

INVASION OF THE HEARING SNATCHERS

August 5, 2025



PHOTO BY ISAAC JONAS

HOW OUR HEADPHONE HABIT HAS CHANGED THE CULTURE OF THE COOP

August 5, 2025

By Susannah Jacob

Last year, over one billion headphones were sold around the world. Agitation grows along with headphone use itself. Has its proliferation plagued our society? How badly is it damaging our hearing? And how, we wonder, does it affect life at the Coop?

Andrew Young has been on staff as a receiving coordinator for one year, on top of two decades of membership. He has noticed an uptick in working members ignoring summons on the loudspeaker. “They couldn’t hear anything.”

A specific incident led Young to believe the Coop needs a strong suggestion if not an official policy limiting headphone use for working members. On a busy weekend afternoon, he saw a member returning a cart to the receiving room, wearing “big podcast headphones...totally oblivious that he was going to hit a four-year-old girl,” Young said. He was able to stop the accident just in time.

Now he raises the issue at the start of shifts. “I just lay it out,” he said, and tends to ask people not to wear headphones or, if they must, consider wearing only one earbud. For Young, this is not just a safety issue, but a “two-pronged argument: safety, and we need to be talking to each other.” He went on, “the Coop is about not being alone. The Coop is a public crossroads, and one of the great things is talking to people and meeting people, and when you have headphones in you miss half the point of the Coop.”

Delivering his start-of-shift spiel made him realize he is not the only one with concerns. “You do run into people who are like ‘F you, I’m listening to this and I don’t care,’ but most people are happy about it,” he said. He surveys teenagers, 15 and 16-year-olds, who come to the Coop to work shifts and “most of them say, ‘I wish phones didn’t exist.’”

“ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS IS TALKING TO PEOPLE AND MEETING PEOPLE, AND WHEN YOU HAVE HEADPHONES IN, YOU MISS HALF THE POINT OF THE COOP.”

Young believes the Coop should make a strong suggestion to members who are working not to use headphones, much like he does today. As for members who are shopping? “We have no control over that, that’s a whole different animal,” he said, “but I

have seen people get into fights after bumping into each other because they can't hear anything."

Young and other staff members have formed a small committee to talk through policy strategies to address headphone use while working. They are planning to have a formal meeting. "Meanwhile, I'm going to keep talking about it," he said.

Maddy Bruster and Alexis Nowicki are two Coop members, and a couple. Bruster, who works checkout or front-end support, disagrees that the Coop needs a formal policy barring headphones for members who are working. Nowicki, who loves checkout and occasionally restocks, feels more strongly that wearing headphones is dangerous and antisocial. "I think they're basically a hazard, and I think it just creates this barrier if someone is trying to speak to you and be heard by you," said Nowicki. "When you're working a shift, it becomes hard for anyone to assign you a task. And what if something is about to fall on your head? You could maybe not hear it."

"Actually, a box of sirloin steak once fell on my head in the meat locker and it made not a sound," said Bruster.

"I also think that the Coop shift is actually an opportunity to have spontaneous interactions with people and you're cutting yourself off from if you have had headphones on. It's good to be present in the world," said Nowicki. "I take things very personally and so I'm thinking about this as a symptom of a problem with people in general, like, why does my friend want to do a Coop shift with me and be on headphones the whole time?"

"I can see both sides of the issue, but I don't see [headphone use] as really changing the culture," said Jason Sparks, a receiving coordinator who has also been a member for 22 years. As a receiving coordinator, a big part of Sparks' job is explaining things to people. "Sometimes I will be explaining something to someone, and I realize they have earbuds in. They stop me and ask me to start over. I always tell people at the beginning of shifts to keep your ears open."

“I CAN’T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME IN CHECKOUT THAT THE CHECKOUT PERSON DIDN’T CHECK THEIR TEXT MESSAGES BETWEEN EVERY STEP OF CHECKOUT.”

Sparks agrees with Bruster that there are some potentially-dangerous places to be absorbed in headphone noise, such as on the sidewalk near the receiving trucks or in the basement. But on the whole, he believes “everybody does it and I don’t think it has an overall negative effect on the social culture of the Coop.”

He points out that if people aren’t listening to something, they are glued to their phones, looking at their screens. “I can’t remember the last time in checkout that the checkout person didn’t check their text messages between every step of checkout.”

Plus, he says, tuning into your headphones offers an understandable reprieve from other oppressive noise. “If you are working eight-to-nine hours a day, every room has its own music playing. You can enter a fugue state.” The Coop, he says, “is not as aurally diverse as you would think...it’s a lot of banal, eighties classic rock we’ve all heard 8,000 times. Maybe you just need a reprieve with a book-on-tape, or a podcast.”

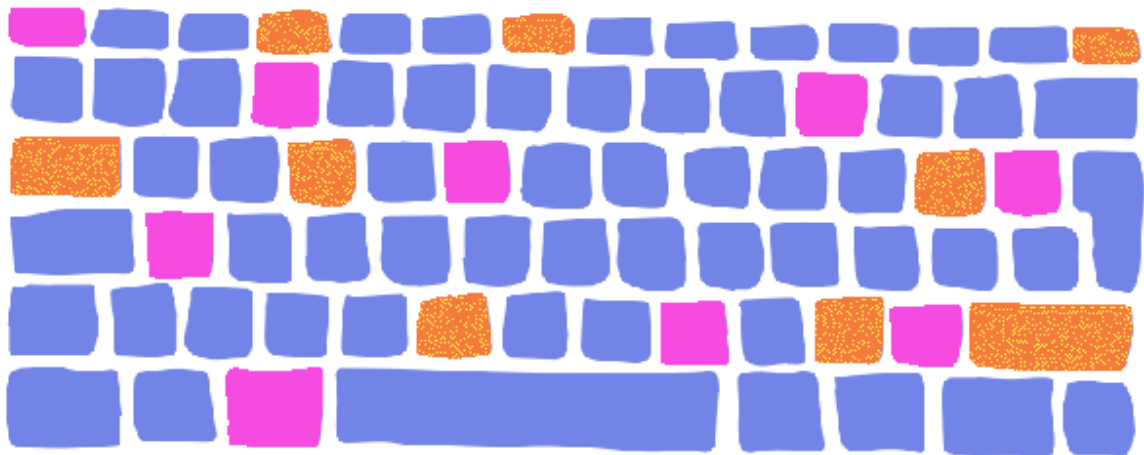
Another upside to the headphone habit is all the extra work the Coop gains. “A lot of time I will have people working on my shift come to ask me if the shift has ended,” he said. “Especially the people with the big, Bose noise-cancelling phones. They ask, ‘Did you make the announcement?’ And I’m like, “Yeah, 15 minutes ago.”

Susannah Jacob is a history PhD student and a proficient operator of the slotted, plastic bag-taper machine in the Coop’s bulk department.

MAY 13, 2025

August 5, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



SEARCH FOR OPEN WORK SHIFTS IN YOUR CALENDAR APPLICATION!

Fellow members,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In solidarity,

Rex Ledesma

NAOMI GATHERING!

Dear Coop Members,

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Naomi Becker, One of the Coop Naomis

THE MYTH OF PLASTIC RECYCLING

Dear Coop members:

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

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

Plastics were invented in 1907. Since then, virtually ALL plastic items manufactured are still on this planet—either in landfills, as litter, in the oceans and virtually everywhere—microplastics have been found at astounding levels in every organ of our bodies! The only exceptions are plastics that have been incinerated—a process that releases microplastics and many highly toxic compounds into the air.

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

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

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

An excellent source of information is www.beyondplastics.org

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

Sincerely,

Will Boorstein

WHAT DOES THE COOP STAND FOR?

Greetings:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Joao M. Da Silva

REPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIOR ON ALL SIDES

Dear Coop Members:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Zara Watkins

A VENUE FOR THE “HYBRID MEETINGS” GM VOTE

Dear fellow members:

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

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

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

those calling for hybrid meetings.

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

Sincerely,

David Barouh

THE CASE FOR A MEMBER BYLAW AMENDMENT

To my fellow Coop members,

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

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

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

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

ples?

During my presentation, I planned to discuss:

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

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

In solidarity,

Zachary Zaban

CITY TECH NEEDED ONLY ONE REASON.

Dear Coop:

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

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

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

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

Best,

Jesse Rosenfeld

THE COST TO THE COOP OF FIGHTING ONE ANOTHER

Greetings:

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Rodger Parsons

HYBRID MEETINGS: WE CAN DO THIS

Greetings:

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

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

time costs of \$300-\$400.

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

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

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

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

In cooperation,

Morgan Vö

WHY DOES NOBODY SAY: THIS ENDS HERE

Dear Agenda Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is no one saying: this ends here?

Sincerely,

Barbara Mazor

IS THE COOP FASCISM ADJACENT?

Dear Coop community:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Sarah Safford, member since 1985

STOP STYMYING THE SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY AT THE COOP

Dear Coop Members:

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Mac Simonson

ABOUT OUR MEETINGS

Dear Fellow Members:

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

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

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

Sincerely,

EVIDENCE THAT HYBRID GMS ARE A GOOD IDEA

Dear Coop members:

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

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

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

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

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

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

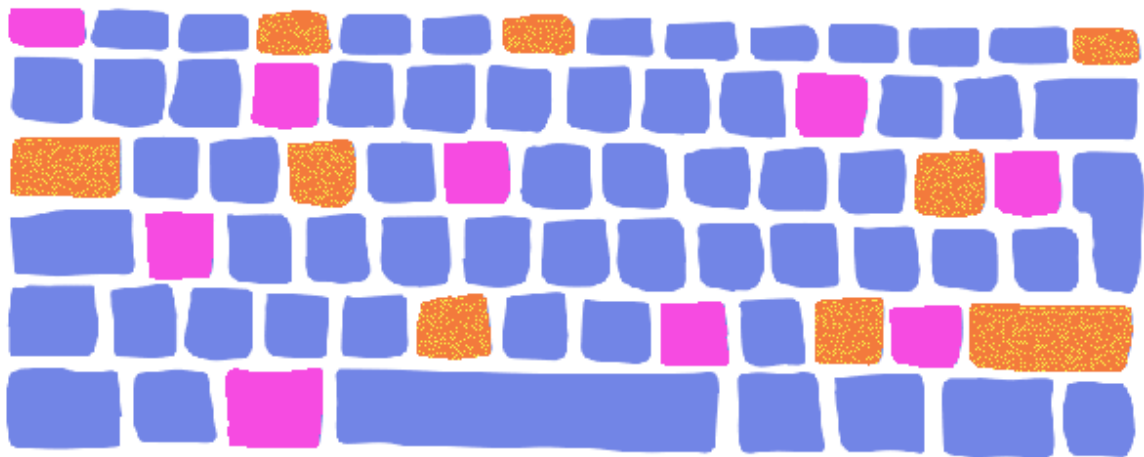
Best,

CJ Glackin

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

August 5, 2025

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Editors' Note: The *Gazette* is pausing the publication of all member letters and member articles related to the war in the Middle East while we revise our submissions policy.

LINWAITERS' GA-ZINE?

Dear Linewaiters' Gazette,

At the November GM a member asked about the *Gazette* being brought back to a print edition, and the question has stuck with me. The transition to a digital *Gazette* has clearly had many advantages (some of which were covered in detail in an article May 2022), however I agree that something tangible may have also been lost in this move.

The appeal of spontaneously collecting a physical edition while shopping is tempting, and some other recent new publications—such as the *New York Review of Architecture*—have triumphed in their role as primarily physical things, to be folded into pockets or left on tables, and which are full of idiosyncratic sketches and graphics. Even the simple ability for editions of the *Gazette* to be continuously archived at the Brooklyn Public Library to expand on their current collection could be of value.

I understand that the cost and time of producing a traditional print edition in parallel to the digital version might be challenging. However, while walking around Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines at the Brooklyn Museum this week, it occurred to me that the *Gazette* could learn from the scrappy, improvised and imperfect world of zines. I propose that, for each digital release, someone takes a turn to print out the new articles, letters and graphics, and paste them into a haphazard zine master copy layout. We could photocopy a dozen and leave them by the entrance, and if the stack runs low, we could just photocopy some more! Each edition could be unique and represent the graphic whims of whoever was responsible for the cut and paste job, and each edition would be photocopied to demand—low cost recycled paper, and tailored to how many copies are needed.

Zine-cerely,
Dan Bergsagel

DISBANDING THE COC TONIGHT AT THE GM—AN EXAMPLE OF STAFF OVERREACH AND POOR GOVERNANCE FOR A COOP

To the editors:

I just returned from the January GM a few minutes ago and, as one of the four members of the COC, which was disbanded tonight, I am both a bit relieved yet quite disappointed. Relieved to no longer be in a crossfire of an unwillingness to collaborate and illuminate; disappointed at a very poorly run process.

The agenda items (Oct. and last night) were mostly based on untruths, namely:

- We never attempted to arbitrate committee disputes—that is the job of the Dispute Resolution Committee.
- We never claimed we would reduce staff workload. Not sure where this idea came from.
- We never tried to take on work credit management. That is done by Staff.

After that October discussion—where the COC leader Brian responded to clear up some “misunderstandings”—i.e. false allegations—we thought everything was amended. Then suddenly in early January we discovered there was an agenda item to disband us. A few of us attempted to reach out to the proposing staff member to discuss but were met with a stone wall. No communication.

Earlier today, I took the time to read the Agenda Committee’s memo “How to Develop an Agenda Item for the General Meeting.” Among the suggestions—not evidenced by this process at all, are:

- Write out your proposal or discussion item and check it for clarity.

- Seek background information.
- Publicize your idea.
- Ask for feedback.

It concerns me that this kind of forceful, top-down behavior is at play at the Coop. It also concerns me that the Agenda Committee did not make any effort to fact check the allegations made about the COC in tonight's agenda item—which was filled with falsehoods.

Just a warning—this is a slippery slope. We are a member-owned coop, and our governance should reflect that.

Kristian Nammack

ACCESS FOR ALL COOP FAMILIES

Dear editors,

I've been a member for 10 years, though I spent many of those away from the borough, and then away from the state. When I rejoined last year, I was so happy to find a vibrant and thriving Coop. I brought with me my now 6-year-old daughter, who fell in love immediately with the place, believes (correctly) that you can find "everything" there, and pesters me daily about when she can work a shift. We are passionate about the Coop in our family! I've begun seeking out ways to get more involved, to both give back to and learn from this community that has fed and nurtured us so well. But for reasons I'm sure a lot of parent-members can relate to, I'm limited by work and family obligations. I'd like to attend the General Meetings, but I simply can't. However, if these meetings shifted to a hybrid model that accommodated virtual attendance, this would help so many who want to participate, but currently are not able —

parents, immunocompromised individuals, people who have mobility, health, work, school or any other kind of constraints. I applaud the Coop for recently reinstating masking midweek; it's a powerful way of expressing commitment to and care for each other. The same principle of access and inclusion should be extended to the General Meetings. These, too, should be spaces where all of us feel welcome.

Sincerely,
Genevieve Yue

SOMETHING NEW IS NOT WORKING WELL AT THE PSFC

Dear Coop:

I haven't been able to shop at the Coop for at least the past 30 days, despite having completed four shifts between late September and early January and having two future shifts scheduled. Yes, I had five free passes and they were already used up, because I have a family, and I shop often via bicycle. They did not replenish after the shift I worked in January. Yes, I fell behind in my work shifts. Yes, I have been a member for 30 years but am too young to "retire". Yes, I spoke to Coop staff members about this. I was told that the new system is not going to change because it is working well for the Coop. Attendance for work slots is at an all-time high. Got it. The greater good, for sure. But what about members like me? This is a call to open up a discussion about the need for some leeway, nuance. I kept my money in the Coop during the pandemic when it was struggling and when I had to wait in line for three hours each time that I shopped. Now I need to go to Whole Foods instead of shopping where I have shopped for three decades. There's no good reason that a 30-year member should shop at Whole Foods because of a one-size (doesn't) fit-all policy. I mean, we wear masks two days a week to accommodate certain members. Let's find some creative solutions regarding suspension rules to fit a few more members' needs.

Rebecca Stronger

CARROT SHIFTS: MEMBERS EARN EXTRA CREDIT FOR HARD-TO-FILL WORK SLOTS

August 5, 2025

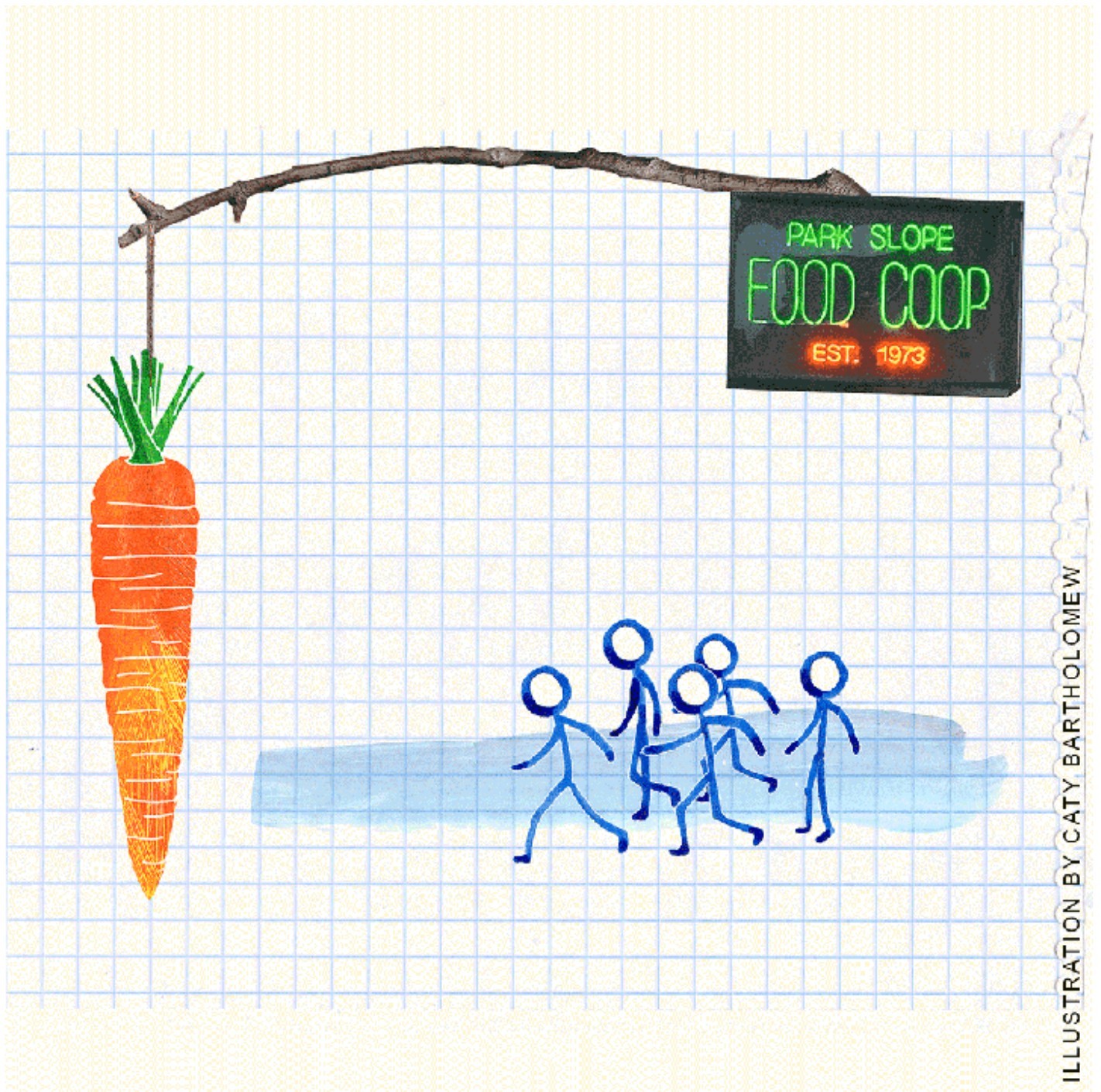


ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

By Walecia Konrad

It's about 8:30 a.m. on a rainy, raw January morning, and as usual around that time, the giant United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) truck is parked outside the Park Slope Food Coop. Palette after palette filled with dozens of cases of products are lined up on the sidewalk, waiting to be unloaded inside.

Meanwhile, in the Coop basement, member workers on the 8 a.m. lifting shift are on

either side of the conveyor belt, lifting and storing boxes of everything from feather-weight toilet paper to hefty cases of bottled beverages. There's fun music on the speaker and Receiving Coordinator Francisco Ferreiro keeps everything moving from the lift to the conveyor belt so lifters can stock shelves quickly.

"It's an enormous amount of goods to move at a dynamic pace," said Ferreiro. "There's enough people today so we can keep it moving."

The fact that workers showed up on this dreary morning may be in large part due to something called the "carrot shift."



Henry Green

Carrot shifts started when member labor returned to the Coop after the COVID-19 lockdown. That's when the previous squad system—wherein members signed up for a specific squad that met at the same day and time every cycle—gave way to the current system, in which members can sign up for any available shift 30 minutes in ad-

vance.

“WE USED TO HAVE A HUGE ABSENTEE RATE ON THESE SHIFTS. NOW WE HAVE A REALLY LOW ABSENTEE RATE AND CAN GET THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE WANT.”

GENERAL COORDINATOR ANN HERPEL

The new system immediately worked well for member labor and staff alike. But coordinators soon noticed that, just as in pre-pandemic times, they were having trouble getting enough members to work early morning slots starting at 5 a.m. and late evening weekend shifts for hard-to-fill jobs like lifting, cleaning and bathrooms.

Prior to the pandemic, coordinators tried to incentivize members to work those shifts by making them shorter—two hours instead of the usual two hours and 45 minutes. But even with the shorter hours, the Coop still had trouble with no shows, forcing staff to fill the gaps themselves. Then, those same no shows would crowd more appealing slots to do their makeups, causing an oversupply of labor during popular times.

So the staff decided to incentivize workers in a different way. Each carrot work slot completed is worth 1.2 shifts. In other words, work five shifts, get a sixth free.

“We used to have a huge absentee rate on these shifts, like 20 percent cancellation when it was squads,” explained General Coordinator Ann Herpel. “Now we have a really low absentee rate and can get the number of people we want for these shifts,” she said.

Missing work at the Coop used to mean a punishment, explained Herpel. But with the new system, members choose the shifts they can work and are able to cancel without penalty. “We’re hopeful that we’re moving away from the punitive thing,” Herpel said.

In other words, the Coop is using the carrot instead of the stick.

MEMBERS LOVE CARROTS

If the recent rainy day lifter shift is any indication, some members prefer carrots. Julia Foote, who joined the Coop this past summer, said, “I like to know where everything goes, and I’m not really a people-facing person, so this job is great for me. And I only have two more to go before I get the extra credit.”

Terry Brooks, a member since 2004, said she did the same shift pre-pandemic, “so now the carrot is a nice bonus. I’ve already earned an extra shift!”

New member Henry Green joined the Coop two months ago. He had some free days in January, so he tried out a carrot shift. “Why not? Who doesn’t want a free shift?” He said that enthusiastically while lifting and stocking the lightweight boxes of pretzels that came down the conveyor belt. To his credit, his exuberance dimmed only slightly when he started hoisting cases of Field Day canned pumpkin. “These are heavy!” he said, still smiling.

“HONESTLY, THE LATE-NIGHT HOURS WORK BEST FOR ME. MY KIDS ARE ASLEEP AND I CAN’T REALLY COME MANY OTHER TIMES. AND THIS CARROT THING IS GREAT! I’VE ALREADY GOTTEN ONE OR TWO EXTRA SHIFTS.”

MEMBER OFER WOLBERGER

Noah Rott, a three-year PSFC member, summed up the general feeling on the squad when he said, “It gives you a good feeling to earn an extra shift.”



Noah Rott

WEEKEND CARROTS WORK THE NIGHT SHIFT

Carrot shifts are also available late at night on weekends. On a recent Friday evening, flex workers started signing in at 8:30 p.m., just as the last shoppers were leaving the Coop. Ofer Wolberger, a member for more than 10 years, was one of them. “Honestly, the late-night hours work best for me. My kids are asleep and I can’t really come many other times,” he said. “And this carrot thing is great! I’ve already gotten one or two extra shifts.”

Wolberger likes the variety of duties on the flex shifts. Workers often start out on checkout or stocking and then move to cleaning and maintenance jobs once the Coop is empty of shoppers. “I can do cashier, I clean the shelves, I don’t care, whatever needs doing,” said Wolberger. Later he added, “Sometimes they let you drive the Zamboni, that’s really fun,” referring to the Zamboni-like floor cleaning machine.

That night Wolberger was starting at the bread bins, where membership coordinator Karina Gee explained how to gently pull out and clean the bins and how to wrap up and label tomorrow's day-old baked goodies.

They were joined by another carrot worker, Polly Thistlethwaite, a Coop member for about 10 years. "I only work carrot shifts, and I love the night shift," she said. "Once you earn that extra credit, you never go back!" She differed a bit from Wolberger on the Zamboni job, though. "I was really disappointed. I thought you got to ride it, but really, you push it. And it's a big heavy machine!"



Julia Foote

Both Thistlethwaite and Wolberger appreciate the fact that workers can come early to shop and store their groceries during their shift. Or, if it's just a few items, staff will stay a little later to check workers out.

"WHEN WE SEE A SHIFT ISN'T ATTRACTING ENOUGH PEOPLE, WE MAY 'CARROTIZE' IT."

GENERAL COORDINATOR ELINOAR ASTRINSKY

Herpel has noticed that carrots make weekend night shifts more attractive to members with all types of schedules. Even the most social member may find themselves with a rare weekend evening without plans, she explained. If they do, they can sign up and earn extra credit.

With the online signup system, carrot workers and regular workers can now plan their work slots around their schedules instead of having to plan their schedules around their work slots, she added.

CARROTS TAKE A LOAD OFF STAFFERS

“The reason I’m most excited about the carrot shift,” said General Coordinator Joe Szladek, “specifically with early morning shifts, is that the staff needs consistent support and now we are almost certain to have enough people. If we don’t have enough people, we do all the lifting, and it is really hard on our bodies,” he explained.

Ferreiro agreed. “When workers don’t show, it’s a full-on workout—we’re just lifting boxes non-stop to get everything unloaded.”



Terry Brooks, Iver Cleveland, Margo Johnston

SIGNING UP FOR CARROT SHIFTS IS EASY

If you want to get in on the work-less-for-more-credit bandwagon, go to the shift calendar, use the drop-down menu to find “Only Carrots” at the bottom of the list, and see what’s available.

Keep in mind carrot shifts are very dynamic. Many of them fill up fast, so scheduling ahead may give you more options. At the same time, “when we see a shift isn’t attracting enough people, we may ‘carrotize’ it,” said General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky, meaning shopping for last-minute carrot shifts can pay off, too. This is especially true during the holidays, said Astrinsky, “which is the time the fewest people come to work, but the most people come to shop.”

While there may be changes in which shifts are incentivized—Astrinsky said the coord-

inators are looking at taking the 8 a.m. lifting shift off the carrot list if there continues to be good turnout—the carrot itself seems here to stay. “We’ll always have them,” said Astrinsky. “It’s working really well, and we’re filling shifts we wouldn’t fill otherwise.”

DEARTH OF SHIFTS

August 5, 2025

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 that 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

FTOP RULES TOO RESTRICTIVE

August 5, 2025

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.

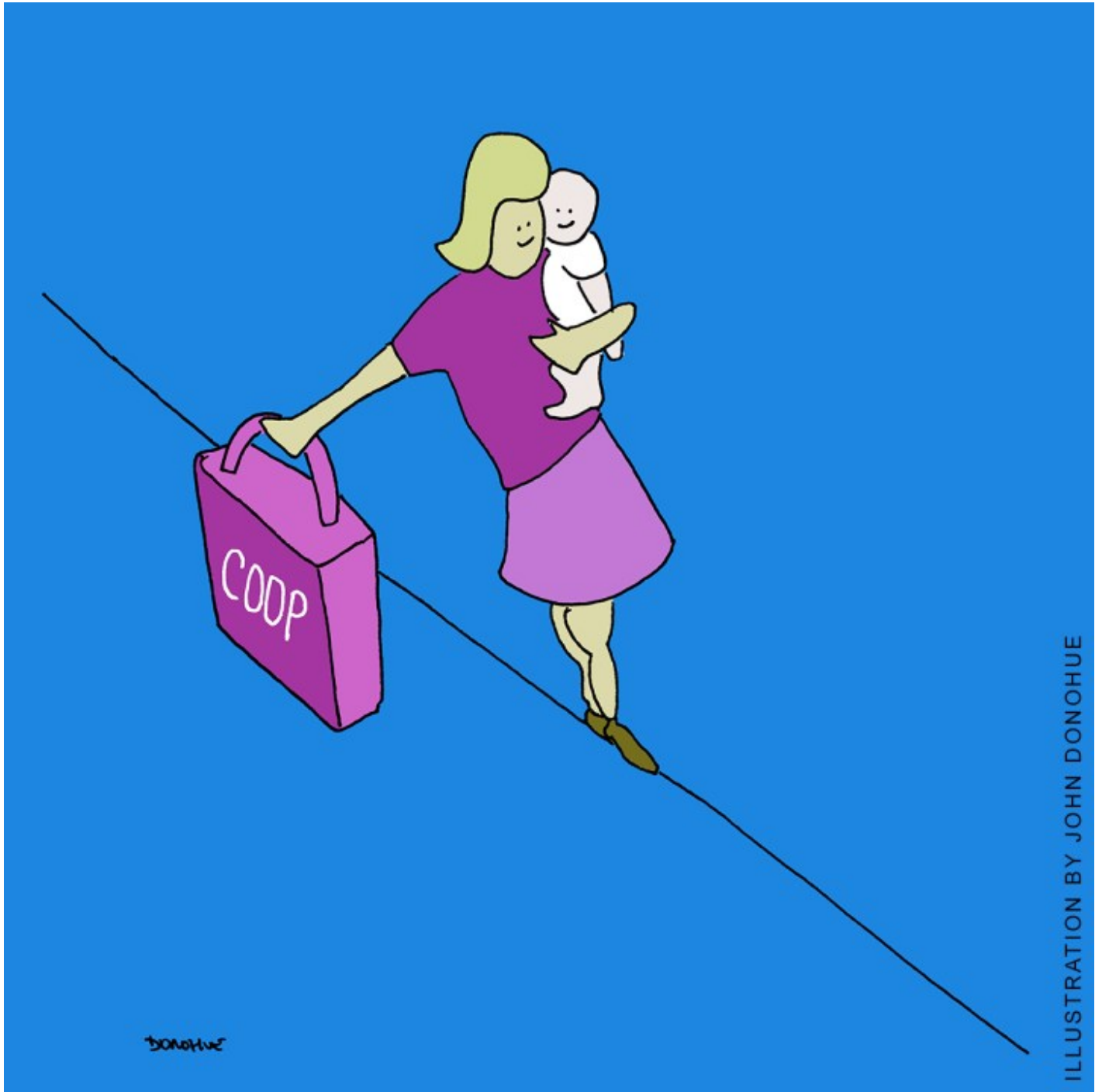
Moreover, when we accept the Workslot Policy Agreement, we agree that “Whenever possible I will cancel farther in advance, so other members have the opportunity to claim the shift(s).” Here, too, the FTOP policy makes it difficult to do so. For example, I will be traveling in November but cannot cancel 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

SINGLE MOMS STRUGGLING TO FIND COOP SHIFTS

August 5, 2025



BY HAYLEY GORENBERG

The high-wire act of snagging and balancing Coop work shifts, while being a single parent of young children—especially in an era when the Coop lacks childcare—took center ring in the Coop Confidential Facebook group in recent weeks, with many single mothers venting their frustration about whether or not they are truly welcome at the store.

WORKING SHIFTS

In April, changes in work shifts extended work cycles, and adjusted the release of new shift opportunities, so they trickle out more steadily over time—rather than flooding online at odd hours, and quickly getting scooped up. The Coop also considered the return of reliably recurring shifts in July. But these improvements still left mothers of young children jockeying for swaps through flurries of social media posts, and wishing for both structured flexibility to swap shifts, and childcare coverage at the Coop. Some said they had felt unwelcome at the Coop from the start.

“I don’t mind working at all, but it’s a little bit complicated, and they’re not flexible,” said Alla Tice, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union who joined the Coop in 2018, motivated in large part by stellar tomatoes. “‘Wonderful tomatoes!’ That’s what everyone said at orientation. The food is amazing. The choice is amazing. Prices are good. It’s three small blocks away, my local supermarket.”

Tice, a self-described “single mother by choice” of two children, now four and almost eight years old, said she was dismayed to be met with suspicion about her household from the outset. When she first arrived at the Coop and explained that she was the only adult in a household with two children, she said the response was incredulous, “Yeah. Right.” She felt she was being tacitly accused of lying.

THE COOP SHOULD INSTITUTE A “GRACE PERIOD,” TO ALLOW SINGLE PARENTS WHO LACK ROUTINE CHILD CARE TO REMAIN MEMBERS.

—*KIKI RAKOWSKY, COOP MEMBER*

She forged ahead anyway, and did appreciate the Coop’s parental leave policy, applied when her younger child was born. After her leave, she got some help from her mother, or from friends on occasion, and successfully worked checkout for almost a

year, before COVID-19 put member work on hiatus. But when member work resumed, with the childcare room shut down indefinitely, and other care options constrained by COVID risks, she started to struggle with meeting shift requirements. She stopped by the Coop office to try and work out a solution—and described speaking with an individual in the office—who, she said, told her, “Maybe the Coop is not for you.”



Shopping with a baby in a stroller along the produce section of the Coop.

BANKING SHIFTS

Tice scrambled to bank shifts for a full week when she had childcare in early 2022. She said she worked so steadily that a staff member asked whether she had joined as a paid employee. But with her banked shifts running out, Tice said she checks “almost every day” for shifts she can manage—and she’s having a hard time finding them. She rhapsodizes about the childcare room: “My daughter loved it! They got bagels. They played. I know my youngest now, she would appreciate it.” However,

she vacillated in her feelings about a childcare space during the era of COVID. “I’m not sure how I would feel about bringing back childcare—but I would still say it would be really nice if childcare were available. It would be helpful.”

I DON’T MIND WORKING AT ALL, BUT IT’S A LITTLE BIT COMPLICATED, AND THEY’RE NOT FLEXIBLE.

—*ALLA TICE, COOP MEMBER*

Ultimately, she wondered about the possibility of a documented proof of need for excuse from work during a period of time, comparing the situation to excusing jurors who are primary caretakers of young children. “I don’t want to sound lazy,” she hurried to add. “I don’t want to sound like I want to avoid work.”

LOOKING FOR A SHIFT



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

Coop member and single mother Kiki Rakowsky, a Coop Confidential member, also advocated for lessened shift requirements with documented proof of need—perhaps a tax return excerpt showing that a parent is “head of household” with young dependents. Rakowsky likened searching for shifts that worked in her schedule to buying choice concert tickets the moment they are released. She said fellow Coop members told her to “wake up early, 4 or 4:30,” to find “plenty of slots.”

Rakowsky, a funeral director, said, “I don’t have the privilege of knowing when I’m going to be at work. Let’s say I schedule a shift four weeks in advance—and someone dies?” In the absence of a formal shift-swapping procedure, even the revisions to the work slot system fall short of addressing her need for flexibility. “It’s almost like the Coop has turned into ‘Lord of the Flies,’” she exclaimed. “Kill or be killed there! Eat or be eaten! Everyone’s stretched really thin.”

A Coop member for more than a decade, Rakowsky brought her now-seven-year-old to the Coop in a baby carrier, and nursed him during her checkout shift, until he was old enough to go to Coop childcare.

ON LEAVE

Part of the “sandwich generation,” Rakowsky now also takes care of her father—and she is on leave until June for that reason. She said she’s not sure how she will maintain her membership after her leave ends—but she remains convinced the Coop can solve the problem.



Pushing a baby in a stroller along the busy bulk section of the Coop.

"I think it's an amazing institution," she said. "I think it's a great place with great people, and the model has worked for so long and so many." She pointed out that the pandemic has laid bare the deficits in many systems, including, but not limited to, PS-FC. "It's nothing against the Coop," she said. "I sing the praises of the Coop! The Coop should be modeling how to shop for all of its members. If we had elderly shopping on Thursday mornings, why haven't we solved for single parents? You can't pick and choose which marginalized community to solve for. When I hear that people can no longer shop at the Coop because of their single-parent status, I'm with you!" she said. "We have to have the intellectual wherewithal to come up with a solution." Until then, she suggested the Coop should institute a "grace period," to allow single parents who lack routine child care to remain members. For now, she said, "I'm just tired!"

COOP CHILDCARE ON HOLD



The Coop bulk room.

PSFC Membership Coordinator Matt Hoagland, on staff for more than 17 years, acknowledged childcare at the Coop was on hold “indefinitely”—because of COVID concerns, but also because using the space for bulk processing equipment has radically improved packaging bulk items, to the point where what was once a week’s worth of work can be accomplished in a day. That capacity is all the more critical when COVID safety measures necessitate moving shoppers efficiently through the high-volume bulk aisle, “traditionally one of the worst aisles for traffic.”

Hoagland deemed creating a system for excusing single parents of young children from work slots “above pay grade” for his position—meaning it would require a rule change. Noting that he grew up in a household headed by his single mother, he asked, “How much can we get into the management of people’s lives? It’s hard, and some of the answers don’t sound friendly at times.”

He also pointed out that even when childcare existed at the Coop, pre-pandemic, there was no guarantee it would be open or available at any particular time. “If we didn’t have workers, we didn’t have childcare, and that was what it was. So there were always limits on it.”

Hoagland expressed hope that newly available recurring shift options and improvements to online scheduling would help single parents, but acknowledged that there’s currently “no adequate answer.” He said, “We’re hoping people do the best they can. We’re making our way, trying to figure out what will work for most of our members—whether that’s single parents, hardcore planners, people who don’t plan very well, or people who only think of their status when they’re about to be suspended.”



Bags of produce being prepared for bulk sale.

Hayley Gorenberg is a journalist-turned-civil-rights-lawyer and Floridian--turned-Brooklynite.