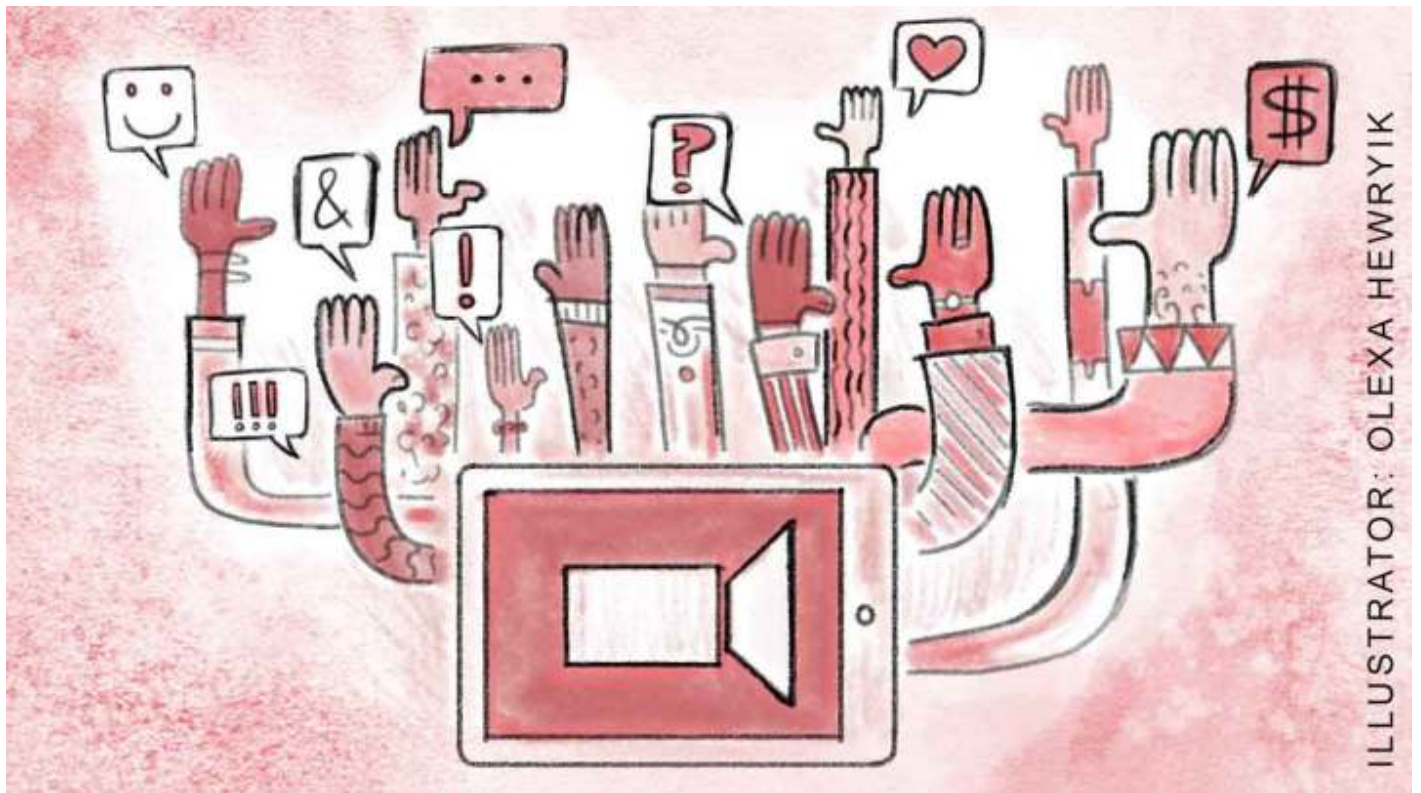


# MEMBER VOICE, ZOOM PAINS AND JELLYBEANS: MARCH 29 GENERAL MEETING REPORT

April 19, 2022



*By John B. Thomas*

The Coop attempted to continue its tradition of virtual General Meetings on March 29, but cracks in the seams of this approach started to show. A meeting that was supposed to be about electing a new member to the Agenda Committee and three members to the Dispute Resolution Committee had to be tabled to the May GM due to an attendance limit of 100 on the Coop's Zoom account. This occurred because the Chair Committee made a Zoom scheduling error, and has been resolved for future GMs, with a limit raised to 500. At this meeting, however, the 100-person cap was reached and additional members were subsequently locked out.

DURING THE PANDEMIC, THE COOP'S MEMBERSHIP DROPPED FROM 17,000 TO 11,750. HOWEVER, IN RECENT MONTHS THE COOP'S MEMBERSHIP HAS INCHED BACK UP TO 13,000.

In spite of these challenges, there was a lively General Coordinator update from Elinoar Astrinsky, impassioned comments about the Coop's vaccine mandate from two members during the Open Forum, and an opportunity for candidates to the Coop Board of Directors to answer questions from members.

## **Open Forum**

The GM kicked off with an Open Forum that touched on the process to evaluate accommodations to the Coop's Covid-19 vaccine mandate, as well as a request for more detail on the farming procedures used to raise and slaughter all live animals, a question about whether the Terracycle program would return, and a request for videos of the Board Member discussions to be posted on the Coop website.

## **Vaccine Mandate**

General Coordinator Joe Holtz explained the Coop's process for evaluating accommodations requests to the mandate, letting members know that he made decisions in accordance with New York City's Covid-19 guidelines. Of the approximately 300 people who have applied for accommodations, around 60 were granted. Holtz did not provide details pertaining to why certain members were approved and others not, other than referring to the New York City Department of Health guidelines. Those whose accommodation requests were denied have the opportunity to appeal, should they so desire. Holtz is still working through all of the requests.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Holtz proceeded to present the Treasurer's Report, which included some bright spots for the Coop's finances. Although the Coop is still showing a loss on its income statement, the expectation is that the Coop will be back to break even within this fiscal year. The key factors in enabling this move back to breaking even are the continuation of the 25% markup (up from 21% pre-pandemic), increased shopping hours, rules

allowing more shoppers to be present in the store at once, and plans to reduce prices again (which will spur sales) and recover the Coop's size of membership.

On this last point, more good news. During the pandemic, the Coop's membership dropped from 17,000 to 11,750. However, in recent weeks the Coop's membership has inched back up to 13,000 and there is a backlog of 600 people who have completed orientation but who haven't yet joined due to limited new member enrollment appointments. While certainly not out of the woods yet, the Coop appears to be on the trajectory to return to some version of pre-pandemic normal.

## **General Coordinator Updates**

Elinor Astrinsky provided a lively update from the General Coordinators that touched on the Coop's masking policy and updates to recurring shifts as well as the Coop's food and non-food items in time for the arrival of spring.

### **Masking Policy**

The Coop's masking policy requires all members, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a face covering at all times when working or shopping. This policy includes children ages 2 and up. More detail (including on Coop-approved face coverings) can be found [here](#).

### **Food and Non-Food Report**

Astrinsky provided a lighting-round introduction to new and seasonal products at the Coop. In terms of food items, the Coop has all of the items in stock to meet members' Passover and Easter needs. The Coop now stocks all kinds of matzoh—regular, organic, gluten-free, and egg. For Easter, the Coop is stocking chocolate bunnies that are Fair Trade, organic, and also vegan—and even some chocolate bunnies that have gummy bears inside. The Coop is also stocking egg-shaped candles for the season.



FOR EASTER, THE COOP IS STOCKING CHOCOLATE BUNNIES THAT ARE FAIR TRADE, ORGANIC, AND ALSO VEGAN—AND EVEN SOME CHOCOLATE BUNNIES THAT HAVE GUMMY BEARS INSIDE.

For a seasonal taste of New York, Astrinsky encouraged Coop members to try Raaka chocolate, which the Coop now stocks. Raaka has partnership with the New York Botanical Garden to use herbs from the NYBG in their locally-produced chocolate.

New non-food items include several cleaning products that use less plastic than other brands, as well as seeds, soil, and gardening needs for spring plantings. Astrinsky recommended that Coop members try out the Eco Next Detergent Sheets, True Earth, and Eco Egg for reduced-plastic laundry needs. The Coop now stocks seeds from the Hudson Valley Seed Company, a local source for heirloom and open-pollinated garden

seeds.

## **Agenda Items**

The meeting then proceeded to the Agenda Items which included an Interim Agenda Committee election, a Dispute Resolution Committee election, and a Board candidates discussion. Due to a technical issue limiting the number of members who could participate via Zoom, a motion was raised to table the voting items until the May GM in order to make sure more Coop member voices could be heard. The Chair Committee also wished to note that there is an opening on the Chair Committee, and interested members are encouraged to apply by reaching out to [psfcchair@gmail.com](mailto:psfcchair@gmail.com).

Member voice was the key item of discussion during the Board Candidate discussion. After each candidate gave a two-minute statement (candidate statements were printed in the prior issue of the *Gazette*), the Chair Committee opened the floor to discussion, which was the primary purpose of this Agenda Item. Board Candidates included George Sarah Olken, Brandon West, Amy Cao, Jesse Rosenfeld, Imani Q'Ryn, and Tim Hospodar. Questions immediately returned to the issue of member voice, specifically related to how the increase in centralized decision-making during the pandemic was limiting opportunities for participation and dialogue, and also how to increase participation in the GM given declining attendance.

On the Coop's Covid-19 rules, questions centered around how Board candidates would approach issues of perceived discrimination due to not being vaccinated against Covid-19. Board Candidates largely made similar statements, with Olken and Cao encouraging discussion of the Coop's Covid-19 rules and perhaps even a vote on them at the GM so that membership could voice opinions about what would be best for the most number of members. Q'Ryn made a point that was likely on most members' minds: that these are scary times, and that the Coop was set up to have discussions about big topics, and that forum is the GM.

As to improving participation in the GM, the main topics of discussion were around

the ways in which decision-making has become more centralized at the Coop during the pandemic (often by necessity) and also around the desire to bring back work slot credit for GM attendance. Board Candidates had differing views and interesting ideas on these points.

Rosenfeld made the point that for years members had been requesting online GMs to enable greater participation, and Olken brought up the point that the Coop was now in much more regular email communication with members. Brandon West made an astute observation that active outreach in the form of canvassing may help to bring more people back into the GMs. Hospodar suggested doing some brainstorming among members to explore hybrid GM models that could include in-person and video options.

Across both topics of conversation, it seems clear that the Coop's central governance mechanism—the GM—is not operating in a way that allows maximum participation and also gives adequate voice to Coop member concerns.

*John B. Thomas is a consultant working on environmental policy. He has been a Coop member since 2012.*

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## THE VACCINE MANDATE AND THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP

April 19, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

## *A Discussion with Joe Holtz*

*By Frank Haberle*

On December 6, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced major expansions to the “Key to NYC” program, the first-in-nation vaccination mandate for workers and customers at indoor dining, fitness, entertainment and performance venues. In addition, the mayor also announced a first-in-the-nation vaccine mandate for private-sector workers. The

mandate, which was to take effect on December 27, would apply to roughly 184,000 businesses—a list which includes all businesses, nonprofit entities and the Park Slope Food Coop. At the time, December 6, the Mayor’s office announced that guidelines would be released December 15—when released, the further guidelines specified that interns and volunteers were included in the mandate.

**New York City requires:**  
**ALL MEMBER-WORKERS**  
**must be vaccinated**  
**against COVID-19 to**  
**work a shift.**

**REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR**  
**VACCINE RECORD TO SHOW AT**  
**CHECK-IN FOR EACH**  
**SCHEDULED SHIFT.**

To find out where to get a free COVID-19 vaccine,  
visit [nyc.gov/vaccinefinder](https://nyc.gov/vaccinefinder) or  
call **877-VAX-4NYC** (877-829-4692).

NYC may change recommendations  
as the situation evolves. 12.14.21

**NYC VACCINE FOR ALL:**  
**SAFE, FREE, EASY**

**NYC**

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

For the PSFC, this has required a fast and major overhaul of our own guidelines and

practices to ensure that we are in compliance with the new mandate. From the December 6 announcement, the PSFC's 92 paid staff (71 full-time permanent staff, 8 permanent part-time, and 13 pandemic support staff) had to either vaccinate or apply for an accommodation by December 27 (more than 90% were already compliant). However, under the December 15 announcement, the mandate's extension also would include working members (who are, under the City's definition, 'volunteers').

“OUR MEMBER WORKERS ARE NOT REALLY EMPLOYEES AND THEY ARE NOT VOLUNTEERS—THEY SIGN UP FOR WORK SHIFTS VOLUNTARILY AND THEY SCHEDULE THEMSELVES.”

*GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ*

The new mandates put the PSFC into a short turnaround window over the holidays to work with staff and on-site working members to communicate and clarify the new requirements and put systems in place to ensure that working members kept proof of vaccination or had applied for an exemption. The *Linewaiters' Gazette* spoke to General Coordinator Joe Holtz to learn more about the PSFC's experience with the mandates, how the PSFC responded and what this means to our workforce.

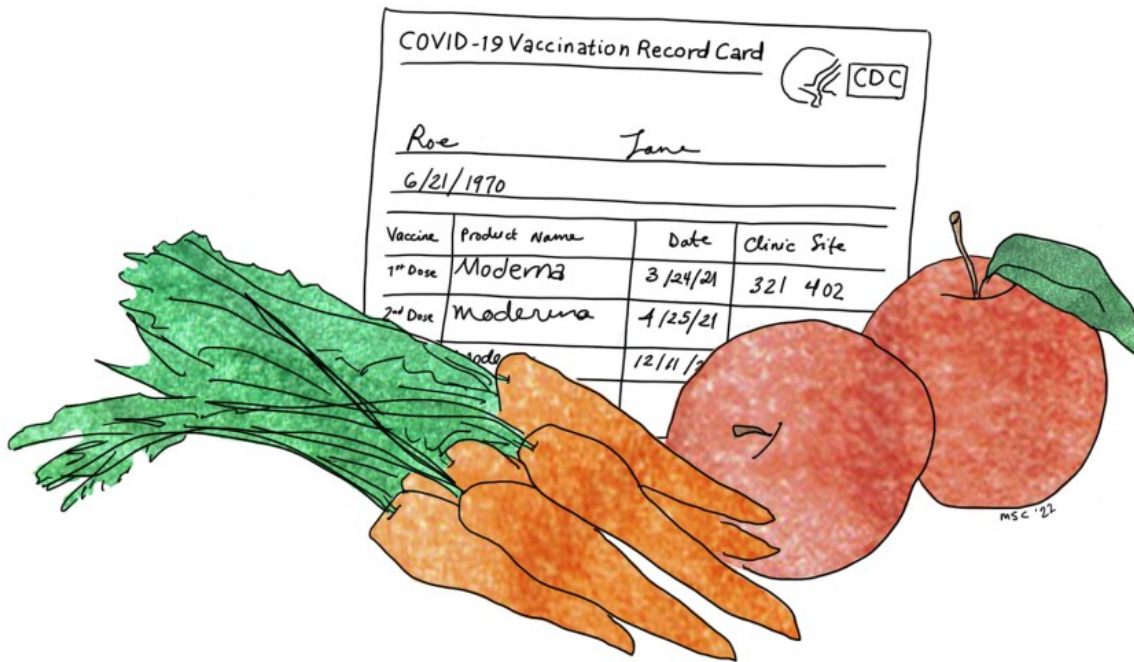


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

## A Fast Turnaround

“As it was originally announced on December 6, the vaccine mandate was extended to all private employers in New York City—even those with under 100 employees,” Holtz recalled. “Because we currently have 92 employees, down from 200 in July, we were not required by the Federal mandate [since overturned by the Supreme Court] to have workers either get a vaccination or get tested weekly. The new NYC mandate announced by de Blasio required that all workers get vaccinated or get a formal accommodation for not being vaccinated. This announcement gave us three weeks to meet with our staff and ensure that they understood and met the requirements. As this only affected a small percentage of our staff, this did not pose a serious problem, and all of our staff complied.

“The follow-up announcement on December 15, which defined what they meant by ‘workers,’ posed a much bigger problem for the PSFC,” Holtz continued. “By definition, a ‘worker’ under the mandate would include employees, interns, or volunteers. Under their definition, our working members are essentially ‘volunteers.’ So, suddenly, the PSFC was grappling with a serious challenge: how do we communicate to our

10,000 working members that they need to be vaccinated or apply for accommodation in two weeks, in order to work their shifts and stay active at the Coop?"

WELCOME

**PROTECT EACH OTHER**

At the Coop we take everyone's safety seriously. We require all adults and children age 2 and up to wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth **AT ALL TIMES** when inside the building.



*Never pull down your mask. Members that fail to cooperate with our mask protocols may be asked to leave the store. If you have any questions, please visit the Membership Office.*

**IMPORTANT! VALVE MASKS**

Masks with valves do not protect those around you and are therefore prohibited inside The Coop.



**NO!**

This is based on guidance from the NYC Health Dept.

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

Holtz pointed out that, unlike the pre-COVID days of two years ago, “the PSFC has worked to build out our member service, and we encouraged members to update their email addresses and register with Member Services. So reaching out to members to alert them was not as great a problem.” The Coop was able to email all members and communicate in various ways. Announcements were made on the PSFC website. But because of the holiday break and the rapid rise of Omicron, there was no definite way to reach every Coop member. By December 27, a system was in place: at the start of every work shift, working members must demonstrate that they have proof on hand or have applied for an accommodation. This is the only way, should a health inspector make an unannounced visit, that we can ensure that the PSFC is protected. At the same time, the mandate supports that more working members interacting with each other, with staff and with shopping members on the Coop shopping floors are vaccinated and that we are keeping our members safer from the spread of COVID-19.

“PSFC IS FORMALLY A BUSINESS ENTITY IN NEW YORK CITY, AND WE HAVE TO OBEY NEW YORK CITY MANDATES.”

*GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ*

“You could make the case that this was not a reasonable thing to ask,” Holtz said. “Our member workers are not really employees and they are not volunteers—they sign up for work shifts voluntarily and they schedule themselves. We don’t recognize or refer to our member workers as ‘volunteers’—we see them as workers. But under the City’s definition, they are ‘volunteers,’ even if we don’t like the word. When you come to do a work shift, you are a ‘working member,’ not a volunteer. When you come to shop, you are a ‘shopping member,’ not a ‘customer.’ And when you come to the General Meeting and have your voice heard and vote on important topics, you are an ‘owner member.’”

## Member Response

Holtz was asked if there has been member pushback on the vaccine mandate. “Some members have definitely pushed back on this,” Holtz replied. “We’ve received some phone calls and emails. One member said that it’s not officially law until the New York City Council votes on it, that the Mayor does not have authority, and that we should ignore the mandate until the City Council votes. But we’re not willing to take the risk of having the PSFC closed down. Another member argued that they don’t believe this is what the Coop stands for. I agree with them, but PSFC is formally a business entity in New York City, and we have to obey New York City mandates. As an administrator of the PSFC, my intent is not to put the PSFC at risk by not obeying this. Another member is asking me to not comply, to make a stand. But that member can write an agenda item, and we can vote on it as a cooperative. In the meantime, the PSFC has to obey rules and regulations in New York City, and we try to follow public health mandates and requirements.

“The most common refrain is to say, ‘I have a problem with these rules at the PSFC.’ But in this case, these are not the rules of the PSFC. These are the rules of New York City.” Holtz recommends that PSFC members who have issues with this come together and communicate with one another. “We are truly a unique organization. But when the Mayor included ‘volunteers’ in his mandate, he was probably thinking of nonprofit groups that have 100 or 200 volunteers. But under the City of New York’s definition, we have 10,000 volunteers. Does any other business or nonprofit entity in NYC have this many?

“We tried to pound the message home to our members,” Holtz concluded. “Some people are still deeply committed to not getting vaccinated. But the PSFC needs to follow the public health guidelines. We want the PSFC to be a good public health citizen. We want everyone here to be a part of preventing the spread of the disease.”



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## FROM THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE EDUCATION SQUAD

April 19, 2022

DEAR EDITORS,

The International Trade Education Squad (ITES) has been working with other trade justice and human rights groups throughout the pandemic to push for changes in international trade arrangements to enable the making of vaccines across the world. From November 30–December 3 the World Trade Organization is meeting where a vote will take place to suspend intellectual property monopolies for COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments. Already more than 100 nations support a temporary, COVID-specific waiver of WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) rules.

The White House said it would support the TRIPS waiver, but governments of the European Union are currently blocking it. Our government needs to push the European Union to support vaccinating and treating the world so further SARS variants will not render the existing shots and treatment modalities we have ineffective.

Join us in calling on our government to:

1. Cooperate with South Africa, India and other waiver proponents to speedily produce a draft WTO TRIPS waiver text and use all means available to press the European Union to end their opposition and secure swift passage of a comprehensive waiver agreement.
2. Leverage the U.S. government's past public investments, existing legal authorities and considerable equities to make vaccine firms transfer technology to capable and qualified producers around the world.
3. Launch and fund a global manufacturing plan to increase and democratize vaccine production in hubs worldwide.

Thank you,

*Helen Beichel*



## TIME FOR A VACCINE MANDATE AT THE COOP

April 19, 2022

DEAR *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE* EDITORS,

It is time for the Coop to implement a vaccine mandate for its members. I understand that not everyone is able to get a vaccine, including those with autoimmune disorders, those receiving chemotherapy, etc. However, the vast majority of people, including the vast majority of Coop members, do not fall into these categories. For those of us who are able, the time to hesitate is through.

It was heartening to see, during the pandemic, how Coop members eagerly adopted public health best practices: social distancing, masking, limiting the number of members in the Coop at a time, etc. The Coop did a much better job than most other institutions at keeping its members safe and healthy.

Now the Coop must take the next step: require members, who are able to receive a vaccine, to be vaccinated if they intend to remain members.

While I understand indoor masking will be the norm for some time, if we are ever to return to a world without masks, we must be vaccinated. It is not fair that the majority of members must continue wearing masks on their shifts indefinitely because a few holdouts refuse to get vaccinated. Life must eventually return to normal. The best way to accelerate that process is to require all Coop members who are able to get vaccinated to do so.

*Sincerely,*

*Taylor Wofford*