format: if a member logged on to the Zoom meeting just one minute before a vote, without having heard the preceding discussion, would they be permitted to

vote? The chair confirmed that they would, noting that the same rule applies to members who arrive late in person.

Member Yeija Chen raised several accessibility questions, including what accommodations the Coop would offer for members with access needs, whether the outdated guide to general meetings—last updated about a decade ago—might be revised, and whether members could present agenda items via prerecorded video. All three were answered affirmatively, with some details to be confirmed.

Members Lee Solomon and Sarede Switzer both flagged a security vulnerability in the Zoom link, noting it could be forwarded to nonmembers. Batcha acknowledged the error and said the Coop is working to require member number logins for future meetings and will audit ballots to prevent duplicate votes.

Member Jan Clausen asked over Zoom how many people were in the room versus on Zoom. The results were close: 123 on Zoom and 103 in person. There was no drop-off when the tally was checked again at the end of the meeting.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS



PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE

Joe Szladek going over January comparisons.

General Manager Joe Szladek opened his report by thanking staff and committee members for the enormous amount of work required to make the hybrid meeting happen. He then turned to a preview of the Coop’s financial picture, noting that the full 52-week fiscal year statement would be presented at the March meeting.

Szladek shared a striking pre- versus post-pandemic comparison: across the January averages of 2018–2020 versus 2024–2026, the Coop’s transaction volume is down 25.2 percent (from 75,357 to 56,371), even though membership has only declined 4.5 percent (from 16,985 to 16,216).

Units sold fell 16.7 percent and items purchased per member per month dropped from 97 to 85—a 12.4 percent decline. Sales dollars, meanwhile, are up 4.3 percent in nominal terms, from \$5,050,784 to \$5,266,857—a figure Szladek noted does not account for inflation.

Szladek attributed the drop primarily to the shift from a four-week to a six-week work-slot cycle.

“In a six-week cycle, you come to the Coop about 8.67 times a year,” he explained. “In a four-week cycle, you come 13 times.”

Members living further away—a consequence of rising costs in the neighborhood—are shopping elsewhere between their less-frequent visits. Inflation has further dampened discretionary purchases. He also noted that more committee meetings are now conducted over video. Committees including the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, the Agenda Committee, the Personnel Committee and newer groups like the Plastics Reduction Committee have all moved online—reducing foot traffic and incidental shopping.

To address the shortfall, Szladek outlined several new initiatives.

The Coop is close to joining Co-op Deals, a program through National Co+op Grocers (NCG) that would put roughly 100 items on sale every two weeks at 20–40 percent off. A new prepared-foods cooler has been ordered and will replace the seltzer end cap near the front of the store. Longer term, the Coop is exploring home delivery.

Example 1

Scenario Planning

Annual Spend - \$5

- \$100 each week, fifty weeks a year
- \$4000 before mark-up
- \$4840 spend with 21% mark-up
- \$5000 spend with 25% mark-up

Annual Spend - \$1

- \$200 each week, fifty weeks a year
- \$8000 before mark-up
- \$9680 spend with 21% mark-up
- \$10000 spend with 25% mark-up



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Clockwise from top left: Tim Hospodor scenario planning, Board member Lynn Husum listens intently, Tim Hospodor asks us to use our imagination in regard to the banana markup, members sign out for the night, Elinoar Astrinsky presents the citrus selection.

On the expense side, the Coop has been managing staffing lean—avoiding new hires when possible as staff have departed—and has made adjustments to the staff health plan, with a new plan year beginning March 1. The dairy cooler on the shopping floor is also being expanded into the backyard area to ease refrigeration strain on busy Fridays and Saturdays.

Szladek also announced that a Financial Advisory Committee is now forming, as approved at the December 2025 general meeting. The committee will include members with financial expertise and work collaboratively with the Coop’s financial team to review performance, advise on concerns and adopt clear financial benchmarks. Applications were published in the March 3rd *Gazette* and on the PSFC website. The commit-

tee is advisory only, reporting to the general manager, the GC of finance and/or the treasurer.

Member Alyse Barr asked Szladek to address a controversy that had been circulating among members: the temporary removal of two letters from the *Gazette* on February 13th.

After the February 10th issue of the *Gazette* was published, General Coordinator Ann Herpel and Szladek became aware that two different versions of the letters policy were in use.

In one version of the policy, members may name other members, but accusations are not permitted—letters or articles that target or attack specific members by name will be rejected, and writers are expected to address ideas rather than individuals.

In the other version, shared by editors with some members via email, members were told they could not name anyone at all.

Herpel and Szladek said they were concerned that there was a lack of clarity about the policy on names appearing in member submissions and that members had subsequently been asked to adhere to different standards. As a result, publication of two letters was temporarily paused while the policy was clarified.

“The publisher’s role is not editorial,” Szladek said. “We do not make content decisions, but we do take responsibility for institutional oversight, ensuring policies are applied consistently.” He said *Gazette* editors are now working to clarify and strengthen the letters policy and will share the updated version with the membership.

Herpel came to the podium to add that the removal was “procedural, not punitive,” and that assurances were given to affected members that the policy would be applied fairly to all.

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky followed with the operations report, beginning with thanks to members who came out to shovel during recent snowstorms. She offered an enthusiastic tour of the Coop's current citrus selection (IRL examples included!)—pomelos, Minneola tangelos, Meyer lemons, Lisbon lemons and Sorrento lemons from the Amalfi Coast—and urged members to pick up morning produce shifts, which she said remain consistently hard to fill in winter.

COMMITTEE REPORTS





PHOTO BY AZIKWE ABOAGYE

Amy Brinker & Rahima Nasa pitch their podcast committee.

Lois Wilcken, appearing via Zoom on behalf of the Plastics Reduction Committee, announced a new member survey on plastic use at the Coop. Members can access the survey via QR code or through a link that was published in the March 3rd *Gazette*. The survey will be open through mid-May.

Members Amy Brinker and Rahima Nasa presented a discussion item to form an official Podcast Committee. The duo—Brinker, a writer and editor with book-publishing audio experience, and Nasa, a journalist and producer with credits at NPR, WNYC, and Pushkin Industries—described a vision for a Coop oral history podcast that would capture members' personal recollections, illuminate the Coop's 50-year history, spotlight committees and squads and explore themes of food justice and community.

The pair played a short audio teaser recorded outside the Coop, featuring members sharing what they'd want the podcast to cover: romances in the cheese aisle, the mys-

tery of who organizes the basement, the evolution of Coop policy and one memorable suggestion—"I want to know if anybody ever died in the Coop. Has anyone gone into labor in the Coop?"

The proposal called for one work credit per 30-minute episode per person on a six-week release cadence, with a rough annual budget of \$300 for RSS-feed and website hosting. The podcast would be publicly available. Brinker noted that the *Gazette* itself had recommended the project form as a separate committee, given the technical infrastructure and editorial expertise required.

Several members raised questions. Multiple speakers asked how the committee would maintain editorial independence from the general coordinators, particularly in light of the recent *Gazette* letter controversy. Brinker emphasized that the show would not function as journalism or cover breaking news and would focus on oral history and institutional memory rather than current controversies. Both presenters said they intended to follow the *Gazette*'s existing editorial policy.

Other commenters noted the work-credit-to-hours ratio seemed low—roughly nine hours of work per 30-minute episode, split two ways—and suggested the committee coordinate closely with the Archives Committee and the Center for Brooklyn History, which has an existing relationship with the Coop. Other members asked to be involved in the committee, creating a learning opportunity for people without professional podcast experience. One veteran member, recalling that the Coop didn't assign member numbers for its first few years and arriving late to collect hers, said she was "thrilled" at the prospect of a podcast. The item was a discussion only; no vote was taken.

Board member Tim Hospodar brought an ambitious and somewhat unconventional discussion item to the membership: a call to collectively reimagine the Coop's markup structure. He began with an interactive quiz about the markup on bananas at the Coop, leading to a lengthy explanation about why the price is inconsistent at the Coop.

He also laid out scenarios for multiple types of Coop members, adding up how much the markup is costing different types of shoppers per year. Using an Airbnb-derived design exercise called the “11-Star Framework,” Hospodar invited members to think creatively about how the Coop closes the gap between its expenses and revenue.

He offered three categories for discussion: growing revenue; finding cost reductions; and, if the markup were made permanent and a surplus resulted, deciding how to return value to members—through something like a farm bus trip to visit a supplier, for example.

In response to some confusion about the current markup’s status, Szladek clarified that while the original 25 percent markup was approved in 2020 as a temporary measure during COVID-19—when member labor had largely ceased—a subsequent 2023 general meeting vote gave the GCs authority to set the markup anywhere between 21 percent and 25 percent, based on projected finances.

“It is not a temporary markup,” he said. The Coop has been operating between 24–25 percent since then, with an effective rate of about 26.5 percent when accounting for the roughly \$900,000 in annual product loss that gets factored back in.

Discussion then ranged broadly. One member proposed satellite storefronts in neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy or Crown Heights as both an equity measure and a practical alternative to home delivery. Another suggested listing prepared foods on the Too Good To Go app to generate nightly revenue from surplus items.

Several members raised concerns about the Coop’s affordability and accessibility, noting that as shopping frequency declines, members may increasingly use the Coop for specialty items rather than staples. One member pointed out the difficulty of buying bulk staples like rice in large quantities.

Astrinsky offered context: most grocery stores mark up items at 50–100 percent, using loss-leader pricing on basics like milk and eggs to draw customers in. “The Coop

doesn't do that," she said. On the question of a second location—which came up in member comments—she noted that a previous committee estimated the cost of building out a new store at approximately \$20 million, and that other Brooklyn co-op ventures have struggled in the current real estate environment.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING



Board of Directors vote to approve the last meeting's minutes.

Board President Brandon West led the Board of Directors meeting. Directors Tim Hospodar and Lynn Husum were also present. The board voted to approve the minutes from the January 27, 2026 general meeting.

Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian, and Park Slope local.