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March GM

By Lauren Mechling

Four member candidates vying for two open positions on the Food Coop Board of Directors presented themselves at the March 30, 2021 General Members meeting. Another member introduced himself and was voted onto the Hearing Officer Committee. The other issues discussed at the meeting ranged from the Coop's economic viability at this challenging moment to political philosophy and inclusivity and transparency. Attendees also learned more details about the plan for the upcoming return of mandatory member work, to begin in July. Some 200 members tuned in.

Open Forum

The meeting kicked off with an open forum, in which members shared thoughts and concerns that reflect the anxieties of late-stage pandemic. Elizabeth Cohen pointed out that social distancing efforts are compromised when cashiers call a new shopper forward before the previous shopper has packed her groceries. Andy Feldman shared a tale of being chided by a staff member for not staying close enough to his cart while shopping, and requested an explanation of the rule. "How far does the cart need to be from you—Five feet? Three feet? Close enough to touch it? And why?" Other questions included: Why aren't we inviting new members to join the Coop? Do retired members need to resume working on July 1? Will childcare be available to members come July?

General Coordinator Ann Herpel offered answers. There was no specific number regarding the distance between a shopper and her cart, but she explained that the sight of an unattended cart causes confusion, especially when there are limits in place to the number of shoppers per aisle. Retired members are not expected to start working shifts in July; new members to coop households are asked to register and prepare to start working. The Coop has been holding off on inviting new members at a time when there is no work requirement and no online orientation. The childcare room has been restructured into a food preparation area, so there is not a plan to immediately reopen childcare, alas.

Financial Update

General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented a fascinating update on the financial impact of the pandemic, and the future viability of the Coop. Sharing a PowerPoint presentation, he homed in on several highlights. On March 17, 2021, the Coop received its second PPP loan. The Small Business Association provided the Coop \$1,677,000 of relief. "If we get the projected aid of \$2.4 million, we should make it through this year," Holtz said. Given the reduced number of shoppers and the added expense of paid labor, we are currently losing about \$10,000 a day. In the first four weeks of this fiscal year we lost \$304,000. "We need to do the work of either selling more food or reducing our expenses, or both," he said. Bringing back the work requirement will be a good first step, as personnel currently accounts for 86% of the Coop's expenses, as compared to 79% the year before last.

Other big expenses are electronic payment service charges (\$120,000 last year, and \$250,000 the busier previous year), electricity (\$137,000 last year), and business insurance (nearly \$267,000 last year). Holtz pointed out that the member equity program has been a boon, with members adding to their Coop investments by an additional \$826,000 over the last year. "That's what helped us land on our feet," he said. While such contributions have slowed down, they are still trickling in.

Coordinator Report

Coordinator Ann Herpel's coordinator report was focused on the July return to member work program. "As the vaccine becomes more available, perhaps it is time to bring people back into a working environment that is safe," she said. On a logistical note, the Coop will not yet be returning to the A/B/C/D weeks system. Instead, members will be required to set up their shifts through the Member Services section of the Coop's website. "The plan is to come back in a FTOP-like system," she said. The same committees (e.g., food processing, receiving) will be in effect, but members will need to sign up for slots. As the Coop organizes this phase-in work plan, it is important to know how many members will be available to return to work. Members who have temporarily relocated or who plan to be away for the summer are urged to take a temporary leave of absence. Members who need to take a COVID disability can do so through Member Services. Unfortunately, members who need to take disability for any other reason must come to the second floor office and speak to a member of the staff.

A final note: If you've noticed the line outside has become shorter, there is a reason. "We've increased the number of shoppers inside the Coop from 41 to 45," said Herpel. "We will continue to take stock and see if we can increase the number some more. It will help with the bottom line."

Herpel fielded a handful of member questions: Is there any plan to maintain paid staff at the cashier stations? "The people who are paid seem to be more efficient and the lines move more quickly," said Heidi Brown. Priscilla Hayner asked if members who would like to work now, in the mornings, can try their hand at any job besides receiving. "It is clear you have to be able to lift 50 pounds," she said. "It seems you can't help if you aren't prepared to do heavy lifting." Susan Jaffe wanted to know if work shifts could be two rather than three hours "in order to minimize potential exposure." Herpel returned to the screen and offered answers. Laws prohibit the Coop from mixing paid and member staff, so we will return to all-unpaid workers. She explained that early morning work slots are dedicated to truck unloading, but clarified that most of the work does not involve lifting 50 pounds. Shorter shifts would mean more exposure for staff members, so two-hour shifts are unlikely.

Agenda Committee

Agenda Committee member Kate Spota came forward to shed light on what her committee does, and how meeting agenda items are introduced. The seven-member committee meets once a month to review submissions. They consider time constraints, urgency, redundancy (often editing a few similar

Member requests into one agenda item). There are also mandatory agenda items, such as the presentation of candidates for board positions. "Personal preferences do not come into play," she said. If members have suggestions for agenda items, they are asked to email them to: pscfac@gmail.com. Member Lisa G. asked if pending suggestions could be visible to the Member public. Spota said that she liked that suggestion, and would bring it up with her committee at their next meeting.

Hearing Officer Vote

Jonathan Fox, a candidate for the Hearing Committee, introduced himself. A tenants' rights lawyer who works at the nonprofit New York Legal Assistance Group, Fox has been a Coop member since 2005. "I am very excited to be able to use my legal skills in the service of the Coop," he said, and made a commitment to adhere to proper procedures and protocols. Member Rachel Porter beamed in with a provocative question: "I don't think the General Meeting does a good job of assessing the power that we give committees," she said. "Going forward I want people to be grilled a little more and I want people to get limitations. I'm sure you do a great job advocating for tenants but I'm not sure how it aligns with Coop values. How open would you be about lessening the power?" Fox agreed that there is "a lot to be said for term limits," but said it was premature to make an official statement. A member of the Hearing Committee chimed in to say that members are voted in for three-year terms. Fox was voted in, 60-2.

Board of Directors Candidates

A quartet of Board of Director hopefuls introduced themselves. "Working the Coop shift is one of the more fulfilling parts of my month," said Viren Mehta. "Being at the Coop grounds me." He shared that he is concerned about participation in General Meetings, which suffer "tiny participation" of "usually between 200 to 500 members out of 15000 members" and are marked by the exploration of "ad hoc ideas." Mehta asked, "Can a more holistic involvement of members lead to a Coop journey to better prepare for the unexpected, such as the pandemic?"

Another candidate, Tomek Miernowski, shared that he is driven by a sense of fascination and awe. "What motivated me on moving forward [with entering the race] is the general joy I get out of being part of my community," he said. "I love the Coop—I go almost every day." While he does not have a platform, per se, he said he brings an open mind. "I'm generally interested in what systemic change means in the different spheres of our life," he said. "I want to learn about the system and bring that to other communities and

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

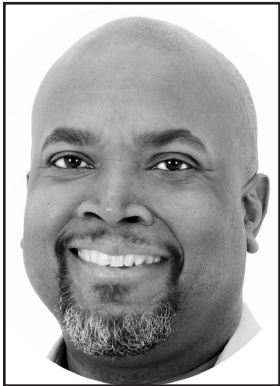
Candidates for Board of Directors of the Park Slope Food Coop, Inc.

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

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organizations. I'm interested in it in an almost theoretical way and I want to learn how it works on a practical level."

The only woman candidate, Shayna Moliver, started off by expressing her love of the Coop. "I love grocery stores the way a lot of people love pets, she said. "I drive my wife crazy because every time we pass the Coop, I drag her in, inevitably." She rolled out her bona fides: She grew up in a family where food coops and health food stores were important. As a child, she made a

commercial about healthy eating and recycling that aired on public access television. Her first job was working on a farm, and she currently volunteers at a soup kitchen on the Upper West Side. "I see the role of being on the Coop's board as a way to help the voices be heard," she said. "My personal views aren't the ones that matter. It's the membership's voice and vote."

The final candidate to speak was Tim Hospodar, who has been a member for a decade and has worked a panoply of shifts. He made an entertaining slide featuring photographs of himself and his family and fun facts ("favor-

ite bulk item: coffee #6000," favorite impulse buy: fine and raw chocolate").

Note that there is a fifth candidate, Frank Bradshaw, who was not present at the meeting.

The tone took a turn for the more serious when a member named Mitzie addressed the candidates, sharing that she had considered entering the race but was wary of adding to bad optics. "My understanding was they were looking for younger and diverse candidates," said Mitzie, who is white. "My worry, to be quite frank, is to be left with a committee of white middle aged men. I hope that this is a consid-

eration." She added that it was important that the candidates understand that board members are not activists, and their job is to reflect the needs and desires of the member body.

Hospodar, in response, said that he had been hesitant to "self-nominate as a white male cisgender middle aged member who's only been at the Coop for 10 years." He already reached out to the Board of Directors and asked about the makeup of the remaining board members, but did not get answers. "I did not want to run if there were three remaining just like me. We

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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. ■

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can all agree here it would be best to have some diverse representation of the Park Slope Food Coop."

Rachel Porter, the member who had challenged Fox earlier in the evening, was back with another question: "What would you do if the vote were against your personal beliefs?" She asked. "I appreciate there is not an activist board but there is nothing to prevent that if we had board members who are activists."

Mehta returned to his message of building on the Coop's beautiful foundation. "We will honor the majority but I hope the membership at large thinks about how we can engage a broader membership, so when the votes are close, we will have the satisfaction of knowing we are representing the members as closely as possible." Tomek Miernowski added, "I'm not applying for this position to have an activist position; I'm interested in how the Coop works."

Rachel Asher, one of the outgoing board members, came on the line and shared that in the past year, the board has been working overtime, often meeting every week. She was curious to hear what the candidates made of this new normal, and what they thought the board's role should be. It was a tricky question, and candidates answered carefully. "Survival of the enterprise is the most important responsibility," Mehta said. "There will be exceptional situations and we need to be prepared for that." Miernowski suggested that if separate meetings are necessary, they should be open to the general public. "A weekly coffee could be good if it increases communication," he shared. "If there's a weekly coffee, why not open it to everybody? The idea of an official meeting of the board that's not accessible to the membership doesn't, to me, align with

what I understand the board's purpose to be." Democracy and Transparency

Just as the meeting was wrapping up, a thought-provoking moment came, via a call from member Ben Esner. He was less interested in hearing how the candidates' views would serve the Coop than calling into question the Coop's longstanding system. "Everyone keeps referring to the Coop's democratic process, but at best it's undemocratic, at worst it's anti-democratic, and at really, really worst it's the tyranny of minority," he said, laying out how thin General Meeting attendance undermines the Coop's democratic values, with only a fraction of citizens available to attend and to vote on pressing issues. "There's a reason the New England town hall went the way of the horse and buggy," he added. "Can candidates please defend this system from any kind of perspective that's ideological or intellectual?" The candidates all agreed that the status quo can and should be improved upon. "You are right," said Miernowski. "A few hundred people are deemed to be the temple of democracy." Mehta suggested that technology might offer solutions. Holtz jumped in and pointed out that he has heard for years that members would like to be able to vote without attending meetings or listening to the discussion in full. Tanya responded that there is inherent danger to that line of thinking, allowing only those with a certain level of education to vote, and reminded attendees that not everybody who attends a meeting is fully engaged.

Moments before the meeting wrapped up, member Kristian Nammack, whose job involves working with organizations on board development, shared that he is unable to find information about the board on the Coop's website. "What are the skills on the board, what are the demographics?" Board members show up to General Meetings, but their bios are not a part

of the website. "Why not?" Nammack's words hung in the air.

The board election will take place

at the next meeting, on June 29, just in time for back-to-work season. Most members vote by proxy. ■

PSFC APR 2021 GENERAL MEETING Tuesday, April 27, 7:00 p.m.

- Meeting presented on Zoom. You must register for the General Meeting to receive the Zoom invite: <https://www.foodcoop.com/gmsignup/>
- You must be a Park Slope Food Coop member to attend.
- Times in parentheses are suggestions. The Chair has the discretion to change the order of the agenda or the time allotted to each item.

I. Meeting Warm-up and Chair Committee Introduction (7:00-7:15)

II. Open Forum (7:15-7:30)

Members will have up to one minute to briefly present questions regarding the operation of the Coop. Appropriate staff or committee members may respond and a brief follow-up may be taken.

III. Treasurer Report (7:30-7:45)

IV. General Coordinators' Reports (7:45-8:00)

V. AGENDA (8:00 - 9:15)

Item 1: Dispute Resolution Committee Election (10 minutes)

Election: One new member will be presented for election to the Dispute Resolution Committee.

Item 2: Proposal to Approve the Hudson Valley Farm Coop (60 minutes)

Item Sponsor: Jonathan Farber

Proposal: 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 community. **The PSFC will not own or operate the new HVFC, or any individual farms, or assume liability for this separate cooperative corporation. The PSFC will not be obligated to enter into any purchasing or other agreements with the HVFC.**

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 combines activism and entrepreneurship and leverages the power of the PSFC to have a positive impact on climate change and our food system. **The proposal includes a provision for the PSFC to invest up to \$10,000 in shares if the HVFC venture launches, at the discretion of the committee.**

How will members be selected?

The General Manager of the PSFC, the proposal sponsor Jonathan Farber, 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.

Will members receive work credit?

Yes. Members will work a minimum of 2.75 hours per four weeks and have a regularly scheduled monthly meeting.

How will decisions be made?

Committee decisions will be made by simple majority votes. Minimum quorum for votes is 2/3 of committee members present.

What is the timeline?

The HVFC is expected to begin operating within one year of approval by the GM.

How will the committee inform members of their progress?

The HVFC will present to the GM during the time regularly allocated for committee reports.

VI. Board of Directors Meeting (9:15)