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Proposal for a New General Meeting Attendance Committee Sparks Debate at January's Virtual GM

By Leila Darabi

A proposal to create a new, rotating squad that would attend Coop General Meetings—and to end work credit for those attending to get a make-up or ftop credit—launched a spirited discussion at the January 26, 2021 General Meeting. Members also posed questions to general coordinators during an open forum and received a financial update from treasurer Joe Holtz. No voting took place on any items discussed at the meeting, which took place over Zoom.

Proposed GM Attendee Squad

Coop member Rachel Porter introduced for discussion the proposed creation of a squad that would receive work credit for attending all 26 GMs for a two-year period. Under the proposal, other than members of the chair and agenda committees, no other members would receive work credit for attending the meeting. Meetings would remain open to all members.

According to the item submitted to the agenda by Porter: "This will create an experienced and knowledgeable GM that will be able to better advise the Coop's board."

In the past, Porter lamented: "What I saw was that huge numbers of people [at the GM] were on laptops or on phones, they were grading papers or reading something, they weren't paying attention." A bullet point on the PowerPoint presentation she shared stated that pre-pandemic 90% of attendees were there to receive work slot credit.

Porter's proposal includes a phased approach, offering the opportunity to join this new squad to a random, computer-generated list of current Coop members. A new group would be invited to join each General Meeting, starting with an initial 10 members invited to the first meeting, another 10 to the next and so on for a total of 220 members by the end of the second year. Members would serve for two years before rotating off the squad.

A few Coop members voiced support for the proposal. A number of others expressed concern and questioned if the proposal addressed the problem of the General Meetings failing to attract and engage attendees representative of the Coop's diverse membership.

Following the presentation Bede McCormack, said he liked "the idea of a GM squad, like a house of representatives," but wondered if people like himself who enjoy their work shifts might be unwilling to switch squads for a two-year term.

A New Squad or a New Ruling Class?

"I hear what Rachel is saying and the intent, but I think it's a mistake to have a two-year squad whose job it is to have an opinion without being involved in the day-to-day work of the Coop," said Lisa Guido. "I

don't think we need a ruling class within our meetings, I think we need more active participation."

"I started attending GMs in late 90's and spent a lot of time on the chair committee trying to make the meetings better," said Ken Garson, who voiced support for the new squad concept. "This proposal is the best solution I've heard because you're not changing anything at all about how the GM works. Anyone can go to the GM, anyone can bring an item, everyone discusses, everyone votes."

Mitzie Rothzied agreed with the idea of the new squad, sharing that when she has attended General Meetings she has seen people wearing headphones and felt dismayed by the fact that many attend for makeup credit. "In a sense we were creating a way to kind of cheat."

David Moss, a current member of the chair committee disagreed. "I'm opposed to the professionalization of the meeting membership. The worst people at the meetings are those of us who go to all the meetings. It's the people who are biased and trying to control the Coop."

Jenna Weiss worried that the proposed new committee would disincentivize others from attending. "I'm also unclear what this group would do other than attend meetings if there's also a chair committee and an agenda committee," she said.

General coordinator Joe Holtz voiced support for the proposal. "It's my duty as a board of director to get advice from people who are actually paying attention and actually learn how the meeting works and this helps that," he said.

Addressing the Root Problem

"We need to pay more attention to the root of the problem, which is that people aren't paying attention," Rachel Asher said.

"I think the issue of not paying attention has been greatly exaggerated," said Glenn Moller who said he thought the current meetings work well. "I don't think the 10 people with headphones on are ruining the meeting."

Tim Platt agreed those not paying attention are "irritating but not consequential."

"I am capable of doing a word puzzle and listening to the general meeting," Noel S. said. "When the content of the meeting calls for it, people will tune in."

"The danger of these Zoom meetings is that because we're not getting credit it is only the die-hards who are here and I would hate for that to cement itself," George Olken said.

"The meeting should be naturally interesting for people to participate," Elizabeth Tobier said. "I don't think anyone comes to the meeting because it's easy to participate and not frustrating. It is frustrating. And what we should be doing is making it easier to participate."

"I'm not a big supporter of this particular solution,"

Charlie Rogers of the chair committee said, also noting that if General Meetings continue by Zoom the work credit system may need to be overhauled.

Porter now has the opportunity to revise her proposal for vote at a future meeting.

Treasurer's Report

During his monthly update, Joe Holtz shared that the Coop has applied for a \$1.7 million Paycheck Protection Program loan and may be eligible for employee retention tax credits. This would be the second PPP loan the Coop receives, following a \$1.5 million grant received in April 2020. Voluntarily increased member/owner equity investments brought another \$800,000 in cash to the Coop.

Holtz shared that the Coop started the fiscal year with \$6.2 million in cash (comprised of \$3.9 million in cash, plus the Payroll Protection Program loan and the increase in member investments). In January the Coop had \$2.6 million remaining in cash. Weekly cash drop peaked between March 23 and April 26, 2020, when the Coop significantly restricted the number of members shopping and lost more than \$100,000 per week. In the final 12 weeks of 2020, the cash drop slowed to around \$50,000 per week. Holtz reported these improvements resulted from increasing hours of operation, more checkout counters, allowing more shoppers in at one time and an increase in the Coop's markup that began last October.

Open Forum

During a 10-minute open forum, General Coordinators responded to member questions. Committees that continue to work were advised to continue to work through their staff liaisons to receive work credit. Paid part-time staff forced to quarantine after one worker tested positive for COVID-19 are paid for that time under the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act.

Bandanas and gaiters are accepted as face covering while shopping, but must be two layers.

Join the Chair Committee

Members interested in joining the chair committee that runs General Meetings should write to psfc-chair@gmail.com. The committee is looking for new members and ideally members that represent the diversity of the Coop. ■

**See Candidates for
the Park Slope Food Coop
Board of Directors
on Pages 2 and 3**

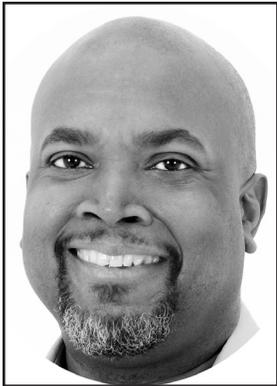
Candidates for Board of Directors of the Park Slope Food Coop, Inc.

Two three-year terms on the Board are open.

Voting for the Board of Directors candidates will happen by proxy beginning in late May or in person at the Annual Meeting on June 29, 2021.

You will have the opportunity to meet the candidates at the March 30 General Meeting. Candidate statements follow.

Frank Bradshaw



Why does Frank Bradshaw want to be on the board...I've done just about every job at the Coop.

From my early days almost 15 years ago in Receiving, working under Alexis' guidance (RIP, I miss you brother), I began to get a deeper understanding of how important our

food and where it comes from is.

When I moved over to Orientation, I kept one foot in the Receiving world as I tried my hand at everything.

The only thing that I haven't done is Office work and Food Processing (I couldn't cut a straight line in cheese if you gave me a guillotine).

Then the pandemic hit.

Much to my wife's chagrin, I dutifully shopped. Even when the line snaked around to President St. and I brought my own folding chair for the 2 hour line, I shopped.

And it's clear...

We need fresh eyes, a fresh vision.

Our Coop is in trouble and we have to change course. Find new and fresh ways.

I want to be a catalyst for some of that change.

Part of that fresh vision is one of a different perspective.

Our Coop should reflect the racial, gender, gender identity, age and socio-economic diversity that is our Coop.

We talk about inclusion...

Let's not talk about it, let's be about it!

I am ready to help our Coop grow out of the ashes that is the post-COVID-19 world we are in and become the phoenix we can be!

"E pluribus unum sumus" ■

Timothy Hospodar



When I joined the Park Slope Food Coop 10 years ago, already there were debit card transactions, cart return, and beer for sale. This is to say I did not witness our Coop's significant growth over its first 40 years. I acknowledge, nevertheless, the countless changes implemented at our Coop that have trans-

formed it into a large thriving market and secured it as a hub of community that I have come to know and cherish. Noting that our dear Coop has been disrupted by these unprecedented times, I anticipate further change, and I seek a participatory role

during our Coop's post-pandemic growth.

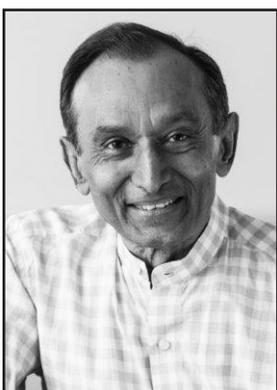
When I'm not shopping or returning to work on an early-morning truck-unloading shift, I work for a big auditing firm. I am not an accountant, however, I am a computer scientist. In other words, I'm an analyst who is passionate about process, order of operations, and continuous improvement. And in the last decade, I have familiarized myself with how clients are leveraging "Data and Analytics" to drive change and growth. That's been my day job, first at tech companies and now at a consultancy.

I've been lucky to have been placed on an advisory team that works closely with the C-suites of many of my employer's clients, mostly in the Fortune 500. Running our firm's Innovation Center, the team hosts collaborative sessions charged with facilitating clients' data-driven decision-making at the executive level. As part of our firm's advisory practice, client solutions might employ "workforce

analytics," feature "intelligent revenue forecasting," or simply parlay "market signals" to transform a client's operating model. I recognize that the job is loaded with consultant slang and that implementing these solutions at the Coop isn't possible, yet I'm excited for the Coop's continued innovation to carry it through the challenging times.

My role at work found me in Chicago for a year and naturally missing the Coop. When thinking about being back in New York, my thoughts often returned to our Coop as one place I would hasten to visit. I think there is an analogy here, trusting that many members of the Coop are currently missing the Coop. Even as an active shopper, I am eager for the Coop's return and confident that the current detour will route us to a better, even innovative, place. This returning will require enormous direction by the General Meeting, and I request the opportunity to represent our Coop's members at our meetings. ■

Viren Mehta



My Park Slope Food Coop membership of over a decade continues to be a privilege. Not only do I benefit from excellent groceries, but more importantly, I have become a part of our community of diversity, cooperation, and participation. My professional work in global healthcare leads me to meet and work with many interesting people, but meeting

Coop members with a wide range of interests and

experiences from so many walks of life is especially enriching. My experiences include work on boards of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in several countries, and now I would like to bring these experiences to the Coop as a board member, and do so while enhancing our unique governance and culture. The shock of the pandemic on the Coop makes this a delicate moment in the life of our very special organization with unique reputation and a strong brand—a real force not only in our community but throughout the state, and in many parts of the country. I would like to contribute to strengthening it further.

The pandemic has made me realize how much I look forward to and value the time I spend working at the Coop, and more recently I've been grateful for the opportunity to volunteer with the excellent staff on sev-

eral evening shifts to help keep things running smoothly and efficiently as we work towards a return to normalcy.

The Coop is required to constitute a board of directors, but we have made it into a special strength in an unusual forum for governance guided by the Coop members' input. I would strive to strengthen these democratic processes while ensuring that the board fulfills its fiduciary obligations, including all the advice and input from members so that the Coop fulfills its potential. Every member knows and expects that each board member acts for the benefit of the Coop as a whole. I as a board member would vote to ensure that the Coop continues to thrive without undue financial or legal risk. I will be honored to join the Board of Directors with its diverse talents and dedicated people, and I request your support. ■

SEE MORE CANDIDATES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

Tomek Miernowski



Dear fellow Coop members! My name is Tomek, and I submit my nomination for a Board of Directors position as an anti-capitalist interested in the scalability of our Coop model to both

smaller and larger communities, particularly into our civic systems, for example on a city council district level. Despite facing enormous challenges, our Coop's swift and effective response to the Covid pandemic shows that it is a structure capable of adaptability, and its long history shows that the social fabric it creates is lasting. In a time that demands systemic change in so many arenas, I'm interested in learning the most I can about the ins and outs of

our Coop structure and operation. I think it provides a shining example of what can come from a community acting for its mutual benefit, without financial profit motives.

As a professional musician, I bring a team-oriented enthusiasm for learning and service, and as someone who dearly loves the Coop and depends on it almost daily, an eagerness to be helpful however I can. Thank you! ■

Shayna Moliver

I'm Shayna Moliver and I am running for a seat on the Coop Board of Directors. As other Board members have said, the role of the Board is to affirm the decisions of the membership. Not to make our Board of Director's voice heard, but to make your voice chart our path forward.

Food has always been my most enduring passion. Raised by New Yorkers who were members of coops and Health Clubs, I grew up learning to love and appreciate the community that seems to naturally

come with a focus on healthy food. My first job was on a farm and I spend time each month volunteering to help feed the food insecure in our community. Since the farm, I've worked in conflict resolution and counseling, and in operations for education and tech. I've learned how to stay calm and empathetic, work with and encourage diverse points of view, and balance the needs of competing interests. I'm even-tempered, able to think critically, and not afraid to question.

I believe Board Members should be a conduit for the voice of the overall membership. The Board's work is to ensure that we continue to financially, legally,

and cooperatively comply with the charter of the Coop. The Coop, like our City, is in uncharted territory. We're going to need every member to help keep the Coop afloat in these turbulent times. While working FTOP shifts as a walker during the pandemic, I've had the opportunity to speak with a lot of you, and hear our hopes and fears for the future. Despite everything this past year, every member has expressed deep gratitude for the Coop's perseverance. We've relied on each other and that, to me, has always been a part of the Coop's enduring legacy. I'm excited to see us weather this storm together. ■