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August General Meeting Approves Temporary Markup Increase

By Christopher Cox

At the fourth General Meeting conducted via video, members voted in favor of a temporary increase in the standard markup applied to all products sold at the Coop, responding to the sharp drop in overall revenue during the pandemic. The meeting, held at 7:15 p.m. on August 25, was attended by 451 member-owners. They voted 368 to 63 to increase the markup from 21 to 25 percent, though individual members will be able to opt out of the price increase.

Receiving Coordinator Margie Lempert, who presented the plan for the increase along with General Coordinator Joseph Szladek, argued that the increase could be implemented immediately, which would help reduce the Coop's losses, currently averaging \$85,000 a week. Unlike other strategies to limit losses, such as reintroducing member labor, or potential ways of raising revenue, such as increasing the number of shoppers allowed inside at one time, an increase in the markup wouldn't need to be reversed if a second wave of Covid-19 hits New York City. "It's a pandemic-proof idea," Lempert said.

Also discussed during the meeting was the possible return of member labor on a voluntary basis. During the General Coordinators' reports, Ann Herpel presented a plan for a phased return of certain work slots, starting on September 21, and beginning with those that could be done outdoors. Members would get FTOP credit for any shifts they worked. Later in the meeting, Rachel Porter, a member of the Loans Committee, spoke about her proposal (which was on the agenda), to return to almost all member labor immediately.

Temporary Markup Increase

The debate over increasing prices to keep the Coop solvent for a longer period of time was occasionally heated, as one group argued for the financial necessity of the move, while others saw in the price increase an abandonment of the Coop's commitment to affordability—a concern only heightened by the rise in unemployment and other economic hardships during the pandemic.

As a prelude to the discussion, members were given insight into just how dire the Coop's finances have become. Joe Holtz, the Coop's general manager and treasurer, presented a preliminary financial statement that showed a decline in total sales of more than \$6 million, and more than \$550,000 in additional labor

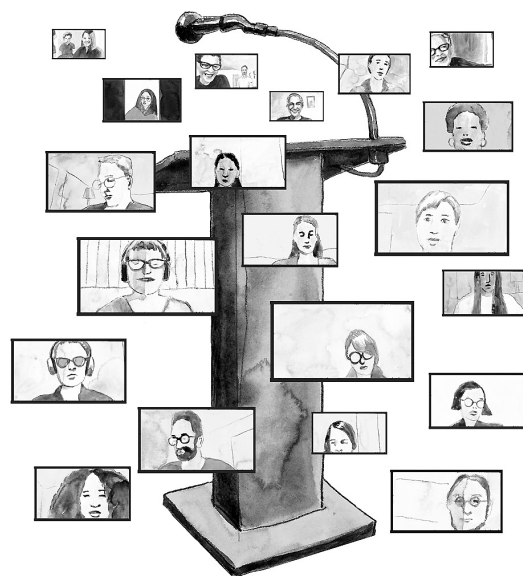


ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

costs this year—mostly due to the suspension of member labor, which required the hiring of dozens of new paid employees. According to Holtz, with the approximately \$4 million in cash the Coop now has on hand, "We'll be out of money by around May 1."

Margie Lempert, who also serves as the Coop's meat buyer, presented the case for increasing the markup. She began by noting that of the \$85,000 the Coop is losing weekly, approximately \$68,000 is the result of reduced sales. (In previous years, the Coop had a modest weekly profit.) Lempert forecasted that increasing the markup to 25 percent, and slightly increasing sales volume by expanding the hours the Coop is open, and allowing more people in the store, would cut that loss to \$34,000 a week. "Reducing our loss in this way extends our financial runway into late spring 2022," she said. "By this time, the pandemic should be over."

Lempert and Szladek's proposal comes with a sunset clause: the markup will revert to 21 percent when full member labor returns, or when the Coop has begun breaking even on a weekly basis. Members will also have the right to opt out of the price increase, no questions asked, by notifying the member office. All EBT recipients among the membership will automatically pay the lower markup rate.

Lempert concluded by calling an increased markup the "most reliable approach we have. Right away, we get a benefit from introducing a markup. We can introduce it quickly without additional labor being required." The average bill, Szladek added, would still be considerably

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

New Directions for the Old Stone House



PHOTOS BY CAROLINE MARDOK

By Frank Haberle

Long before there was a Park Slope Food Coop (or a Park Slope neighborhood, or for that matter, any "Slope" at all) there was the Old Stone House. In 1699, Dutch settlers built a little stone farmhouse by a marsh, on land that had been occupied and used by the Lenape tribe for thousands of years. In August 1776, during the Battle of Long Island, a key battle in the American Revolutionary War, this small building became the focal point of the battle, changing hands between the British and the Americans several times, as the Continental army slipped over the Gowanus. Later, the building became the clubhouse of the original Brooklyn Dodgers; was buried as part of the re-grading of the current neighborhood; and was then reconstructed, along with the surrounding Washington Park, as a WPA project during the 1930s.

The Old Stone House (OSH) and the park, located between Third and Fourth Streets and Fourth and Fifth Avenues, have evolved, like the neighborhood itself, over the last thirty years, to meet the needs and interests of a diverse community. Before the Covid-19 crisis closed its doors, children from surrounding schools visited the old building to learn about both the battle and the Revolution. Upstairs, people of all ages gathered for small concerts and readings, community meetings, and crafting classes. Summer months saw daytime soccer games and evening concerts, as well as movies and plays on the west side of the park. On the east side of the park, children and parents played and relaxed on the beautifully sculpted playground. All around the park's perimeter are magnificent plantings and gardens, the product of a 15-year permaculture project that returned native plants and trees to a place where they flourished long before European settlers.

As a non-profit organization, OSH finds ways to best serve the current educational, cultural, and social needs of the community, while also paying tribute to the full and complete history of the place where it stands. "People in the community see OSH as a small building dedicated solely to commemorating its role in the Revolution, but they don't necessarily know that we are a conservancy, caring for the surrounding Washington Park and JJ Byrne playground. We have a range of offerings, designed to bring the community together," said Kim Maier, Executive Director for the last sixteen



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

August GM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cheaper than Whole Foods or Fresh Direct. (A \$100 spend at the Coop would now cost \$103.30.)

Most of the comments that followed the presentation were in support of the proposal. Jan Fogel, who is retired from member labor, praised the inclusion of the ability to opt out. “I hope the Coop decides to do this,” she said, “because we should save the Coop.” Elizabeth Eakin, a squad leader on the Receiving Committee, asked whether members’ privacy would be protected if they opted out, and Lempert and Szladek assured her that it would. Checkout workers, for example, wouldn’t know which markup rate a member was paying. They estimated that five to six percent of members would opt out of the higher rate. Several members also offered support for the possibility of opting in to even higher markup rates, although that was not made a part of the proposal.

Member Christina Chala argued that the membership shouldn’t consider raising prices during this crisis. “I think this is really out of touch for the Coop,” she said. The opt-out system put an additional burden on already stressed people, she continued, arguing that the Coop should be making it easier for its members at this moment, not more difficult. Chala argued that there were other ways to increase revenue and cut weekly losses.

Chala was joined in her dissent by Joe Holtz, who argued that raising prices, while the unemployment rate is so high, was wrong. Chala and Holtz both thought that the price increase went against the spirit of cooperation, which promised low prices in return for collective labor. Holtz argued that we shouldn’t “stray from our model, which is working so well.”

Ralph Engelman, who has been a member since 1981, agreed, adding that the bar set by the sunset clause was too high. “I think this will be a permanent increase,” he said.

The final vote was lopsided, with 86 percent voting in favor of the increase. (The new markup is planned to go into effect on October 5, as long as the opt-out system is working by then.)

The Return of Volunteer Member Labor

The final 45 minutes of the general meeting was devoted to the question of restarting the member-labor program on a voluntary basis. In Herpel’s presentation at the beginning of the meeting, she noted that the transition to paid labor had achieved its primary goal of reducing infections. There has been no known case of Covid-19 among the paid staff at the Coop. She also cited a survey of the membership, which showed that 80 percent of the members felt safe at the Coop. Ingrid Dudek, who is on the Receiving Committee, called the Coop “the safest place in Brooklyn.”

Porter’s presentation was a forceful argument in favor of returning members to their work slots as

quickly as possible. “Our culture of cooperation,” she said, “is eroded without member labor.” She continued, “It is fundamental to our model. We are not the Park Slope Food Coop without member labor. Our mission statement specifies member labor in its first sentence.” She noted that the General Coordinator’s plan to wait until January, or later, to phase in some work slots, such as those in the basement requiring close contact in a confined space, would move too slowly. It was a route, she argued, to making the Park Slope Food Coop the “fancy food coop.”

Comments on Porter’s presentation were passionate, both for and against. However, in a letter published in this issue of the Gazette, Porter announced she is rescinding her proposal and will not bring it to a vote.

The meeting ended with a vote from the Board of Directors to approve the membership vote for a markup increase. ■

Old Stone

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

years. “OSH and the surrounding grounds are a lot like a town square—a place in the heart of Brooklyn where people from all walks of life get to know each other as neighbors. During the pandemic and this summer of social unrest, preserving this space is more important than ever.”

OSH has reopened, by appointment, for pods of up to six; and has installed a new contemporary art exhibit, “Brooklyn Utopias: 2020.” The exhibit explores how Brooklyn has continued to change over the past decade—while acknowledging Brooklyn’s past, present, and future—by inviting artists to present contrasting visions of an ideal Brooklyn. The work can also be seen on the OSH website.

Re-Setting Education Programs: The Whole Story

The Covid-19 pandemic and social unrest of the last six months have only reinforced OSH’s commitment to inclusive, civic-minded programming. This begins with teaching history. “The Covid crisis and the closing of our park and building for safety reasons gave us a chance to hit ‘re-set,’” said Maggie Weber, Director of Education. “OSH has always been trying to make our work relevant to the whole Brooklyn community. We are traditionally a Revolutionary War site,



PHOTOS BY CAROLINE MARDOK

but when you take a closer look, we learn that when the original building was built in 1699, Brooklyn was already a remarkably diverse place. While the native Lenape had been pushed back by aggressive Dutch settlers, they had been coming to this place for at least ten centuries. At the time this building was created, 40% of Brooklyn’s residents were of African descent. Women played a huge role in these settlements, but are often overlooked in the telling of the stories of places like these.” A curriculum development project currently underway, entitled “Crossroads 1702,” will educate local students and visitors by telling the stories of all the people who have lived in this place.

To build young people’s understanding of civic education and responsibility, OSH educators will deliver the Democracy Project to seventh graders in schools across Brooklyn. The semester-long residency uses dramatic play to help seventh graders learn the events that led up to the American Revolution. “The middle schoolers create their

own colonies, name them, discover what kinds of natural resources they have,” Maggie explained. “Then they impose taxation, pilfer from each other, and pay each other for protection. Finally, they are introduced to the ideas of democracy. Representation and justice become more real. They learn how elections work.” In the fall, OSH staff are preparing to make this program an online offering for remote learning.

OSH is also exploring how to create a unique learning pod that will be made affordable for children and families with fewer resources, including the children of essential workers. The children will be working outside for the entirety of the program—planting and digging and learning about the gardens. Other resources for families offered through OSH include new online crafting programs for kids.



Washington Park’s Permaculture Plantings and Gardens

For fifteen years, Park Slope Food Coop member and neighborhood gardening legend Claudia Joseph committed herself to being the gardener of Washington Park. She put in trees, plants, and

flowers, with the goal of creating a permaculture garden using varieties native to the American Northeast. Claudia retired from OSH two years ago. This March, Sam Lewis, a native New Yorker, started his new job as Director of Gardens—just before the park closed.

“The permaculture gardens that Claudia developed here are just unbelievable,” Sam said. “There are medicinal and native plants. You look around the park, and you are surrounded by an edible food forest in the middle of the city, designed in layers—a canopy of persimmon and pear and fruit trees, a middle layer of raspberries, gooseberries, blueberries, and agastache. This was all Claudia’s work. The challenge for me is to preserve the amazing gardens Claudia designed, while also introducing more flowering plants—to bring different colors and textures—so that people visiting the park are surrounded by beautiful colors.”

One project Sam has already taken on is the development of an untended garden space along Fifth Avenue. “There was only a patch of dirt behind a locked gate,” Sam explains. “Working with volunteers, we turned it into a shade garden with a picnic table, surrounded by native plants including those the Lenape would recognize.” Sam is working on the food-producing part of the garden, with an eye toward providing for people in need.

“We donate the food we grow to several community refrigerator pop-ups that have been operating around the neighborhood since the Covid crisis began,” Sam says. “I drop off a load of tomatoes or eggplant, and when I go back the next day, they’re gone.” Sam is also working on a project with young people from the Ali Forney Center’s LEAP internship program.

The Coop has collaborated with OSH on composting for years. Members collect and deliver sawdust and scraps



from the Coop to the composting bins for their work slot. This work has been suspended while member labor is on hiatus. Sam emphasized that Coop members interested in bringing their home food scraps for composting would be most welcome, as would any volunteers to work on the gardens and plantings teams. Volunteers work Tuesdays and Thursdays. Members should contact Sam directly for more information on composting and volunteering: slewis@oldstonehouse.org. ■

For more information on events and activities at The Old Stone House, please visit the website: <https://theoldstonehouse.org>.

L E T T E R S T O T H E E D I T O R

PROPOSAL TO REINSTATE MEMBER LABOR WILL NOT GO TO A VOTE

DEAR COOP COMMUNITY,

At the August GM I tried to present a proposal to restore voluntary member labor for discussion. The response to my presentation was so overwhelmingly negative that I have decided not to request a vote. But I do want to address a few points as they bear on the state of our Coop.

First, although the General Coordinators knew about my proposal and I had written to them about the matter several times, and although I have had a cooperative relationship with them for many years, including as Committee Chair on the Loan Committee, they did not tell me that they intended to present the return to member labor as an apparent fait accompli, during their report at the beginning of the GM. I believe that there had been no earlier public proposal from the GCs to restore member labor. Had the GCs informed me of their intentions, I would have withdrawn my proposal.

Second, several com-

ments suggested that my motives for wanting to restore member labor were political. One person explicitly said I was “screaming like Trump’s girlfriend.” Ouch. Without trotting out my progressive bona fides, I assert that people can legitimately disagree on which precautions are science-based and which are fear-based. Contrary to comments during the meeting, I had thought a lot about the issue, discussed it with other Coop stakeholders (staff and members), and spent considerable time reviewing health research and guidelines. I was motivated entirely by caring about the cooperative model and financial viability. I am concerned that liberals are becoming as reactionary as the right. I hope we are not going to meet disagreement with disparagement, either within our Coop or in the broader community. I tried to present as coherently as I could, within the limits of the Zoom meeting, a response to whatever concerns I could anticipate. I don’t think anyone should be dismissed or mocked for suggesting alternative approaches. That does not strengthen us, it weakens us.

Third, the Chair of the

meeting said that the Chair committee members are not receiving work credit. He also noted that they are working more than average to make the GM happen. I think that the Coop should grant work credit to members who provide essential functions, such as running the GM and the Linewaiters’ Gazette. For essential functions we should not depend on members’ willingness to donate their time.

Finally, I had requested that my presentation be made available, but I don’t think that happened. Unfortunately, because my time was cut short and I had technical difficulties with my Zoom connection, the presentation was rushed, and I could not introduce myself, respond to questions, or provide clarifications. I am a public school special ed teacher; I used to be a social scientist; I have been a member of the Coop for about 25 years, and I was the chair of the Revolving Loan Committee. If anyone is interested, here is the link to the presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1UdZdpi-jqqvhxaK_06NjrTyqeOM-8jAvnQSeablaLbIkC/edit?usp=sharing

*In Cooperation,
Rachel Porter*

AN INVITATION

HELLO EVERYONE,

I am part of Rockycorner.org, a cohousing community in Connecticut, and a long-time PSFC member. Quite a few of us at Rocky Corner are also members of the PSFC, and we would like to invite the Coop community and their families to events that we are planning on our property and the surrounding area in rural Connecticut.

A Special Event for PSFC members & families: the Rocky Corner Cohousing community is planning some foraging and herb walks / hikes on some of the nice weather weekends we have left in this summer/early fall. We would like to extend a special invitation to the members of the Park Slope Food Coop and their families to come and spend a day in rural Connecticut with us.

Social distancing is easy at Rocky Corner; our property is situated on 33 acres of mostly farmland and is adjacent to a hiking trail that leads down to Lake Chamberlain, Connecticut’s largest reservoir.

We have a few knowledgeable members ready to guide us as we forage and identify the herbs and edible wild

plants that grow on our land.

We invite you to bring a picnic basket. There is plenty of space in our “outdoor living room” to organize some fun activities and games for all ages.

If you have a portable instrument, feel free to bring it along. The musically inclined among us are always ready for a jam session!

Since these events are very much weather-dependent and can not therefore be scheduled far in advance, we invite you to check our website regularly for updates: www.rockycorner.org/events. We only ask that you dress appropriately for a walk/hike (sturdy shoes and long pants!) and bring a smile to the event!

All of us at Rocky Corner Cohousing look forward to welcoming our friends at the PSFC to these events and to celebrate outdoor living with all of you.

Be sure to RSVP for the event of your choice by emailing info@rockycorner.org a few days before the event so we can plan appropriately for the ages and abilities of attendees. Rocky Corner is a respectful and inclusive community and ALL ARE WELCOME!

Lori Schumann

COORDINATOR’S CORNER

By the Bulk Coordinator

First, I want to thank everyone for being supportive, cooperative, and patient, regarding the changes in the bulk aisle.

As you may have seen, we installed new shelves in Aisle 2, instead of having

only scoop bins.

Now that this phase is complete, and all bulk items except those in the silos are bagged, movement through the bulk aisle is quicker.

All bulk items that were temporarily moved to Aisle 3 are back in their original place.

Items will be organized alphabetically, as they were originally.

We have replaced items that we are unable to bag ourselves, such as flour and sugar, with a retail packaged equivalent of relatively similar price range.

Bread, pastry, spelt, rye, and AP flours, as well as cornmeal, are now available in two- or five-pound bags, from the same mills that provided us with those items in bulk.

Sugar is available from UNFI. Tri-color pasta is now being offered for sale in Aisle 5.

Wheat bran was discontinued, because it does not sell much. Salt in bulk was also discontinued, as salt at a similar price point is available among the baking goods in Aisle 2.

Food processing will bag nutritional yeast, in-shell peanuts, and sesame sticks. ■

RECIPE

Garlic-Marinated Zucchini (Concia)



PHOTO BY VALERIE TRUCCHIA

By Leah Koenig

This dish hails from Rome’s ancient Jewish community, which dates back 2,000 years. The recipe makes delicious use of summer’s zucchini abundance and highlights a hallmark technique of Roman Jewish cooking: frying vegetables in oil. Although the zucchini is fried before it is marinated in a mix of chopped basil, parsley, garlic, and a glug of red wine vinegar, the final dish is complex and bright, rather than stodgy or heavy. I first tried concia at a restaurant in Rome’s historic Jewish ghetto neighborhood over a decade ago, and haven’t ever forgotten the experience.

Recipe adapted slightly from Modern Jewish Cooking by Leah Koenig, ©2015, Chronicle Books.



ILLUSTRATION BY VALERIE TRUCCHIA

The following serves four.

- Ingredients**
- 2 lbs. zucchini, trimmed and cut into ¼-inch thick planks
 - Kosher salt
 - 2 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh basil
 - ¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
 - 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 - ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
 - ¼ cup red wine vinegar
 - Freshly ground black pepper

Place the zucchini in a colander, sprinkle with about 1 Tbsp. salt, and toss with your hands to coat. Let stand for 30 minutes, then rinse well and thoroughly pat dry with paper towels. Stir together the basil, parsley, and garlic in a small bowl and set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan set over medium heat. Working in batches, fry the zucchini, turning once, until softened and lightly browned on both sides, about 6 minutes total. Transfer half of the zucchini to a shallow ceramic, glass, or Pyrex (not metal) baking dish, and top with half of the herb mixture and half of the vinegar. Taste and season lightly with salt to taste (zucchini should already be salty), and pepper. Repeat with the remaining zucchini, herbs, and vinegar.

Let stand at room temperature, basting occasionally with the juices in the baking dish, for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours, before serving. Serve at room temperature. Store leftovers, covered, in the refrigerator. ■

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STATEMENT ON THE COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

DEFINITION

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

VALUES

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

PRINCIPLES

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice. The International Cooperative Alliance adopted the revised Statement on the Cooperative Identity in 1995.

They are as follows:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

2. Democratic Member Control

3. Member Economic Participation

4. Autonomy and Independence

5. Education, Training and Information

6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives

7. Concern for Community

REFERENCE: ICA.COOP