

## SHAPESHIFTER LAB CELEBRATES ONE YEAR IN PARK SLOPE

September 24, 2024



By Leila Darabi

September 24, 2024

August marked one year since the music and arts organization ShapeShifter Lab moved into 837 Union Street, just across the street from the Park Slope Food Coop. Before it opened last year, founders and Coop members Matthew Garrison and Fortuna Sung shared their ambitious plans for the space with the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. They had built the ShapeShifter name as a jazz venue in Gowanus. With the new venue, they wanted to continue that work and to expand their nonprofit entity ShapeShifter+. One year since they opened their doors, the space is fully open as a music venue, part-time cafe and studio space.

TRUE TO ITS ROOTS, THE NEW SHAPESHIFTER LAB IS MOST ACTIVE AS A MUSIC VENUE, HOSTING PERFORMANCES FROM RENOWNED JAZZ ARTISTS.

## MUSIC VENUE

True to its roots, the new ShapeShifter Lab is most active as a music venue, hosting performances from renowned jazz artists. August performances included Bill Ware & The Club Bird All Stars performing original compositions from Ware, a popup show featuring DJs from the HELM record collective, clarinetist Ricardo Gallo's project Horse's Mouth, jazz ensemble Joshua Trio Two, pianist Shereen Cheong's group, an Afrobeat-/Afrofusion night and the Indian raga group Mir Naqibul Islam Trio.



Shereen Cheong Muthuraja on keys, Andrew Cheng on guitar, Anthony Muthuraja on drums, Ruber Simbana on percussion and Matt Garrison on

bass.



Matt Garrison on bass and Ruber Simbana on percussion at ShapeShifter Lab

“Honestly, the summer was kind of slow, but it gave us an idea of how to navigate summer in Park Slope,” Sung said. ShapeShifter Lab, which has a diversified business model, has seen other successes in its first year.

The space is also available to rent for events, a core part of the ShapeShifter Lab business model, Sung noted.

## WORKSHOPS AND CLASSES

The summer gave the team the opportunity to build out programming on their second-floor studio space. Once a yoga studio, ShapeShifter Lab uses the second floor to host a range of classes and to record music.

Stefania Clementi, founder of Allora Creative Cultural Center, used the space to host kids classes this summer, which included cooking classes, play time and other activities as part of a day camp. The classes will continue into the fall as after-school activities.

“We also have SIM, the School for Improvisational Music,” said Sung. “It’s really fun, a whole day of improv starting with learning and including a teacher’s performance.” Those instructors included well-known jazz artists, directed by trumpeter Ralph Alessi, leading 15–20 students.

“The last day was their final performance,” Sung said. “It was quite amazing. People flew in from Switzerland and China for this workshop.”

BEYOND CAMPS AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCES, THE SHAPESHIFTER LAB TEAM IS EAGER TO RESUME YOGA CLASSES AND OTHER MOVEMENT ARTS PROGRAMS IN THEIR SECOND-FLOOR STUDIO.

As described on the school's website: "The SIM experience encompasses ample playing opportunities and discussion of improvisational concepts. SIM is less about teaching through the lens of style and more about the overarching concepts of improvisation, touching on multiple disciplines."

## MOVEMENT ARTS

SHAPE SHIFTER +

# MOVEMENT ARTS PROGRAM

UPCOMING CLASSES

FUNDAMENTALS OF  
VINYASA  
TUESDAYS  
9:30-11 AM

DIVING DEEPER  
(YOGA)  
SUNDAYS  
9:30-12 PM

YOGA & MUSIC  
MEDITATION  
FRIDAYS  
5:00-6:30  
(PM)

CARNIVAL MOVES  
& MELODIES  
FRIDAYS  
4-5 PM  
(AGES 8-12)

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Beyond camps and musical performances, the ShapeShifter Lab team is eager to resume yoga classes and other movement arts programs in their second-floor studio. A recent newsletter had a teaser about a new “movement arts program” curated by Maia Claire Garrison, sister of ShapeShifter Lab’s co-founder Matthew Garrison.

Like her brother, Maia Claire Garrison was raised between New York and Rome. Their father, Jimmy Garrison, was the bassist in the John Coltrane Quartet and their mother, Roberta Escamilla Garrison, was a dancer and dance instructor. The music arts program is set to include classes in yoga, music meditation, capoeira and children’s classes in “carnival moves and melodies” and “clapping hands, stomping feet.”

## THE CAFE

Long-time residents of Park Slope will remember that 837 Union once housed the famous Tea Lounge. So opening a cafe in the ShapeShifter space was always important to cofounders Garrison and Sung.

A part-time team of baristas now serve coffee, tea and a limited menu of treats. “If you remember the Tea Lounge, it’s a different kind of vibe,” Sung said. “I always tell the baristas ‘don’t get too disappointed if you don’t serve too much coffee’.” She describes the cafe as more of a networking space linked to the musical performances and community gatherings that ShapeShifter Lab hosts.

SHAPESHIFTER+ IS WORKING CLOSELY WITH JOHN COLTRANE’S SON RAVI COLTRANE AND THE COLTRANE HOME FOUNDATION TO HOST SOME OF THE COLTRANE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS.

“We also have the Park Slope Parents’ Meetup. It’s really about networking and people coming in,” Sung said.

In particular, Sung previewed that ShapeShifter+ is working closely with John Coltrane's son Ravi Coltrane and the Coltrane Home Foundation to host some of the Coltrane centennial celebrations that, in 2026, will honor what would have been the musician's 100th birthday.

As the sons of two members of the Coltrane Quartet, Ravi Coltrane and Matthew Garrison are frequent collaborators. "They have continued the tradition of working together," Sung said.

## A LAB TO MAKE CREATIVE PROJECTS HAPPEN

Sung describes ShapeShifter Lab as a space where artists can propose projects and get support in producing them. As an example of the unique, interdisciplinary nature of their events, she recounted a panel commemorating "the year of Alice Coltrane", John Coltrane's wife, mother to Ravi and bandleader and composer in her own right. The panel included Matthew Garrison, Reggie Workman (who was Coltrane's bassist before Matthew's father joined the quartet) and Ravi Coltrane. The three discussed and played Alice Coltrane's music.

## RETURN OF THE PSFC CONCERT SERIES

Perhaps most exciting to Coop members, plans are in the works to revive the PSFC Concert Series, a long-standing performance series for Coop members. Jay Rodriguez, a Coop member and Grammy-nominated reed player, composer and bandleader, describes the tradition as: "One of the most exciting things we do at the Coop."

Coop member, artist and activist Beverly Grant formerly curated the series, and held it at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. Rodriguez said he and Alexis Cuadrado—a Coop member who is a musician, producer and professor—took on the project of reviving the tradition. Together with Coop Membership Coordinator Jason Weiner, the team has worked to revive a beloved Coop tradition and found a new home at ShapeShifter Lab.

“WE HAVE SO MANY GIFTED AND TALENTED MEMBERS. IT WAS A NATURAL THING TO DO AND A NO-BRAINER,” SAID COOP MEMBER JAY RODRIGUEZ.

“Alexis Cuadrado and I were talking in the membership office about how we were missing community events, specifically the Very Good Coffeehouse,” Weiner shared. “Fortuna, Matt, Alexis and Jay connected. They created a great proposal for bringing the series back, and the General Coordinators approved the reboot. We’re super excited to bring more community-oriented events and fun back to Union Street!”

“We have so many gifted and talented members. It was a natural thing to do and a no-brainer,” Rodriguez shared in an email. “Before the shutdown this was an important ... way to bring us closer together as a community of people that really care about the world around us. Art in every aspect of our human experience is a life-healing force,” he said.

Rodriguez and Cuadrado intend to expand the new series beyond musical performances to include, Rodriguez said, “a platform for freedom of expression for all ... We welcome painters, dancers, professional and amateur musicians, comedians, actors, DJs, poets, magicians, gurus, dreamers and schemers who want to express themselves and share their gifts!”

They closed with a call to Coop members: “Bring us your light!”



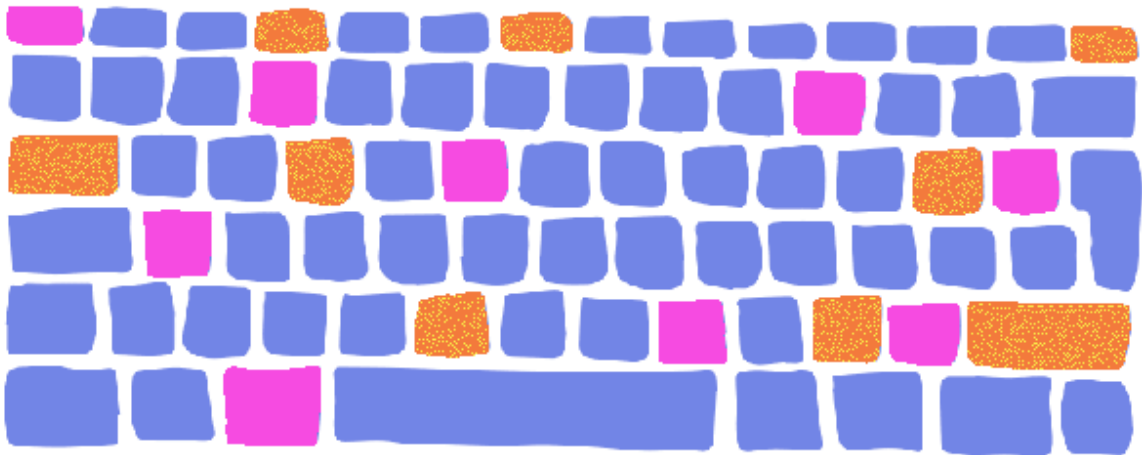
Matt Garrison and Fortuna Sung, the founders and power team behind Shapeshifter Lab

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SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

September 24, 2024

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



JEEZ THE CHEESE IS TOO BIG

Hi Members,

I'm not necessarily a cheese enthusiast, but my partner and son are. They love cheese and love trying new cheeses. Years ago, this was easy to do, as the cheeses

cut were of various shapes and sizes.

For the past many years, however, cheeses tend to be about the same size, which discourages trying different types. I'd love to buy a piece of parmesan, but not a \$10 block of it. I'm hoping we can add a diversity of sizes to the cheeses being displayed which would reflect our members' various needs.

Here's to bringing back small and medium sizes of cheese—let's make cheese great again.

Thanks and hope to see the new sizes soon.

Respectfully in cooperation,  
*Jesse Farrell*

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## RE: CRITIQUE OF JULY 2024 PROPOSAL ITEM

To the Members:

Three Coop area coordinators brought a proposal item to the July 2024 General Meeting (GM) on behalf of a group of 52 area coordinators. It was posted in the GM agenda notice as "Urgent Resubmission of Personnel Committee Proposal," and was a reworking of a similar proposal that was brought by the General Coordinators to the April 2024 GM and voted down. Both proposals sought to set policies concerning the powers of the Coop committee known as the Personnel Committee, as well as detailing the supervisory hierarchy of Coop staff. The version of the proposal brought to the July 2024 GM was approved by the members.

Both versions of the proposal included language that disenfranchises membership, which I find unnecessary and baffling.

One is the statement:

“The personnel policies of the Park Slope Food Coop shall be the responsibility of the General Manager, GC Team, and/or the Personnel Committee. Those entities have the sole authority to bring agenda items related to personnel policies to the General Meeting.”

Why can't a non-General Coordinator or non-Personnel Committee member bring an agenda item concerning personnel policies if that member thinks it's needed? Very perplexing.

Two is the statement:

“Once approved, the above motions shall replace all other GM-approved motions on matters in the areas specified above regarding employment policies and procedures for the General Coordinators and the General Manager.”

What is objectionable to me about this is that the GM was not provided with the specific policies and procedures being replaced. These documents could and should have been made available to members so they could be fully informed on the matter. Links to these documents could have been posted online or emailed to members before the meeting.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Tobier*

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RE: “THE COOP IS AT CAPACITY AND CROWDED: CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?”

Dear fellow members:

In reading this article I was struck by the mention of the Second Location Study Committee (SLSC), its rigorous investigation into the feasibility and the community benefits of a second location, and its simple rejection by a close margin of 74 votes to 64 votes. That's 138 of approximately 16,000 Coop members who participated in the vote. The article goes on to survey several other potential avenues for increasing capacity and improving efficiency within the walls of the current PSFC building, none of which sound promising or would benefit the greater Brooklyn community and sustainable vendors at large.

After reading this article, I went back to look at the PSFC's Mission Statement. There are two lines included that I believe support the ideas held within the SLSC's report. Support for that initiative had the potential to satisfy our Mission and would also ameliorate the problem of overcrowding at the PSFC.

Here are the two lines:

"We are a part of and support the cooperative movement."

"We strive to reduce the impact of our lifestyles on the world we share with other species and future generations."

I am familiar with SLSC's report and was one of the 138 voters. I am writing this letter with the hope of stimulating interest in the ideas and information gathered by the SLSC. My concern is that the participation of voting members was woefully small and a good idea was laid to rest prematurely.

A third line from our Mission statement speaks to this hope:

"We seek to maximize participation at every level, from policy making to running the store."

Cheers!

*Rebecca Stronger*

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## REGARDING REFERENDA AND HYBRID MEETINGS

To the Editors,

With all the controversy about holding referenda and hybrid meetings, a few statistics I obtained from the office may shed some light on these subjects.

It turns out that the total number of members who participated in this year's Board of Directors election out of more than 15,000 members was around 3,800, and this was apparently atypically high, likely due to efforts to get BDS partisans onto the Board; the number of members who vote is usually around 1,000—a tiny fraction of the total.

As for virtual meetings, during the height of the pandemic, after an initial surge in attendance in the spring of 2020, the numbers dwindled and ultimately fell to under 100 by August 2023.

Even the unprecedented and very costly 2012 General Meeting, which required security presence to consider a referendum on joining BDS, attracted fewer than 2,000 members.

It's likely that referenda and hybrid meetings would produce similarly minimal participation since the vast majority of members simply want to do their work shifts and shop at the Coop in a congenial and welcoming atmosphere and aren't interested in subjects outside the Coop's fundamental mission of providing good food at low prices for working members.

*Sylvia Lowenthal*

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## BOYCOTT NEXT STEPS: A MODEST PROPOSAL

Dear fellow members,

I'd like to propose a simple, hopefully modest proposal as we look to individually express our views on a boycott of Israeli goods—in short, let us all vote with our wallets as we see fit.

To those that support a boycott: create a list of all products that you believe should not be purchased, publicize that list in a central location (perhaps on a social media page dedicated to the effort), and encourage those that agree with you to not buy those products.

Others who do not support the boycott can continue to purchase products as they see fit.

There is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution to complex issues, especially those as nuanced and emotionally charged as this, and pushing for an entire community to adopt a set of principles is divisive and unnecessary. Let us all be informed and take individual action that aligns with our own personal outlook.

In cooperation, even when we disagree,

*Paul Blachar*

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GENERAL COORDINATORS (GCS) ANN HERPEL AND MATT HOAGLAND RESPOND TO STEPHEN KLEIN'S LETTER, "OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

## OF FINDING WORK SHIFTS”:

Dear Stephen,

We offer these answers to help all Coop members understand how complex Coop operations are and the factors that must be considered before changing the labor system.

### 1. **Availability of Shifts**

As of Sept. 3, there were 12,037 members in the work pool. The six-week shift calendar had 2,184 shifts per week, projecting 13,104 shifts per cycle. The difference between these two figures (work pool and projected shifts over six weeks) is 1,067, leaving a weekly surplus of 177 shifts. In other words, there is at least one shift for every member to work in the six-week cycle, plus 1,067.

Members might feel that there is a dearth of shifts. But from an operational perspective, even with the surplus, the Coop often runs without optimal member-workers where work goes uncompleted or staff step in because the task has to be done.

2. **Expanded store hours are coming soon.** While the start date is TBD, the GCs have decided to expand the shopping hours to 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Sunday hours will remain 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Closing the Coop one hour later, six days per week, will add approximately 30 shifts, meeting at the end of the Coop day, per week.

3. **Reducing the shift length to two hours or increasing the shift cycle length:** Neither would affect shift size, nor reduce demand for popular shifts and start times.

The benefit of reducing the shift length would be to add one more shift-time daily at the END the day, something the expanded store hours will accomplish. However, unlike expanding hours, it would also be burdensome for the operations for many other reasons we can't explain in this brief response.

Increasing the cycle length beyond six weeks would require the Coop to grow around 2,000 members per additional week, far beyond our building's capacity to buy, receive, shelf, and sell groceries to the membership. The impact on the check-out line or queue to enter would be detrimental, to say the least.

4. **Limiting Shift Credits:** Only 3% of the members in the working-pool have 10 or more shifts in their shift bank. Many work on committees like the Gazette or Chair Committee or restricted shifts that need additional training unavailable to most members. Those that do use the shift calendar are more than balanced out by the shift surplus. In fact, the vast majority of members— over 95%—have shift credit banks ranging from -3 to +2 shifts. They are not accumulating enough shifts to crowd out other members from the shift calendar. Note there is currently a two-shift limit on scheduled shifts that helps to prevent shift hoarding.

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CLEAN CORN: MEXICANS PROTECT A GLOBAL STAPLE

September 24, 2024



## International Trade Education Committee (ITES) Report

*By Helen Beichel for the ITES Committee*

September 24, 2024

A February 2023 Mexican Presidential Decree banned the growing of transgenic corn, in order to protect the people's constitutional right to a clean environment and native species from cross-pollination by genetically modified (GMO) species.

**THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT AN INDIGENOUS RIGHTS GENERAL EXCEPTION IN ANY TRADE AGREEMENT INVOLVING THE US WILL BE EXAMINED.**

The decree included restrictions on GMO corn usage in minimally processed foods, such as masa and tortillas. It set a deadline of March 2024 for the elimination of glyphosates in the country, setting a long-term goal of removing GMOs fed to animals. In August 2023, the US Trade Representative, eventually supported by the Canadian government, opened a case against the Mexican government in the secretive Investor State Dispute System tribunal (ISDS). The case asserted that Mexico is violating the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) by preventing the importation of GMO corn. The U.S. claims that Mexico did not present scientific evidence in its report to back up its claim that GMO corn and herbicides are dangerous to the Mexican people.

This is the first time that an Indigenous Rights General Exception in any trade agreement involving the U.S. will be examined. USMCA Article 32.5 on Indigenous Peoples Rights, which was insisted upon by Canada, allows any of the three USMCA countries to create measures “necessary to fulfill its legal obligations to Indigenous Peoples.” In addition, the Environmental chapter in the USMCA points to the connections between Indigenous People’s rights and biodiversity.

Mexican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) support their government’s policies, saying that they are in line with the USMCA, as well as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade Agreement (GATT)’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. These measures allow taking a precautionary, proactive stance regarding protecting corn as there are no conflict-free scientific studies proving the safety of GMO maize. The involvement of GATT provisions makes this a case with global implications.

**GROWING GMO CORN IS DESTRUCTIVE TO THE MILPAS GROWING SYSTEM, A PRACTICE THAT INTEGRATES CORN, BEANS, PUMPKIN, BROAD BEAN, QUELITES AND MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THE RESILIENCE THEY GENERATE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOIL DEGENERATION.**

Mexican NGOs point out that in 2020, 40% of the Mexican diet was corn-based. The

average Mexican eats around 432 lbs of corn per year. Mexico also says that by defending itself in front of the ISDS, it is defending its corn biocultural heritage and preserving its native corn species.

Mexico is a gene reserve for 64 different breeds of corn, 59 of which are native, used and preserved for 300 generations by Indigenous Peoples and the ancestral practices of peasant groups. Mexico points out the decree is not a ban on importing corn; it merely regulates the end use of corn for human consumption. Growing GMO corn is destructive to the milpas growing system, a practice that integrates corn, beans, pumpkin, broad bean, quelites and medicinal plants and the resilience they generate in the face of climate change and soil degeneration.

Analysis by U.S. NGOs such as Food and Water Watch highlights that U.S. approval of GMO corn is based on industry assertions, not science. Assessments of reproductive, developmental, neurological, metabolic, microbiome or gastrointestinal-tract-related health risks have not been addressed through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) process. Nor has any other process in the public or private sector addressed those risks. The U.S. government has never done its own assessment of GMOs.

Technical comments coauthored by Friends of the Earth and Food Tank pointed out that the U.S. government's submission to the tribunal lacked information about the toxins expressed in contemporary GMO corn varieties, and their levels. It ignored dozens of studies linking the insecticidal toxins and glyphosate residues found in GMO corn to adverse impacts on public health.

**OUR BODIES WERE NOT DESIGNED TO DIGEST THESE NEW PROTEINS EXPRESSED IN GMO SEED STRAINS. THESE TOXINS ARE DESIGNED TO KILL INSECTS BY BREAKING DOWN THEIR DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS.**

The toxicity of GMO corn has been increasing since it was introduced 30 years ago.

First, insecticidal toxins, in the form of new proteins, have been engineered into every grain of GMO corn. Early varieties had just one new protein, but today, two thirds of GMO corn varieties have been engineered to have three or more. Levels of these toxins in GMO corn grain now measure 50–100 parts per million (ppm), up from 2–6 ppm.

Our bodies were not designed to digest these new proteins expressed in GMO seed strains. These toxins are designed to kill insects by breaking down their digestive systems. The same seems to be happening to us. The Center for Food Safety's analysis submitted to the tribunal documents increasing allergenic responses to transgenic corn. There are now antibodies against these Cry toxins, which are proteins that attack the gut lining, in at least 8% of Americans. Also, 85% of field corn in the U.S. expressed endotoxins, including non-GMO fields contaminated through wind pollination.

Next, consider the herbicides that are integral to GMO corn. Originally, GMO corn was engineered to withstand just the weed killer glyphosate. Glyphosate usage has increased in the U.S. more than tenfold since the introduction of GMO crops. Now, 86% of GMO corn varieties are engineered to handle two to four toxic herbicides.

Friends of the Earth calls on the U.S. to provide science addressing these concerns in its USMCA response. The tribunal is expected to issue its ruling on the dispute in the fall.

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**MEMBER SUBMISSION: TIME TO ADOPT THE HYBRID GM MODEL!**

September 24, 2024



*By William Beckler*

September 24, 2024

Like so many other Coop members, I joined the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) not simply for the food, but because I am committed to its premise: that member-owners support each other, and do so by collectively making decisions within the organization built by our labor. In that spirit, we need to update our protocol for convening the

membership in a way that invites broad participation. When, in a Coop of over 16,000 members, monthly GMs regularly attract anywhere between 160 and 240 attendees, that signals a poorly functioning system. When votes on matters that are especially consequential to the Coop require unusual and arduous arrangements just for members to participate, that signals an inadequate system.

Requiring members to show up in the flesh made sense when our bylaws were written. We now have 21st-century technology that we used effectively for our meetings during the pandemic. While many have welcomed the return of physical GMs, the fact that these are becoming *mandatory* for those wishing to participate in Coop governance simply makes no sense to others of us.

As a father of three who was fortunate to work from home when COVID-19 hit, I discovered that work-from-home option made a huge positive difference. I'm thankful that my employer has remained flexible. The failure of the Coop to do likewise reminds me of those authoritarian bosses who make everyone return to the office on the theory that "COVID is over" (although, given the recent summer "surge," it clearly isn't). Our unbossed Coop is supposed to be a place where we seek to accommodate members' personal circumstances to the fullest extent possible. In fact, we currently require masking in the store two days per week to increase accessibility for members who need or want to minimize their risk of infection.

A RECENT GM INCLUDED A DISCUSSION SEEKING "SOLUTIONS FOR WORKING FAMILIES" IN THE ABSENCE OF COOP CHILDCARE. HYBRID MEETINGS WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY HELP TO EASE THEIR BURDEN.

Those utilizing the in-store masking provision are among those likely to benefit from the hybrid GM model. A member I know who is getting chemotherapy has recently attended several GMs while wearing a top-quality mask. With COVID-19 infections soaring, she's not comfortable continuing to do so. Parents are another group that stands

to benefit. A recent GM included a discussion seeking “solutions for working families” in the absence of Coop childcare. Hybrid meetings would significantly help to ease their burden.

Hybrid meetings will be eagerly welcomed by those who can’t fit the required travel time into packed work schedules, or feel unsafe trudging park paths in the dark, or lack convenient transportation, or live far away. Our current model restricts participation to members in largely unburdened circumstances. Hybrid GMs would much more accurately reflect what we proudly call “the will of the membership.”

Let’s remember that we are the Park Slope Food Coop—the vibrant organization that serves as an international model for what cooperation can accomplish. We can do this. We have to do this, to remain faithful to our democratic principles. So, let’s do it! What are we waiting for?

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MEMBER SUBMISSION: OPEN STREETS NOT FOR ALL

September 24, 2024



*By Denise DeYonker*

September 24, 2024

The Open Streets Program is not for all. The program that was once welcomed during the pandemic is now harming businesses and residents and with little to no oversight, accountability or transparency for the nonprofits that run them.

ONLY CERTAIN BUSINESS MODELS BENEFIT FROM THE STREET CLOSURES.  
MITCHELL'S SOUL FOOD, A 40-YEAR-OLD BLACK-OWNED BUSINESS, IS NOT ONE  
OF THEM.

There is no requirement for community consultation or consent to close down a street, even a critical traffic artery. That has been our experience in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn—with the closure of Vanderbilt Avenue, a major thoroughfare, for six months a year, three days a week. Only certain business models benefit from the street closures. Mitchell’s Soul Food, a 40-year-old Black-owned business, is not one of them. The Sunday street closures shuts out their customers who drive or take the bus after church, as they have for decades.



The crowd gathered outside of American Vegan on Saturday, June 26. Despite government officials intervening on that restaurant’s behalf, the nonprofit that runs the Vanderbilt Open Streets program won’t budge. *BKReader* ran an article in May of this year about Mitchell’s. Another restaurant, American Vegan, already closed down, in large part after a series of run-ins with the nonprofit.

Neighboring streets are clogged with traffic when the three-day street closures are in effect, harming businesses and residents in the surrounding area. Prospect Heights is a privileged neighborhood with ample access to beautiful green spaces (including a brand new one, Pacific Park). It is difficult to justify the need for the concrete open space when the harm to many clearly outweighs the few who benefit. A group of neighbors came together to fight back and the United Neighbors of Prospect and Crown Heights was born.

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## MAY GM: MEMBERS DIVIDED ON ISRAEL, ALIGNED IN DISDAIN FOR PLASTIC WASTE

September 24, 2024



By Leila Darabi

The May General Meeting kicked off on May 28 at the Prospect Park Picnic House with a charged open forum focused not only on members' differing views on the Israel-Hamas War, but on how those views are communicated. The chair committee reminded members throughout the evening that singling out other members in their statements would not be tolerated and repeatedly asked members to refrain from shouting out comments from the audience.

Members also discussed a proposal to bring back the print edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* and a proposal to create a new committee to reduce the Coop's plastic use.

## OPEN FORUM

During the open forum, several speakers called on fellow members to embrace civility. (Note: Coop members are not required to share their full names during the open forum.)

Seth Pollack shared that he felt some materials being circulated ahead of the Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors elections reflected the division among members and stated "the very, very least that I feel we can do is answer the call of civil society groups and join the BDS movement" referring to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

ONE MEMBER REPORTED THAT LABELS OF ISRAELI PEARLED COUSCOUS HAVE BEEN DEFACED ON THE COOP SHELVES AND CALLED THE BEHAVIOR "PETTY AND UNCOOPERATIVE."

Jonathan T. claimed that another Coop member had been called a Nazi by another member and that "hate has no place here and neither does BDS."

Amos reported that labels of Israeli pearled couscous have been defaced on the Coop

shelves and called the behavior “petty and uncooperative.”

Several members addressed the ongoing debate around whether the Coop would need to change its bylaws to permit virtual or hybrid meetings and voting by proxy.

Dena Beard stated that she works for the Tow Center for Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, a potential venue to host a GM that included a BDS discussion or vote, and that she felt threatened after receiving a voicemail from a member warning her that hosting such a meeting would incite violence. Tensions peaked when Beard said that one voicemail had come from a member whom she mentioned by name.

MJ reported that Professor Michael Haber had, pro bono, drafted a legal memo after reviewing the Coop’s bylaws and that in his opinion the Coop would not need to change bylaws to legally host hybrid or virtual meetings.

Alex also commented on the benefits of virtual meetings, noting that virtual meetings and votes worked well throughout the pandemic.

In response to the open forum, General Coordinators offered some clarifications:

Joe Holtz shared that the Coop’s lawyer had reached the opposite conclusion and thought the bylaws would indeed first need to change before a virtual or hybrid meeting could be considered. He noted that the Board had received both decisions.

**GENERAL COORDINATOR ELINOR ASTRINSKY REPORTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN UPTICK IN NON-MEMBERS ENTERING THE STORE AND CAUTIONED SHOPPERS AND WORKERS TO KEEP THEIR VALUABLES CLOSE AT ALL TIMES.**

Ann Herpel also clarified that Brooklyn College had offered to host a GM where a BDS vote could take place but that, before signing a contract, the General Coordinators

asked the agenda committee to contact the four members who had previously submitted items related to a vote on the boycott of products from Israel to confirm that these items could be brought to the May GM. Herpel shared that:

“All four members declined the May 28th date and instead requested to postpone their items until after another pending agenda item about changing the 75% supermajority currently needed to approve a boycott was discussed and voted on,” and closed stating: “Though it took more years than many would have liked, the [General Coordinators] did fulfill our commitment to secure a location.”

## TREASURER’S REPORT

Holtz also reviewed the 12-week financial statement shared ahead of the meeting covering the period from April 21 through May 28, 2024. He shared that there has been a 7.65% increase in average weekly sales compared to the previous year, but that he expected this average to fall to around 5% by the end of the year.

Holtz also took questions, clarifying that the Coop currently marks products up 24% over wholesale, a 1% decrease from the previous year, which impacts profits.

## COORDINATOR’S REPORTS

General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky shared what she called a “nuts and bolts” report with updates across a range of topics. Among these, she reported that there has been an uptick in non-members entering the store and cautioned shoppers and workers to keep their valuables close at all times. She also stressed that anyone working a shift should wear close-toed shoes.

ALEX GODIN SHARED THAT “THE COOP FEELS MORE AND MORE LIKE A WHOLE FOODS AND LESS LIKE A COMMUNITY,” LAMENTING THE LOSS OF FREE CHILD-CARE AND THE STORE BULLETIN BOARD.

Herpel read a statement from the General Coordinators taking issue with how their views were characterized during the April GM during a vote on the Coop's HR policies.

## COMMITTEE REPORT

Bart DeCoursy of the International Trade Education Squad gave the lone committee report sharing awareness that hearings are ongoing to settle Mexico's ongoing dispute with the U.S. over corn. Mexico refuses to import genetically modified corn, which accounts for most corn grown in the U.S.

## NOSTALGIA FOR A PRINT EDITION OF THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*

For the first of two agenda items for discussion, Alex Godin shared that "the Coop feels more and more like a Whole Foods and less like a community," lamenting that the loss of free childcare and the store bulletin board during the pandemic also contributed to this feeling. The proposal: reinstate a print version of the Coop's newsletter, the *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

Eric Lewis, a former co-coordinating editor of the *Gazette* voiced enthusiastic support and suggested investigating ad sales as a way to cover costs and testing out a new print version for a year to see what worked. The *Gazette*, he said, "is a place for budding journalists... and deepens and strengthens the sense of community [at the Coop]"

Coop member Morgan also shared, in support of the proposal, "print ephemera is an amazing way to create an embodied sense of community."

Coop member Kian asked what the cost would be to reinstate a print edition. In response, Herpel shared that in the last 30 days, the online *Gazette* has received 31,000 views of articles and 10,000 visitors. She also said that to revive the print edition, the Coop would need to replace several computers, resubscribe to Adobe software and cover the cost of printing.

Staff member Jana Cunningham shared that the Coop is working on adding classified

ads to the digital *Gazette*.

Coop member Yasmine also voiced support, noting that digital news can be changed but that “in print, the work of journalists is set in stone.”

TRACY FITZ PROPOSED THE CREATION OF A COOP CLIMATE CRISIS COMMITTEE AND COLLECTED EMAILS FROM MEMBERS WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED TO JOIN.

In response to a question about the kind of paper used to print the *Gazette*, Herpel clarified that the prior *Gazette* was printed on post-consumer newsprint by a union print shop.

The second and final agenda item, introduced by Tracy Fitz, proposed the creation of a Coop Climate Crisis Committee (4Cs) and collected emails from members who would be interested to join.

“In 2019, the Coop went through 49,000 plastic produce bags a week. We now use 57% of that, 28,200 produce bags a week because we have clamshells instead!” In a lively presentation, Fitz pulled sample bags and plastic clamshells out of a bag and waved them around, inspiring laughter across a room that an hour earlier had felt quite tense. “We’re all addicted, [to plastic]!” she cried. A suggestion to wrap General Coordinators in plastic as an artistic action drew applause.

During the discussion that followed, no one disagreed, but members shared additional thoughts on ways to reduce plastic.

Zoe added that compostable bags also include fossil fuel and aren’t necessarily a safe alternative.

Sunny shared that she had a similar idea to create a committee and asked interested

members to email [plasticfreefoodcoop@gmail.com](mailto:plasticfreefoodcoop@gmail.com) to join, noting that she was open to joining forces and creating a single Coop Climate Crisis Committee.

Lois Wilken urged people to read her recent *Gazette* submission “Love Letter from a Mermaid: On Plastics and Your Health.”

For historical context, Holtz shared that the Coop had in the past banned plastic produce bags, then brought them back. “There’s a lot of education to do,” Holtz said. “We also sell something in aisle four to wash and reuse plastic bags.”

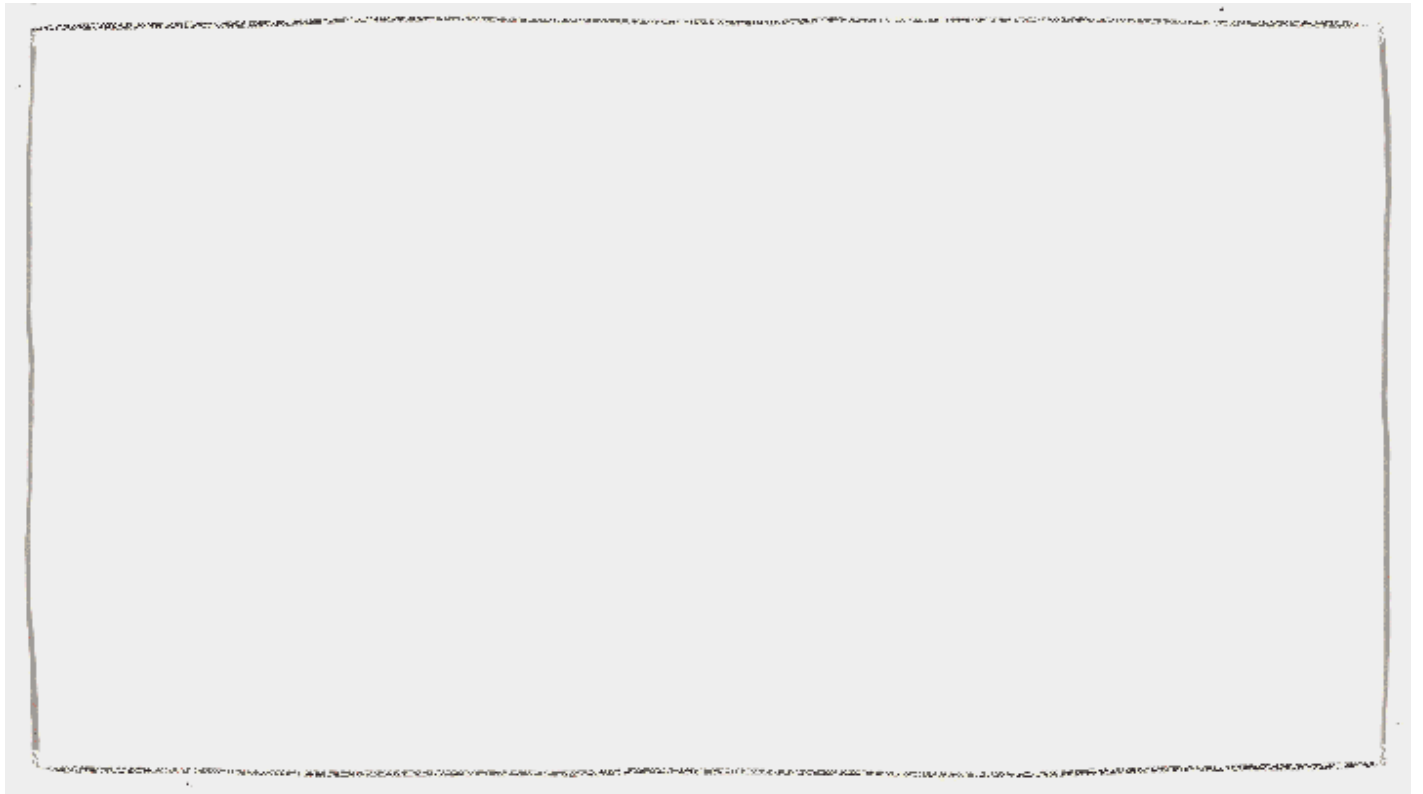
## CLOSING

Board member Brandon West called a vote to close the meeting during which the board voted to accept the minutes from the April GM.

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## NEW AND RESTORED COOP FEATURES: E-CARDS, GUESTS, YOUTH COMMITTEE

September 24, 2024



*By Hayley Gorenberg*

Recent changes at the Coop—from electronic entry cards, to a retooled guest policy, to a brand new Youth Committee for young adult members—aim to streamline member experiences and address “pain points.” Here are details of the changes:

#### **NEWFANGLED CARD GIZMO FOR ALL!**

Flashing a Coop barcode for entry recently got easier for everyone.

Every Coop member can now use their Member Services account to access their barcode and enter the Coop to shop or work. (Any member who has yet to set up the account can register and sign up, as long as they have an email on file with the Coop office.)

As of April 30, 2024, the feature became available to all members, regardless of their smartphone platform or device—a much more egalitarian system than the iPhone-only option that existed for years— courtesy of one member’s donated programming. While the intent was to help, “It’s a nice idea to move away from this thing we never

asked to be made and had no control over,” said General Coordinator Matt Hoagland.

“A COOP CARD IS PROBABLY THE BEST THING YOU CAN CARRY IN YOUR WALLET IN THE EVENT YOU LOSE YOUR WALLET,” SAID GENERAL COORDINATOR MATT HOAGLAND.

The web-based feature does not have wallet integration yet, but Hoagland contemplates that aspect in the future. A screenshot will work for entry, and there’s also a print-at-home option. Those conveniences are more reliable than the MacGyver tricks some members have tried where they photograph a physical membership card, and then try to scan an expanded image of the barcode.

Further advantages include no need to replace lost cards anymore, which Hoagland noted “cuts down on plastic use, and saves you \$3.50 and trips upstairs” to the Coop office.

That said, members can still use their physical cards, and Hoagland is a fan for one particular reason. “A Coop card is probably the best thing you can carry in your wallet in the event you lose your wallet,” he said. The Coop’s contact information leads to calls from good samaritans throughout Brooklyn—and even from other states.

He estimates the Coop gets a few such calls a month, with variations on the theme, “Can you contact this person, and let them know I have their wallet?” The Coop takes the name and number of the caller and relays the information to the member. “We don’t give away your information,” Hoagland said. “We get in touch, and hopefully everything works out. I haven’t heard that it hasn’t. Typically, people are happy to help their fellow human.”



NEXT MEMBER



Photography by Michael Berman

## BE OUR GUEST! (AGAIN!)

The pandemic-era restriction on Coop guests lifted May 1, 2024. Now, members can bring folks to browse the store (and perhaps tempt them to join) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Due to capacity limits on busier “carrot tag” days, guests are not allowed on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

The retooled policy allows members four guest passes over the course of a year—sprinkled throughout, or used all at once. Unused passes do not roll over to the next year, and members who are on a leave of absence, are dormant, or whose status does not allow access to the Coop cannot enter as a guest.

Members still check in their guests at the second-floor service desk or membership office, where visitors show photo ID. The check-in includes a review of the Coop’s database, “making sure the guest is not a member who was put on hold or possibly left under bad circumstances,” said Coop Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso. She added, “There are members who have been kicked out of the Coop for disciplinary reasons.”

Guests receive a sticker to wear on the floor, indicating they are guests, and must comply with the rule that only members shop. The sticker makes improper shopping even clearer, and Mancuso and other Coop staff hope it will reduce instances of that infraction, since enforcing the rule is “never fun for us,” Mancuso said, adding, “but it’s part of our job.”

Most guests are visitors from out of town or people who want to join the Coop. Mancuso summarizes the essence of the revamped policy that lets members bring guests to our collaborative venture: “You want to show [the Coop] off!”

## YOUTH COMMITTEE ADDRESSES AWKWARD YEARS

After more than 15 years of “bubbling” tension over young-adult members of Coop households whose undone shifts often undermined their household’s standing, the Jan-

uary General Meeting voted to assign members aged 18–22 years to a Youth Committee—with no associated work shift.

Going forward, these young people—typically college-aged—won't be “dragging down their households onto work alerts as they get their footing,” said General Coordinator Ann Herpel. “It's a pain point for them. These can be tension-filled conversations with members about their young adult in their household.”

Membership Coordinators confronting frontline member issues originated the proposal and brought it to the General Coordinators after tough exchanges in which members learned their child was supposed to join at age 18 and the older adults in the household didn't want them to. “It became a point of conflict,” said Herpel. While “some parents were fine and [their 18-year-old] would sign up, a lot wouldn't—or a lot would sign up and immediately go on leave.” Or, they would depart for college, return for winter break, and look to come off leave for a couple weeks, and then seek to return to leave status when they went back to school. The tracking was a chore.

The work-exempt Youth Committee does not feature an option to “work ahead” and bank shifts before age 22, though young people can work for other members, “just like any member can work for someone else,” Herpel said. Youth Committee members can attend the GM and participate in the Coop's decision-making process. At 22, the young person moves into the working pool, unless they leave the Coop.

Youth Committee members are not the youngest people shopping at the Coop. For many years the store has offered a “child-of” card, where a child of a Coop member could get their picture taken. While child-of cardholders don't get their own member numbers, they do receive a card with their picture, identifying them as the child of a parent who is a member, and the card includes the adult member's bar code.

A child under 18 with a card can shop independently without the adult member present. The card expires on the child's 18th birthday. Herpel is aware of a child-of card issued to a Coop kid as young as 6. “I think it's kind of a novelty, in a way,” she said.

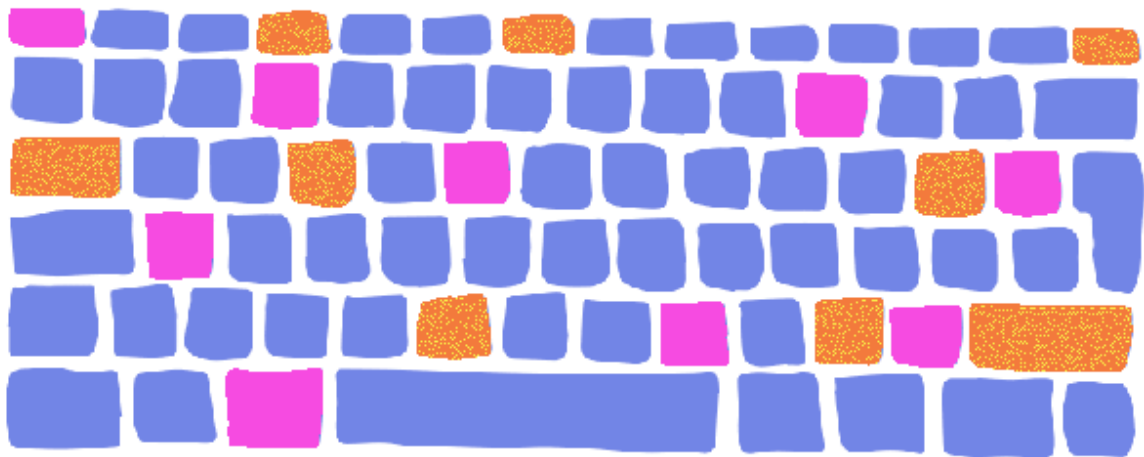
Child-of cards are also used by Coop children ages 14-17 years old, who can work shifts for others, as long as they have secured working papers from their school. In those instances, the child-of card specifies “working papers on file,” in accordance with state law.

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JULY 2, 2024

September 24, 2024

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## **TRAGEDY**

Dear Editor,

The Coop sells my favorite brand of salsa

but only “mild” and “medium”

Where is the “hot”?

I must buy my Green Mountain Gringo elsewhere

*Louise Palmer*

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## **LONG SHOPPING HOURS**

Hello,

Has the Coop considered returning to pre-COVID shopping hours? I seem to remember the shopping floor opening at 6 a.m. and closing at 10 p.m. Our current hours of 8 a.m.–8 p.m. can be pretty limiting during the work week.

*Lucia Brockaway*

## **THE GENERAL COORDINATORS RESPOND:**

Prior to the pandemic, the Coop was open 8 a.m.–10 p.m., Monday through Friday, 6 a.m.–10 p.m. on Saturday and 6 a.m.–8 p.m. on Sunday. The General Coordinators are planning on extending the hours until 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday, but do not have a date on which the hours will change. We have operational challenges that need to be resolved before making the change. We currently do not have plans to open earlier on the weekends because of other operational challenges.

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## **KEEP ON ROCKIN' IN THE FREE WORLD (AND IN THE PSFC)**

Hi fellow members,

I have a cute short story and media I wanted to share... not sure if it will qualify for posting:

I work in the Membership Office and on my last shift this May I took a call from a fellow Coop member, who explained he was missing some shifts because he was going on tour. Working in the music industry, I naturally asked which tour—he and his choir were invited to play on the nationwide Neil Young tour. What a coincidence! I was going to see Neil Young twice that week (ended up actually being three). He said he's Reverend Billy Talen and the Stop Shopping Choir, many of whom are Coop members. Neil Young had just plucked them out of the blue and asked them to go on tour with him. I always knew there were various people who worked in the music industry among Coop members, but how serendipitous that I picked up this call and was going to see this show, and that most of the group were Coop members!

Just wanted to share videos of them playing in support of Neil Young in Bridgeport, Connecticut and to acknowledge their achievement and their awesome message of stop climate change/save the Earth!

Thanks,  
*Natalie Freilich*

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## **POETRY OF POLITICS**

To the *Linewaiters' Gazette*:

Please keep politics out of the Coop;

it does not improve the store.

Just a world more full of weeping

knocking on the door.

*Rodger Parsons*

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## **LET'S PIVOT BACK TOWARD OUR STRENGTHS**

Dear Park Slope Food Coop,

I have seen a flood of letters with regard to the deadly crisis in the Middle East—letters supporting Israel, letters Supporting Palestine, letters calling for a boycott and letters opposing one. Clearly, members of the Coop have many different ideas.

Regardless of what we believe, the Park Slope Food Coop likely cannot solve the problem, and continued debate will only serve to divide and anger our members. Rather, we should focus our energies not on what we cannot solve, but on what we can: supporting our local farms, fighting food insecurity in our own neighborhood, preaching about sustainable food and farming and helping other food coops get started.

Individual members should feel free to support Israel, Palestine, both or neither. But no member should feel that the Coop is not a safe haven to shop. Let's concentrate on what we do best.

*David Meltzer*

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## **A THIRD WAY: ENGAGEMENT**

Dear Coop,

As our Coop members passionately explore a path to promote a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis, I want to highlight grassroots, civil society-based groups working on the ground that are worthy of our encouragement as they make a positive difference in people's lives through direct engagement with each other.

Standing Together is a movement mobilizing Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel against the occupation and for peace, equality and social justice. Co-lead by an Israeli and a Palestinian, this group bravely confronts critical issues head on. The Abraham Initiatives' mission is to advance social inclusion and equal rights for Israel's Palestinian citizens in order to promote a more just society existing alongside an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel promotes human rights and civil liberties for everyone in Israel *and* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Recognizing the practical need to address environmental issues that do not abruptly stop at a community's border, the Arava Institute, currently lead by a Palestinian, brings Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians together in graduate studies while confronting their political and cultural differences.

These are just a few examples of humans on the ground, dealing directly with each other. Disengaging from one another is not an option they are willing to take.

In cooperation,  
*Steven Gold*

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## **GROUNDHOG DAY: THE WAR WITHIN THE COOP**

Dear Members,

Twelve years ago, in March of 2012, the Coop held a large and very expensive meeting that required security arrangements in order to vote on whether to hold a referendum on boycotting Israeli products. The outcome was a definitive vote against such a

referendum in favor of cohesiveness, and against divisiveness, within the Coop.

Like the *Dobbs* decision that reversed what was considered settled law concerning abortion, the Coop's current activism by those determined to reverse the anti-referendum vote are back again and if they fail again who knows how many times they will resurface to make still another such proposal, put the Coop in offensive social turmoil and waste Coop time and financial resources.

And given the very minimal relevance of this movement to the Coop's purpose and values, why should this proposal even be allowed to come to the floor a second time?

Recently, a growing number of academic institutions, the primary sites of BDS activism, are refusing to adopt the BDS agenda, which includes banning association with Israeli scholars and universities, in favor of their core purpose of education and academic debate.

And predictably, anti-Israel activists are becoming increasingly destructive and anti-American, burning Israeli and American flags outside the NYC Israeli embassy and defacing the Brooklyn Museum and the homes of the museum's president and Jewish board members with red paint, labeling them "white supremacist Zionists," among the many incidents,.

Finally, note that since January 2009, the Gazette has published 377,684 words concerning this marginally relevant topic, likely dramatically more than any other subject.

On the basis of the arguments provided above, I urge the agenda committee and the board of directors to refuse a second attempt to bring the BDS proposal to a vote.

*Sylvia Lowenthal*

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## TRUTH AND/OR CONSEQUENCES

Dear Members,

The internet makes it possible to retrieve all kinds of information practically instantaneously. It's also excellent for spreading misinformation and disinformation, also known as untruths, false statements or lies.

We are all human and we all want to believe the things that support our confirmation biases. We owe it to ourselves to be curious and to verify things before hitting the "like" button or sharing with others. It's even more important to verify when dealing with content that informs our actions and opinions.

Our *Linewaiters' Gazette* and our General Meetings are also platforms that are susceptible for spreading disinformation and misinformation. A member could knowingly or unknowingly repeat an untruth. The Coop should not be a platform for false information. Who should be responsible for ensuring this doesn't happen?

The onus should fall on the member. I suggest that if a member provided a statement to the *Gazette* or the GM, and the statement is later demonstrated to be untrue or incomplete or misleading, that member should lose the privilege of publishing and speaking to the GM for at least one year.

This is a harsh consequence for lying. But if free speech is valued, then it also must be true and accurate and falsehoods should have a cost. Our Coop platforms should not be carelessly abused.

*Barbara Mazor*

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## **IN DEFENSE OF A PROPOSED BOYCOTT**

To the Editors,

I'm a long-time Coop member. I remember when the Coop chose to boycott grapes. Though I adored grapes, I decided that justice was more important than my taste buds. I was a teacher at Smith College during the apartheid struggle in South Africa. I taught my classes in the administration building, occupied by the students. I worked with students, faculty and administration to call a five college teach-in that resulted in significant divestment from South Africa. I was at the Coop meeting that voted not to vote on the current BDS movement. Since then I have been silent. But I do believe that Israel, a state, is doing itself and Jews—and I am a Jew—and the ideas of Judaism, a grave disservice by its eight-month attack, its targeting of hospitals, universities, homes, refugee camps. By its inability to defeat the great violence of Oct. 7 with the greater violence of this relentless assault with U.S. weapons. My concern for the welfare of all people makes me believe in the justice of a BDS Movement that would urge the state of Israel to change its ways. BDS is a nonviolent movement, and the Coop is a nonviolent space, with rancor toward none, good food for all. Would that we could do more to help all those facing starvation. Nevertheless, we are not demanded to finish the work, neither are we allowed to abandon the nonviolent work for justice that lies at the heart of Judaism.

Yours in peace,

*Karen Malpede*

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## **THE COOP DOES NOT BOYCOTT ISRAEL**

Coop members,

Park Slope Food Coop does not boycott Israel in any form and it never will. For good reason. Public boycott advocates (PBAs) here and / or outside PSFC are...

Anti-PSFC: A member at the latest Open Forum openly called for division inside PSFC instead of unity, saying "This is a divisive time," as if it proved something; Another member in the last *Gazette* sneered at cooperative volunteer labor here as "a veneer of virtue."

Anti-working class and anti-creative class: Masked assailants with weapons locked workers inside at Columbia University and physically harassed security workers at Brooklyn Museum, then left behind damaged buildings and artwork for low-wage immigrant employees to clean up.

Pro-violent threats: PBAs splashed the Brooklyn Museum's Jewish leaders' houses with paint and painted red triangles ( Hamas' trademark targeting symbol).

Pro Jew-hatred: At the NOVA Music Festival Exhibition, I personally witnessed Hamas supporters and PBAs happily celebrating together outside calling for more Jewish deaths.

Pro-terror: PBAs at PSFC have never ever criticized the truce-breaking, LGBT-murdering, mediievally misogynistic, terror-campaign of Hamas towards Jews and Palestinians alike.

Those against boycotting Israel stand naturally with PSFC's mission of non-violence and cooperation, yet the rest of PSFC's response has been inadequate. Everyone, floor members, GC's, staff, etc., please speak up!

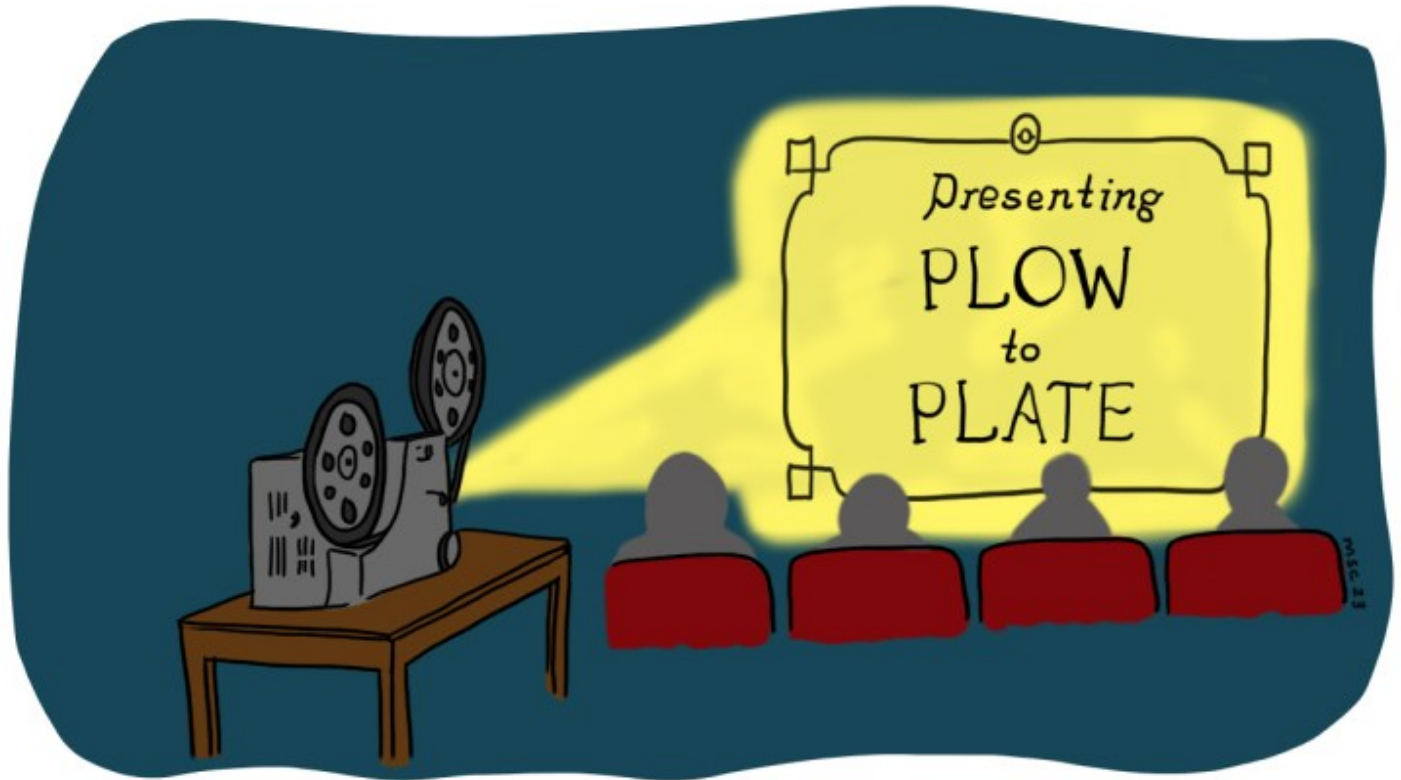
Those of you who have signed boycott of Israel petitions may have had no idea what you were supporting. If you can, remove your name and then help to keep BDS outside our Coop.

Jesse Rosenfeld

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## PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: SUSTAINABLE

September 24, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

In this time of false narratives and misinformation, it is something of a balm to find a movie with a straightforward title, *Sustainable*, which is exactly as it says it is: a documentary that explores in all its nuances precisely what this word means in the context of the food system. The film does this, in part, by answering the major questions that news reporters ask when reporting a story: who, what, where, when, how, and why? Beyond answering many of these basic questions with short stories and explanations, the film follows one major narrative: a year in the life of Spence Farm outside of Chicago.

SUMMER IS AN EXPLOSION OF GREEN, SUNLIGHT, LONG DAYS, SHORT NIGHTS, INTENSITY AND BOUNTY.

The farm, founded in 1830, is now run by Marty Travis, a seventh-generation farmer; his son, Will; and his wife, Kris. Marty narrates the film and describes the feel of each season: Spring is a time of energy flows and rebirth marked by baby plants emerging from the soil and tree buds sprouting from branches. Summer is an explosion of green, sunlight, long days, short nights, intensity and bounty. Fall forecasts the end is near and that the game is over once the ground freezes; it is also a time of abundance. In winter, the main imperatives are keeping warm and ensuring the animals are well fed.

To Marty, the main characteristic of sustainability is the relationships he cultivates and the connections he makes. There are many. Most immediately, he's blessed to work closely with Kris and Will on the farm. Extending from there, he delivers his food to over 30 Chicago restaurants. He considers the chefs to be his friends. To him, it is about "more than rutabagas, more than selling."

Marty also organized a farming cooperative with his neighbors, Stewards of the Land, to plan and sell their products through a single collective channel. Deemed a "visionary leader" by some, he invites his chef friends to his farm for teachable moments. He is an avid student of those he can learn from, such as his friend Greg Wade, a young and talented commercial bread maker, or Gary Reding, a consultant with Advancing Eco Agriculture, a company focused on promoting proper and balanced plant nutrition and soil health.

These "alternative," or non-conventional, agricultural practices and beliefs are a hallmark of sustainability. Reding explains that plants have immune systems, just like animals, and those with strong systems can better resist pests, which target the weaker and compromised plants. But, according to John Kempf, a self-taught Amish farmer

and the founder of Advancing Eco Agriculture, before we can have sustainable agriculture, which requires healthy soil, we need to have regenerative agriculture, as too much of the land is too damaged.

MARTY SAYS THAT HE HOPES TO HAVE SPENCE FARM CONTINUE TO FLOURISH, NOT FOR SEVEN FUTURE GENERATIONS, BUT FOR 70.

Just as plants, like humans, have immune systems, they also have relationships, including with molecules in the air and chemicals and microbes buried at their roots in the soil. In an animated segment, the film presents carbon sequestration clearly and straightforwardly. Plants take carbon dioxide from the air into their leaves and turn it into a sugary liquid, which they exude into the soil, where it feeds microorganisms.

If the soil is not destroyed by tillage or chemicals, the carbon becomes part of the microorganisms' molecular structure, potentially for generations. This long-term thinking and perspective is a hallmark of sustainability. Marty says that he hopes to have Spence Farm continue to flourish not for seven future generations but for 70.

If, for Marty, the hallmark of "sustainable farming" is his various relationships, the movie fleshes out the phrase in all its complexity and meanings. Other notable words and concepts the film covers include local, seasonal, small-scale, healthy, organic no-till, traditional, non-conventional, community-oriented, regenerative, fruits and vegetables vs. commodity-based, diversity vs. uniformity and monocrops, cover crops, chemical-free, nitrogen fixation, natural, externalities, soil health, moisture retention, variety, seed preservation, compost, subsidies, scalability, yield vs. quality, culture, way of life, efficiency, ethics, seed preservation, genetic diversity, nutrition, carbon sequestration, resiliency and quality of life.

Perhaps the word *sustainable* gains meaning through time spent selecting fruits and vegetables in the produce aisle of the Park Slope Food Coop or chatting with a seller

at the Grand Army Plaza farmers' market. The word is variegated, but the film *Sustainable* is a good place to contemplate what the word truly means to you.

*Sustainable July 9, 2024 @ 7 p.m.*

*Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>*

*To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@mail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@mail.com).*

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PERSONNEL POLICIES LEAD TO COOP DIVIDE

September 24, 2024



*By Sanoja Bhaumik*

At the April 30 General Meeting, General Coordinators Joe Holtz and Lisa Moore introduced an agenda item to update personnel policies, which they described as outdated compared to current human resources (HR) practices. In a surprising turn, the item was rejected, in part because of organized opposition from PSFC Members for Palestine.

Prior to the meeting, PSFC Members for Palestine published a memo arguing that the proposal “concentrates even more executive power in the hands of the General Coordinators,” with “alarming” implications for labor practices and union busting.

Those opposed to the group have since responded. Ramon Maislen, candidate for Board of Directors, wrote in a recent *Linewaiters’ Gazette* letter to the editor, “[The

PSFC Members for Palestine] are encouraging members to vote against Coop interests even when they are unrelated to a boycott.”

## THE QUESTION REMAINS: HOW DID AN AGENDA ITEM RELATED TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS BECOME SO DIVISIVE?

In addition to the debate around the proposal’s content, the vote itself was controversial. There were not enough written ballots, and the Chair Committee was forced to initiate two hand counts, both of which resulted in the rejection of the proposal. Park Slope Food Coop staff and PSFC Members for Palestine both criticized the lack of organization. But the question remains: How did an agenda item related to employee handbooks become so divisive?

## THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Holtz and Moore first proposed changes to the personnel policies at the March GM. They designed the proposal to address “deficiencies” in current policies and centralize all policies in a single place.

PSFC Members for Palestine voiced several concerns, writing that the proposal did not “address the problems that led to the Personnel Committee’s current dysfunction.” In a statement to the *Gazette*, the group added, “The proposal’s language was unclear. The first and second paragraphs contradicted each other.”

The first clause states that the “GCs shall be solely responsible for all personnel-related matters,” while the second states that the “Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Coordinator team, shall be solely responsible for all personnel-related matters.”

The proposal consolidates Coop HR practices already in place, and therefore may not

alter the GCs' authority over HR. Jana Cunningham, Membership Coordinator, wrote to the *Gazette*, "The identical HR practices are listed in several different GM mandates. General Coordinators have the responsibility for HR and the authority to take disciplinary actions, in accordance with the Employee Handbook in regards to the Area Coordinators, this remains the same."

PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE STATED, "PEOPLE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW WHY THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HAS REMAINED SEVERELY UNDERSTAFFED FOR ABOUT 15 MONTHS. THE PROPOSERS DIDN'T ANSWER."

The Personnel Committee was created in 1981 to be a five-member elected council. Its mandate, as reiterated by the Committee in 2022, has been the following: "The Committee is an elected group of members that serves in an advisory capacity to the General Coordinators, supporting them with personnel matters such as performance evaluations, succession planning and developing human resources policies."

At present, the Personnel Committee only has two members. Speaking about the March GM, PSFC Members for Palestine stated, "People also wanted to know why the Personnel Committee has remained severely understaffed for about 15 months. The proposers didn't answer."

In July of 2022, the Committee faced intense criticism after suspending Holtz without pay for 30 days after he breached COVID-19 protocols. In August of 2022, in a letter published in the *Gazette*, Safe Food Committee staff member Margaret Maugenest wrote, "One has to wonder about the agenda of the Personnel Committee. Who are these people? Why is there no appeal process to challenge the Personnel Committee's decision?"

In another letter published in November of 2022, Coop member Claudia Joseph added, "It is time to rethink the structure of the Personnel Committee: Five members who

were elected by uncontested vote are clearly not qualified to wield this much power.”

## DEBATING THE PROPOSAL

The Personnel Committee proposal introduced by Holtz and Moore was ostensibly designed to address structural issues that became apparent in the aftermath of Holtz’s suspension. But it remains unclear how the proposal updates policies to meet “widely accepted HR practices.”

Holtz and Moore noted that the proposal had been designed with consultation from the two-member Personnel Committee and with input from an employment lawyer recommended by the National Co+Op Grocers. On its website, the latter describes itself as “a business services cooperative for retail food co-ops located throughout the United States.”

Cunningham noted that the GC proposal would correct the Coop’s current practices, some of which she called “outdated and potentially libelous.”

At the March GM, the GCs agreed to take members’ feedback into account when reintroducing the proposal at the following meeting. The policy introduced in April returned with one addition: “The complaint policy includes the provision to employ a neutral third-party employment lawyer to thoroughly investigate these complaints and provide recommended courses of action for any offenses committed.”

**THE LETTER ALSO CRITICIZED THE “POLITICIZED EFFORTS”:** “THE PSFC MEMBERS FOR PALESTINE GROUP ENCOURAGED THEIR MEMBERS TO VOTE AGAINST THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COOP AND THE STAFF.”

No alternative proposals—such as contracting an outside HR service to bear responsibility for all personnel issues—were considered. PSFC Members for Palestine comment-

ed to the *Gazette*, “No proposal, including one presented by a general coordinator, is automatically entitled to a yes vote. A new proposal must address the ambiguities and contradictions that a majority of members voted down in April.”

Following the April GM vote, a group of 43 Area Coordinators—non-GC paid staff at the Coop—signed a letter to the Agenda Committee criticizing the “no” vote and the handling of the agenda item.

The letter also criticized the “politicized efforts” of the PSFC Members for Palestine: “The PSFC Members for Palestine group encouraged their members to vote against the best interest of the Coop and the staff and we believe this leaves the Coop vulnerable to any potential wrongdoing by senior staff.”

The letter supports the GC’s GM proposal, stating that it puts “the Personnel Committee and the General Coordinators in a better position to make much needed decisions on personnel issues that are currently not possible.” Despite this expressed backing, the letter also proposes significant amendments to the GC proposal—amendments yet to be introduced in the April GM.

The Area Coordinators’ amended proposal excludes the first item of the original GC--supported proposal, which places responsibility for personnel-related matters in the hands of the GC. Instead, the amended proposal suggests: “The Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the General Manager and General Coordinator team, shall be responsible for the hiring, compensation and employment policies for the General Coordinator team.”

The amended proposal also sets forth a plan for selecting the Personnel Committee—a feature absent from the original proposal—that would include the participation of two GCs, the General Manager and four Area Coordinators.

While the amended proposal diverges from the GC proposal with these two changes, the Area Coordinator staff who signed “resent this [GC] proposal having been hi-

jacked by a member group whose purpose is unrelated to the matter at hand.” The letter continues, “Nothing in the GC proposal mentions Palestine.”

This concern was echoed by individual staff. Cunningham, who signed the letter, commented to the *Gazette*:

*What concerns me is that an organized group of members can make a statement like “the GC proposal had alarming implications for labor practices and union-busting,” which was inflammatory and completely inaccurate, influence others to vote against the best interest of the Coop staff and put the Coop at financial risk.*

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

Personnel policies will undoubtedly reemerge as a central issue in future GMs, but the discussion risks veering into debate around PSFC Members for Palestine’s tactics and right to organize.

Responding to criticism around their involvement, the PSFC Members for Palestine stated:

*We believe meaningful member participation strengthens our democratic governance system and upholds our cooperative principles[...] Rather than acknowledging the weaknesses in their proposal, the GCs chose to undermine our Coop’s democratic tenets by vilifying member engagement.*

For Cunningham, the most important step is to move forward with changes to the personnel policies. “My colleagues and I (more than half of the ACs) firmly support the GC proposal and want to see its implementation as soon as possible,” she added.

Amid the debate, all seem to agree that the most important goal is for the Coop to be a safe, welcoming work environment, in which issues of fairness, discrimination and labor standards can be handled in a confidential and professional manner.