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## February GM Explores Hudson Valley Farm Coop

By Frank Haberle

On February 23, some 200 Coop members attended a GM to discuss, among other things, the Hudson Valley Farm Coop. On the top of the agenda was a proposal to invest an initial \$10,000 PSFC funds into a \$30 million start-up fund for 15 new farms in the Hudson Valley area. Just prior to this proposal discussion, General Coordinator Joe Holtz reported on the still-tenuous state of the Coop's finances as reflected in the final fiscal report for the year ending January 31, 2021. GM Jessica Robinson gave a report on the return of mandatory workshifts.

### Reports from the General Coordinators

General Coordinator Joe Holtz opened with a report on the Coop's financial position and outlook. This began with a financial summary, drawing from the recently completed fiscal year of February 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021, a year that coincided with the Covid-19 crisis. Joe reported that in this 12-month period, in comparison to the same period the prior year, the Coop's gross margin decreased by \$2.1 million and sales were reduced by 25 percent. The Coop served one third fewer members with approximately 6,000 of our 17,000 members not currently active as shoppers. The Coop was forced to reduce shopping hours and did not have the staffing available to provide curbside pickup, which motivated some members to shop elsewhere.

At the same time, our expenses increased by \$1.7 million—a cost entirely from the addition of a temporary workforce of 125 new staff. “For the first time since the 1980s,” Joe stated, “the Coop has added a new tier of staff; temp staff receive almost no benefits and particularly lower wages. However, the costs of temporary labor will increase significantly at the one-year mark where, by law, we are required to provide more benefits.”

Joe also reported on two Payroll Protection Program loans. The first, a loan of \$1.5 million is no longer a loan but is now officially a grant, meaning the Coop will not have to pay it back to the federal government. A second application of \$1,677,345 was pending at the time of the meeting. (It has since been approved.) “Without Federal Aid from the first grant and the \$826,000 in increased owner equity our members contributed last year, we would have only \$150,000 in the bank right now.” Joe pointed out increasing shopping hours and shoppers on the floor has also helped the Coop's finances. So has

the four-percentage point markup increase. Earlier the GM voted to increase the Coop's markup from 21% to 25%.

Members asked questions, including how long will the markup increase be with us. Coordinators pointed out possibly until full member labor has returned and people are shopping at full capacity.

General Coordinator Jessica Robinson reported on efforts to return to the mandatory member labor system. “We have two goals right now,” Jess said. “First, we need to understand the true size of the Coop membership. We believe that 35% of members are not using the Coop right now. We are going to reach out to 17,000 members and ask if people want to work or request a leave, which will help us understand who's using the Coop. We also want to understand people who need temporary COVID work exemptions. We want to figure out who the 10,000, or 11,000, or 12,000 left are, and survey them regarding returning to mandatory labor—what the group feelings are. We hope to get this survey out to members by mid-march and we'll be able to report back to members by mid-April and determine when and what form mandatory labor will take. We're not talking about just flipping the switch and turning on the old squads and FTOP. We will probably start with an all-FTOP model and let the Coop gradually get back to former size. We're aiming for restart later in second quarter of the year.”

Questions included members concerned with retaining the same squads (this would not happen short-term); why we can't start now (we still have Covid restrictions on how many people can be in the building); and one member who asked if she began working her shift, would she then be an essential worker, and therefore be eligible for the vaccine. (The Coop would consider how this might happen).

### Agenda Item: The Hudson Valley Farm Coop

The lone agenda item of the February meeting was the discussion of a future proposal for the Coop to sponsor the potential start-up of the Hudson Valley Farm Coop, an independent Coop of 15 farms. The proposal, presented by 30-year Coop member Jonathan Farber, will ask to create a committee to form a new cooperative business, originally sponsored by, but separate from, the PSFC, called the Hudson Valley Farm Coop. The HVFC will acquire, improve, and operate 15 farms for the benefit of its shareholders and the wider commu-

nity. The committee will be composed of up to nine PSFC members and the General Manager of the PSFC. The committee will draft the business plan, prepare the financial offering and recruit additional project sponsors from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This venture, as presented by Jonathan, was intended to combine activism and entrepreneurship and leverage the power of the PSFC to have a positive impact on climate change and our food system.

As General Manager, Jonathan, who owns a Hudson Valley Farm and a Landscape Architecture Firm, and the proposal co-sponsors will interview and select a diversity of members with skills in agriculture, community organizing, planning, business management, real estate, finance, law, construction and more. Members will receive work credit and have a regularly scheduled monthly meeting. The HVFC will begin operating within one year of approval by the GM and will present to the GM. The committee would seek a \$10,000 seed money grant from the Coop and build a plan to raise and provide \$30 million in funds—\$2 million per farm—through a direct public offering. Jonathan spoke of how they would be able to raise capital with fewer rules and regulations than a traditional IPO.

Questions included Steve Rosen asking how it was decided that 15 farms was the correct amount. Jonathan responded that, “Fifteen farms seems very efficient right now. It's hard for farms to cover economies of scale.” Priscilla Hayner asked, “I'm not sure what the primary motivation is; is it to acquire failing farms?” Jonathan responded that, “The motivation is agricultural triage. We are losing farmers at an incredible rate. Mid-size farms are disappearing.” Another member asked, “I don't understand what your ask is—is it for a loan or venture capital?” Jonathan responded that, “This is an IPO without a middle man.”

Comments included Bill Penner stating that it is difficult to assess the financials, and pointing out that the Coop is already invested in many directions; and another board member asking why we are focusing energy here when the Coop is facing such serious financial issues. Joe Holtz, a co-sponsor of the initiative, wrapped up the discussion by saying, “What's the best thing you can do in a capitalist society? Start Coops. I think this is a really good idea. I like the concept of cooperation and community farms. But I'm skeptical about the dividends part.” ■



ILLUSTRATION BY TOM KANE

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

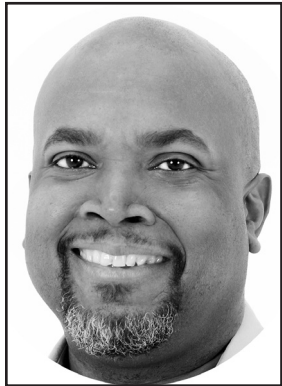
# Candidates for Board of Directors of the Park Slope Food Coop, Inc.

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.

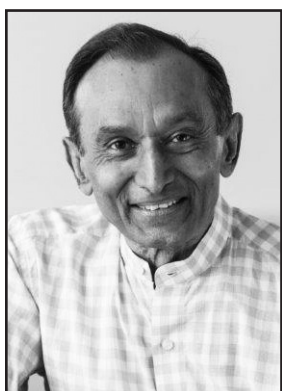
When I'm not shopping or returning to work on an early-morning truck-unloading shift, I work for a big auditing firm. I am not an accountant, however, I am a computer scientist. In other words, I'm an analyst who is passionate about process, order of operations, and continuous improvement. And in the 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. ■