BOARD CANDIDATES: WHO THEY ARE AND WHY THEY'RE RUNNING

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Illustration by John Donohue

First, some background on the Coop's Board:

The Park Slope Food Coop Board of Directors plays a crucial role in running the Coop. The board makes its decisions based on the advice of members who attend the monthly General Meeting. There are five seats on this board, and each term lasts three years. Members submit their applications to run for open seats in March each year and candidate statements are published in the *Linewaiters' Gazette.* Nominees will have the opportunity to introduce themselves at the March 26 General Meeting. All members can start voting online via a Coop-wide email that will go out in late May, and results will be announced at the Annual Meeting on June 25.

This year there are nine candidates for two open seats. Here are the 2024 candidates and their statements (in alphabetical order):

RICHARD ALVAREZ



I was a high school math teacher in the L.A. area for 12 years and am now aged 77 and retired. I am healthy and enjoy my membership in PSFC. I live in Brooklyn in convenient walking distance to the Coop or by subway or bicycle.

I have a BS degree (Duke University, 1967) and an MBA from U. Penn (Wharton) in 1971.

I think I could bring something positive to the PSFC Board and would certainly enjoy the association with the other Board members helping to keep the Coop the great place that it is.

TESS BROWN-LAVOIE



My name is Tess Brown-Lavoie and I’m running for the Board of the Park Slope Food

Coop. I love the Coop, and am eager to lend my background in agriculture, land justice, food policy and nonprofit management to Coop governance. Before I started teaching at Pratt, I was a farmer and community organizer for ten years, mostly in Providence, RI. My relationship with land and food still undergirds my writing and teaching.

As a farmer, I got involved with many farm advocacy and food policy groups. I ran the Young Farmer Network (YFN), which coordinated peer-to-peer learning for young and new farmers in Southeastern New England. YFN also initiated a Justice and Agriculture Working Group to study racial inequality in food and agriculture, and organize land-based mutual aid in the region.

Most of my past board experience is in agricultural policy. Most significantly, I served as a board member of the National Young Farmers Coalition from 2012-2020 (I was President from 2017-2020). I also served as the sole urban farmer on the board of the New England Farmers Union, and the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. These bodies enabled collaboration between individuals and institutions with drastically different food systems perspectives: large- and small-scale farmers, investments in organics and conventional agriculture, reps from food banks and fisheries, land conservation, state Departments of Ag and many more.

When I moved back to New York in 2019, I joined the Coop immediately (long-time guest, first-time shopper). I'm still looking for a community garden plot, so I see the Park Slope Food Coop as one of my primary investments in an ethical food system, and I am eager to contribute my perspective as a former farmer and farm-organizer to the board. Our food system is intrinsically imbedded in cultural, political and ecological concerns, and I value how co-ops encourage consumer buy-in, and prioritize ethical purchasing. We are lucky to have access to such good, local food, and to have the opportunity to consider how we eat and shop. I am indebted to the leadership that has envisioned this venue for food system engagement and empowerment, and look forward to contributing more.

Around 2008, I started farming at Eagle Street Rooftop Farm in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. I was an undergraduate literature student at NYU, and wanted to supplement academic study with more embodied knowledge around colonial histories of this land, alternatives to industrial food production and cycles of energy more broadly. In college I would bike from Windsor Terrace to Greenpoint with a bag full of frozen compost in my backpack, initiating what has been a lifelong commitment to pursuing the long route toward ethical investments in my food system. As a farm apprentice (in Brooklyn, Providence and Scotland) between 2008 and 2011, I exhausted myself in the dirt and hot sun, and was compensated with a bag of the most delicious vegetables I'd ever eaten. It was a stunning, simple logic. The alchemical directness of this system—in which I gave my energy to the land in sweat and muscle, and it gave energy back in an abundance of color, taste and nutrition—really touched me.

In 2011, I started Sidewalk Ends Farm in Providence, RI with my sisters. We grew food in abandoned lots in Providence for a 12-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Participation in the Little City Growers Cooperative enabled our small business to access restaurant sales, which were crucial to starting our business. This was one of my first experiences as a co-op member, and extended my sense of what is possible through collaboration. By 2019, Sidewalk Ends cultivated two acres of chemical-free vegetables for a 60-member CSA, sold at farmers markets and to local restaurants through Little City and ran educational programs for young people at the farm.

I made so little money as a farmer, but ate so well. I traded arugula for oysters, and collected compost scraps from the fruit trucks on my bike cart. Our vegetables tasted better as the soil quality improved. Through changes such as this, I became more sensitive to my environment, and the dynamics that produce conditions that make it more or less possible for plants, food systems, farm workers and food economies to thrive. I learned about the history of the land, indigenous and contemporary stewardship practices, soil ecology and the cultural prism of agrarian values. In New York, these values are largely expressed through my participation in PSFC. I look forward to applying my professional and personal experiences in food ecosystems to our coop.

JULIEANN BUZZANCA



My name is JulieAnn Buzzanca, I have been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop for a few years and am very interested in getting involved beyond my shifts. I really enjoy the diversity of products offered as well as having the confidence that the products are well sourced and well priced. I have worked on cashier shifts and stocking shifts where I have observed pricing models, restocking trends and the average price points for items that consumers tend to buy at accelerated rates. After working these shifts, I am interested in getting more involved in financial performance measures such as month to month stock purchases versus sales analysis, detailed deep dive in stocked perishable items monthly margin of waste, as well as nonperishable items rate of restock.

I am a CPA with over 10 years of experience in audit and internal accounting. I currently work at United Way of New York City as an associate VP of accounting and finance. Prior to this role I was the controller and acting CFO of Damian Family Care Centers, a group of 15 Federally Qualified Health Centers located throughout New York. I have extensive experience in financial statement preparation and analysis of financial data. I have developed a professional skill set in comparatively reviewing financial data, analyzing historical trends and enhancing efficiencies to eliminate organizational waste. I also have extensive knowledge of GAAP accounting and remain up to date with all new accounting standards by regularly attending continuing education courses as well serving as an adjunct professor at DeVry University.

I consider the Park Slope Food Coop as one of the culturally enriching cornerstones of the community I reside in permanently. Every time I have worked a shift and/or shopped in the Coop, the sense of community is overwhelmingly present. As a cashier I have had countless conversations with shoppers about the items they are purchasing and how they plan to prepare the food. As a shopper I have found myself walking through the aisles and picking up items I am unfamiliar with but eager to try. I have a great appreciation for the service the Park Slope Food Coop offers. I believe combining my passion for the organization as well as my passion and skill sets in accounting and finance can be a great asset to the Food Coop Board of Directors.

AVERY HOUSER



Hi, I’m Avery Houser. I joined the Coop in early 2017 to comply with Coop rules in light of a new romantic tryst. I had just started dating my then-housemate, and the development meant we’d be sharing food—suddenly, a household! Now, seven years and many Coop roles later, my romance has endured (we’re married) and I’m ready to deepen my commitment to this grocery store by joining the board. I believe in the importance of the board to represent the will of the members’ democratic decisions

while considering the most responsible financial and legal interest of the Coop. To me, board membership would be an opportunity to serve my cherished Coop community, as well as to apply the board-literacy I've gathered from launching and selling a beverage business.

In 2019 I started an all-natural hard seltzer company called Half Past that aimed to produce unexpected flavors, like a carrot margarita with fenugreek, or grapefruit and cardamom with sea salt. The Coop was where I found flavor inspiration and sourced many of the ingredients for batch upon batch of test recipes. More relevant here though, starting a beverage business meant I learned to navigate legal complexities and gray areas of things like state-by-state permitting, online alcohol sales and packaging labels that had to comply with standards set by both the FDA and the TTB (Tax and Trade Bureau). It came with the weight of financial responsibility to my investors and employees. In early 2023, after extensive strategizing and searching with the help of our own board, we sold the company to another drinks business. The process required, first and foremost, determining the best course of action for the business, which meant making hard and sometimes painful decisions. The most important thing for me during that time was to consider the wellbeing of everyone involved as much as possible in every choice and communication while steering forward.

Back to 2017—within a few months of joining the Coop, I transitioned from bright-eyed recruit to hardened squad leader when my receiving squad leader retired and no one else wanted to do the job. I loved the sense of community and the education that came with the role. At the time, the receiving squad was responsible for many aspects of closing the store. The mad rush to clean bread baskets, buff the aisles, and bail cardboard to get everyone home created a kind of frenzied team energy. The role afforded me a wider view of the functioning of the store; the mechanics work so well not because they are perfectly orchestrated, but because we have collectively grown into them and refined them together over the years. The beautiful way that the Coop functions is through a mixture of highly intentional design and people figuring out how to operate within it. I loved sitting between the team and the coordinators to shepherd items through their journey from basement shelves to the shopping floor to

bailed boxes.

Since member labor returned in 2021, I mostly do receiving but the new system has provided opportunities to work repair shifts that include disassembling fans in basement walk-ins, dusting rafters high above the office, fishing out tools from the roof shed; to walk carts and meet other members; to sometimes serve as a squad leader when needed. It’s fun to see my coordinator friends from the time before the pandemic and reminisce about the relative chaos we had to manage then. My many experiences interacting with the Coop would deeply inform and enrich my board service.

In the past seven years of romance, beverage businessing, and Coop membership I’ve learned over and over again how one of the most critical components of a successful ongoing relationship is the ability to conceive of and move towards a shared dream. At risk of overly belaboring this metaphor, I so appreciate how the organization of the Coop is a manifestation of the shared will and dreams of its members. It would be an honor to serve as a steward of this shared imagination for the future.

RAMON MAISLEN



My name is Ramon Maislen and I've been a Coop member for almost 13 years. Like many of you, my relationship to the Coop is profound but not without its ups and downs. When I first joined, I struggled to do my shifts and eventually was required to switch to the late-night shopping squad. Once I joined this squad I truly fell in love with the Coop. Each month we would meet and have a great time catching up regarding what had happened in our lives over the past month. When our squad leader retired, he asked if any of us would take over as squad leader. After surveying the room and realizing that nobody wanted to step up, I volunteered. I wasn't willing to let the magic of our squad potentially be changed.

As squad leader I made sure that we never stood around looking at the clock at the end, if we'd finished our work before 11pm then everyone got to go home early. My co-squad leader and I would need to bring the cash to the bank and lock up the Coop, so we never got to go home early. But this was a small price to pay to maintain our squad comradery. I also took it upon myself to make a new playlist for every shift and I tried to be as thematic as possible (think Halloween and other holidays). Sadly, the pandemic put an abrupt end to our shopping squad. Since then, I've gotten to do numerous jobs throughout the Coop and gotten to know even more of the staff and members. Despite my enjoying stocking, receiving, lifting, etc. I think I'm ready to take a more active role in the Coop again.

Well, that's quite the long introduction without even getting to the point. So, why should you vote for me to be on the Board of Directors? You should vote for me because I enjoy working amicably with those around me and I truly love the Coop and want it to continue to thrive and be a model for other coops around the country. Working in the field of construction within NYC has forced me to navigate a diverse set of personalities from irate contractors to stubborn design professionals (although for the most part both the construction teams and design professionals have always been lovely). I try to bring a positive and professional demeanor to every setting that I am a part of, and I would continue to do that within the Coop setting. At work I am heavily involved in risk mitigation and review financial and legal documents daily. Therefore, I think that I'll be able to bring my professional experience to bear in a positive

way to help the Coop.

The Coop is an amazing microcosm of NYC and the world at large and I would be honored to be a part of helping to ensure that the Coop continues in its mission and only goes from strength to strength as it embarks upon its next 50 years.

JIMMY ROYSTON



Greetings! My name is Jimmy Royston, and I have been a Park Slope Food Coop member for several years, since I moved a block away on Union Street. Over that time, I've grown increasingly invested in the role that the PSFC plays in cultivating my sense of rootedness in this neighborhood—and I'm excited at the prospect of dedicating more of my time, talents and passion to this organization, and the broader community we serve.

In my professional life, I'm a partner at a large global consulting firm, where I have spent the past 15 years working with food, beverage and home and personal care brands both large and small on their growth pursuits. Many of the brands we all stock during our shifts—or call for on the intercom during our shops—are among those I work with. In this role, I spend my time advising executives across a wide array of topics—by listening to their thinking, bridging divides within their teams, mapping out the impacts of different choices on their many stakeholders and bringing my own objective perspective to the decisions we're making.

Not only has this work afforded me a unique vantage point within the food industry to understand how the "sausage is made" (and consequently, how it is bought, sold, packaged, marketed and shelved)—but also a sharp appreciation of the many food inequities that make the Coop so essential, particularly in our current environment of rampant food price inflation. I believe that my deep expertise in the sector would be of service to the Coop's stewardship, and more importantly, to our continued efforts to bring healthful, affordable and culturally significant foods to our community.

In my Coop life, my preferred shifts are our much sought-after checkout and cart-walking shifts that allow me to meet and get to know my fellow members. My partner Adam prefers to dedicate his Coop time to CHiPS Soup Kitchen shifts just down the hill. Both of us deeply value the sense of community and service that comes from being a part of the Coop—walking through the Coop's sliding door is a palpable sensation for us both, and I inherently leave my shifts feeling more connected, more optimistic and more inspired to be in service of something larger than myself. It also feels particularly meaningful in today's society and economy to actively engage in a more

collectivist, participative approach to urban living.

The Coop has faced many challenges over the past few years that required bold decisiveness in the face of unclear information and divergent opinions across the membership. More of these challenges will certainly arise moving forward. As a representative on your Board of Directors, I would aim to bring the best of my Coop passion and professional expertise to serve you all—listening to and representing the democratic will of our membership community; and bringing my business experience to ensure both the continued financial success and community impact of the Coop.

Despite its storied history, the Coop continues to be both an experiment and a remarkable lighthouse around how we can reshape the ways we feed and serve our communities—puns only *slightly* intended. It would be a deep honor to dedicate my time and experience to ensuring our remarkable work continues.

I look forward to engaging with you at the March General Meeting, and thank you for your consideration!

SONDRA SHAIEVITZ



When I was considering which Brooklyn neighborhood to move to 30 years ago, the choice was easy. The Food Coop drew me to Park Slope. I had wanted to become a member since moving to Brooklyn years before and was so happy to finally join this amazing place. I treasure the Coop—the wonderful healthy groceries, glorious produce and fantastic prices. But what I value most is our community. To me, the Coop is an enclave of kindness, cooperation and shared values. The Coop feels like home.

The Coop plays a crucial role as a shining example of cooperation and self-governance in an ever cynical, increasingly divided society. In recent years, I have felt a strong pull to support this somewhat vulnerable and important ecosystem in a more direct and impactful way. I was inspired by the heroic efforts of the Board of Directors to keep us afloat during the pandemic. I will never forget when, during our first Zoom membership meeting, the Chairperson of the board was moved to tears when describing the hard work and dedication of the entire board to get us through that difficult and very precarious time. I was truly moved.

As a former corporate attorney who switched careers, I have enjoyed a thriving practice as an energy healer and teacher for over 22 years. I feel the intellectual, analytical and problem-solving demands of corporate law, combined with the compassion, patience and empathy developed as a healer would be a beneficial addition to our Coop board of directors. I see the board as the members' voice and source of support. Accordingly, as a board member I would always vote to uphold the members' decisions at our meetings.

I would welcome the opportunity to serve the Coop and the membership in a more meaningful and direct way, and would be very honored to serve on the board of directors if elected. Thank you.

KEYIAN VAFAI



My name is Keyian Vafai and I'm running to be your Park Slope Food Coop board member. I love our Coop because it is a bastion for community and for democracy in New York City. Of course I love the food, too. It's one of the only places in the city where I can get locally-sourced and organic food, rare ethnic specialties and weird mushrooms I've never seen before— all at affordable prices. But I see the carefully-sourced and diverse selection of food we carry as a blueprint for communities to take back our urban spaces. In a "normal" grocery store, customers don't know each other, and workers are invisible and not well rewarded. It's anonymous and lonely. At the Coop, everyone has buy-in, and as a consequence we have a home and community that we all contribute to every time we step through the door.

I understand that building community takes hard work. I've worked as a field organizer for State Senator Julia Salazar's successful 2018 campaign, and as a labor organiz-

er in the Teamsters Union. My current job is a web developer for a local magazine, but I still volunteer my time to community and labor organizing projects.

I love talking to people and finding common ground, what we can learn from one another and discovering what we can create collectively. As a Coop board member, I will focus on finding ways to make member participation in our community wider and deeper. As a younger newer member, I have fresh experience with joining the Coop community and a strong desire to make sure every new member can be welcomed into our community and find ways to contribute. Before I joined, I thought the Coop was just a place for cheap and interesting groceries. I quickly learned it was much more than that. My goal is to make sure all members can contribute to our definition as a collective—even if it's just expanding our sashimi selection.

I know we can make the Coop better. I've learned from longer-term members that the Coop has always been improving community engagement. The Coop didn't just become a community establishment overnight. From the start, members have come together to propose agenda items, campaign and vote to grow and change the Coop for the better.

We know the Coop couldn't even exist without our contributions and labor as members, and accordingly the more stake we have in how our sausage (pork, beef, turkey, chicken, tofu or rabbit) gets made, the better our Coop can be. As a board member, expanding this democracy would be my highest priority.

RALPH YOZZO



My name is Ralph Yozzo and I'd like to contribute to the Coop by serving the members as a member of the Board of Directors.

First, I'd like to thank the Coop founders and members for the now five decades of service to the community.

I've been a member for more than two of those decades. I've served as a General Meeting crew shift member and attended many, many General Meetings.

As the Coop bylaws state, the GM is “devoted to receiving the advice of the members.”

Over 20 years, I’ve served in many phases of the food service business thanks to the Coop. From checkout, to walker, to office, to lifting—I have to say that walking is my favorite.

As a director I would mostly listen to the membership and it would be my honor to serve. I would also promise to only serve one term to give everyone a chance.