

## TIMOTHY HOSPODAR: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

March 8, 2022



In October 2020, when our Coop introduced a new phase of member labor, we met with an online scheduler deployed to support it. I showed up on that very first day to contribute in a way different than I had ever worked before—on a truck-unloading shift. Despite advance scheduling, a hiccup in the system prohibited me from working that first morning. And so, I showed up again on the very next morning, as scheduled,

and I worked on the sidewalk at 5:30 AM. I was surprised to like the shift, as there was a reason that I had never tried the shift before, counter to my history of working a variety of FTOP shifts from CHIPS to childcare to cashiering. Well, here's an inconsequential fact about me: I greatly detest predawn roll calls, not to mention my distaste for cold outdoor activities in general. Be that as it may, I made truck-unloading shifts a weekly practice and showed up 27 times across the eight months before the broader phase of member labor began in July 2021.

There's an analogy here as it relates to one thing fatherhood helped me learn. Early morning hours, before the babe awakens, are sometimes the only chance to devote one's free time to things that matter most. The Coop—as a market and as a community—has mattered so much to me, since joining twelve years ago and certainly in the last two. And its future, following these complicated times, is of grave importance. While my optimism helps me trust that survival is a given, I expect that our future state features exciting changes. I'd like to pledge my work shift to the board and our membership at large, because I understand the General Meeting (as a whole) comprises the stewardship of change.

If granted the opportunity to serve our community in this role, I commit to employing several fair tactics I have learned in other roles. In the effort to mitigate bias, I'll exercise sensitive feedback tools of active listening, to ensure that the board clarifies and validates as appropriate in addition to echoing the majority message. I'll help the board identify any unsatisfied concerns to acknowledge disagreement around consensus. My prior work as a facilitator in decision-making sessions for executives has prepared me to promote a diversity of voices while encouraging dissenting opinions be taken into consideration. I respect that any upcoming changes can only result from an array of debate, and I am equipped to support the process. The timing is right, I believe, for me to support the Coop in this capacity.

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## JESSE ROSENFELD: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

March 8, 2022



A member since 2004, I have worked as cashier, cheese and olive bagger, FTOP stock boy, babysitter and in 2nd floor guest registration. My paid profession is that of Addictions Counselor on the Lower East Side. My free time has been galvanized by the 2016 elections; I have joined Get Organized Brooklyn and regularly do phonebanking to support voter-expansion drives.

Demonstrably supporting our cooperative goals of shared success, I have brought products to our shelves and successfully brought a proposal to the approval stage at our GM. Pre-pandemic, my work slot was Secretary for the General Meeting and I took the minutes every month. Our meetings are one special set of gears in the whole enterprise, and I was proud to have been re-elected yearly for eight years straight. I consider myself very familiar with the GM and AM processes.

I love it at the Coop. I meet people here I wouldn't usually encounter and discuss things I wouldn't ever know about. I shop every couple of days because of its warm familiarity, and I like being part of an organization that is a standard-bearer for food and environmental justice. The Coop is my chosen community and I feel a part of it every day when I walk down 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, seeing fellow members on their way to and from the store.

With a proven record of support for the health of our enterprise, I am running for the Board of Directors because I see the Coop as a business first. As such, the Board is obligated to remain alert to the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the Coop rather than maintain advocacy for any particular issue. Members at the coming election will likely ask a version of, "How will you improve the Coop as a member of the Board?" My answer will be, "There is nothing that a Board member should do outside of taking the advice of the membership on how to vote for proposals, which they have always done."

For any proposal that is problematic, I will ask myself the same questions as any Board member: Will a proposal ratified by the General Meeting put the financial and legal health of the Coop at risk? Does the proposal violate the spirit and letter of the Coop's own by-laws or NYS articles of incorporation, and our own mission statement?

Thank you and I look forward to your vote. ■



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## IMANI Q'RYN: BOARD CANDIDATE STATMENT

March 8, 2022



I was elected to the Board of Directors nearly 17 years ago and have continuously served in this capacity. I have served on the board longer than any other elected

member. I am also a member of the chair committee and have been so throughout my service on the Board.

“Our Board of Directors is not a typical Board. It was required by state law that the Coop have a Board of Directors. As a co-operative we liked our town hall style of governance, that every member has a say, every member has a vote. We wanted to continue that tradition. The Coop’s attorney at that time came up with the idea that the Board should take the advice of the members on all subjects as a means of limiting the powers of the Board. It was written into our By-Laws; most of the Board Members that we’ve had since the Board was instituted decades ago have accepted this policy.”

“I take the mandate to trust the membership and take their advice as a sacred duty. It’s not my opinion, or my position on an issue that is important. It is vital that I respect and trust the voice of the membership. The membership guides my vote.”

I wrote those words three years ago in my bid for candidacy letter. I take the opportunity to state that again. These last three years have been the most challenging for me as a Board Member and most dangerous for our form of governance and possibly the Coop in General. We had to do things as a Board that we had never done. We never meet outside of the General Meeting. During the beginning of COVID so much changed for the Coop and we were in uncharted territory. We got advice from our general Counsel. We not only had to meet but we did so every week for hours! It was exhausting. We wanted the membership to have their voice, to weigh in and decide the direction that we would go as a co-operative. It is in crisis times like those that we could have lost what we had worked over 50 years to protect.

I was so proud and honored to be with that group of Board members: Bill P, Allen Z., Rachel A., Sukey T. and Joe H. We went through that fire and kept our word, our promise to the membership.

I ask for your vote one last time. I hope that more members will step up and choose

to participate in our form of governance. It's easier now to come to our meetings, they are on zoom! All the Coop laws are made here. I also hope that those that really understand our kind of Board will consider running next time we have an opening.

I love the Coop and hope that it exists for generations to come!

Imani Q'ryn

March 1, 2022

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GEORGE SARAH OLKEN: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

March 8, 2022





I knew the Park Slope Food Coop was magical when I saw the red sign-in books at La Louve Coopérative in Paris, which is not only built on our model but copied our store down to the color of the binders. There is a special pleasure in our rituals: calling out over the intercom “What are those little mushrooms in miso soup?” (Enoki); the line painted on the backyard wall to indicate how high to stack compost buckets; walking a member and their cart up Seventh Ave and learning how they came to New York in the Sixties or last month. The Coop is my happy place, I’ve made friends there, I run



into friends there, I want it to flourish.

I would like to join the Coop Board of Directors to be a voice for that flourishing. I believe board members, like coordinators and committee members, can use their position to influence discussions and decision-making in a positive direction, especially because the board is our one elected leadership body. With a mandate from the membership, I will use this position to emphasize working together and building community.

Recently the Coop has had to make difficult decisions: How to run the virtual GM? How to re-organize member labor? How to support members struggling from the pandemic? There is no abstract entity “The Coop” to address these questions. WE must address them through cooperation as members.

We need to re-educate ourselves about how our Coop functions and re-imagine our role within it. As we become more reliant on technology (goodbye red binders), we must find ways to make that technology accessible so that every member can learn how it operates. As our finances fluctuate due to unforeseen crises—the next pandemic or future supply chain breakdowns—members need to take an active role in the decisions of how we react.

This is work I’ve tried to do on an individual level as a squad leader, by bringing items to the GM, by joining with members of the unofficial Coop Study Group, and by speaking with staff and community elders: What was the Coop like before we owned the building? How do we resolve disputes? How do you pick the perfect melon?

Since joining in 2007, I’ve worked on the shopping floor, in the basement, and in the office. In 2018, I became a shopping squad leader. I was heartbroken when the pandemic severed the relationships with my fellow squad members and with the members of the Coop staff who supported us. These relationships are as important as the smooth operation of our grocery store—they are what make the Coop what it is! I believe the GM and management should be guided by the goal of fostering greater con-

nection among cooperators.

Outside the Coop, I drive the Bookmobile for Brooklyn Public Library, bringing library service to communities all over the borough. I live just south of Prospect Park with my partner Jenny and our cat Tahini (who never does her work shift). I look forward to answering questions at the March 29 GM and I hope I can continue to serve the Coop as a member of the Board.

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## BRANDON WEST: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

March 8, 2022



My name is Brandon West, I have been a member since 2009, when I first moved into the neighborhood, and soon after became a squad leader for stocking and receiving. I also recently ran for City Council in the community in 2021. For a career I'm currently a labor organizer for local journalists and have worked in voting rights and organizing. I have always been very close to the Coop and its mission. It is incredibly challenging to maintain large membership led organizations. I have experienced that fact, not just as an active member of this Coop, but in other collective processes and while working

in government.

As the pandemic put an incredible strain on the Coop, and some challenging decisions were made about how to plan for the present and future, I wished I had an avenue to be more directly involved with the Coop. Not just as a way to be more directly connected in a community important to me during a time where “community” is harder to find, but also so that we can bring more member input into some of the seriously important decisions this Coop will have in the future. My goal and intention of running for this position is to mainly focus on decision making, and helping work to build participation in the general meetings, which were once much larger.

We all remember the more contentious, but better attended meetings in the past 10 years. While we have progressed a lot in this time, I think the challenge our Coop faces as being large but also democratic is critical, especially when our membership numbers have dropped in light of the pandemic, and that we are in a more vulnerable state financially as we were before it started. I also pledge to work to make sure that members are more brought into major decisions in the future and support in developing a process for how we rethink our democratic processes in the face of so much change to the Coop. Our leaders made several tough decisions quickly, and I believe the Coop is much better for it, but I think more tough questions are ahead, and there are a lot of unknowns. I think it's important to try to bring as many folks into these decisions as we can, and make more members aware of the challenges we face as a Coop.

I think our mission is strong and widely felt and believe the next few years in the City will be challenging with a shift towards living with the pandemic. What that does physically, and financially to the Coop remains to be known. Making sure that our members who are most negatively impacted, and who struggle financially, should be centered as much as possible.

In addition to this, I think the fiscal health of the Coop is incredibly important, and I will also work to make sure that the relationship between coordinators and staff is al-



ways a focus and highlighted. The Coop needs to be a great place to be a member and to work, and will use my background in conflict negotiation to help mediate any issues if they come up, and contribute to mitigating conversations if needed.

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## AMY CAO: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

March 8, 2022



Fellow members-owners, my name is Amy Cao, and I humbly submit my candidacy to the Coop's Board of Directors. My growing passion for good food—its origins, its impact, its accessibility—I owe to the Food Coop. I was drawn to the Coop for the promise of delicious, affordable food, and over the years, I find myself becoming more and more attached to the less tangible aspects of what makes our community a true collective—and how to nurture this spirit to help ensure its lasting success.

In my professional life, I am a communications strategist for nonprofits, schools, professional organizations and public and private companies. This often positions me as an advisor to executives, faculty administration, public officials, and even board directors, to help them plan for growth opportunities, manage crises and minimize risks. Previously, the City contracted me to work alongside social workers as a financial empowerment counselor. This brought me face to face with struggling New Yorkers, as I helped them navigate scarce resources in unforgiving situations.

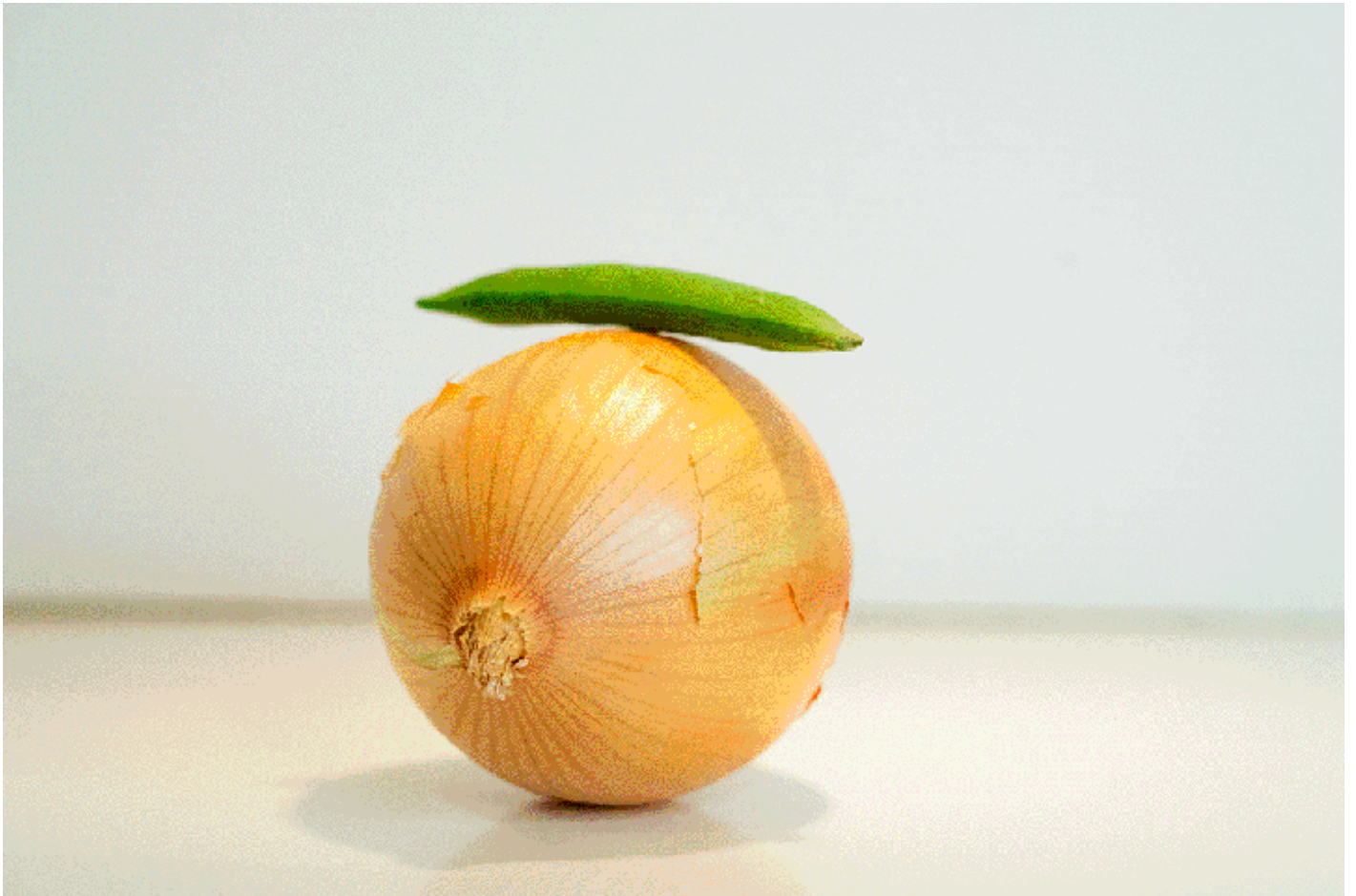
These experiences have exposed me to unique and diverse challenges at all levels of an institution. This formed an inclusionary perspective that informs my daily life. As a liaison to stakeholders at many levels, I am a good listener. I do my best to understand differing points of view, encourage dialogue to solve problems, and respond thoughtfully and decisively when the situation commands it. As a Board Member, I would do this by leaning heavily on my member community.

I believe an elected Board Member has a duty of responsibility to the membership. Over the years, I've had the privilege to speak with many of you over the course of countless shops, while stocking shelves, scanning your IDs and walking your groceries home with you. I am immensely proud of the Coop community, and I am committed to working together with you to secure its financial health and future sustainability, in service to our founding Cooperative principles. With your confidence in my ability to take your lead by heeding the advice of the membership to act in the best interest of the Coop, I hope to earn your vote.

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@FOODCOOP ON INSTAGRAM CONNECTS MEMBERS THROUGH THEIR COOKING

March 8, 2022



*Photos by Caroline Mardok*

*By Leila Darabi*

In the new Netflix series, *Inventing Anna*, a reporter assisted by several colleagues uses Instagram to piece together the social network and international movement of her subject, Anna Soroken (a.k.a., Anna Delvey). This fake heiress scammed acquaintances into paying her lavish hotel bills and to vouch for her as she applied for a \$40 million loan. In dramatized scenes, the reporters print out selfies, scouring the background for location clues and potential people to interview as they piece together Anna's world travel and luxury hotel hopping.

A deep dive into the Coop's Instagram feed tells a far more wholesome but no less intricate story. At the time of writing, @foodcoop on Instagram had more than 14,200 followers. Scrolling back through the 6,383 posts and the more than 100 highlights folders of past posts shared as stories, one can track shifts in the Coop's community



of members.

## PRE-PANDEMIC BLISS

Several years before the pandemic reached Brooklyn, the Coop's Instagram largely featured newly stocked produce and the occasional store announcement. Peppered between those posts, @foodcoop regularly reposted photos members shared of the foods they were cooking at home, showcasing the people behind the cooperative.

These posts of members' cooking showcased diverse palates and a mix of professional and amateur creations. There were personal chef Jeffrey Mason (@chefjeffreynyc)'s homemade granola bars; Megan Davidson (@brooklyndoula)'s test run of three new bundt pans; chef and teaching instructor Michelle Doll (@chefmichelledoll)'s declaration of "watermelon radishes for life"; and tuba player Matthew Cain (@matthew\_cain)'s savory tart.

Looking back now at Deb Etsten (@citychiclet)'s Meyer lemon and rosemary focaccia, posted just before the pandemic lockdown started in New York, the @foodcoop feed recalls a simpler time before trips to the Coop and sourcing of yeast, flour and specialty items required more complex planning.



PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

*Shortcut spring risotto*

## INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

After March of 2020, the Coop's Instagram posts garnered more comments. For example, Dough Ashford (@deashford)'s post celebrating his last Coop shift pre-retirement received 273 likes and only one comment on February 25, 2020. Whereas a typical post on April 7, 2020, which featured a selfie of Autumn L. (@autumng0tstamina) in line to get into the Coop, received 61 comments as members pooled intel on line lengths ("Ok in line at 2:45. Abt five down from 7th ave on President. Will update when I get to door."); safety regulations ("anyone knows if my toddler needs to wear a mask? She will probably not keep it on..."); and messages of gratitude ("thank you food coop workers!!!!").

The same period saw a shift in members' whereabouts. While Instagram continued to provide a space to peer into one another's kitchens, several of the home cooks most

reposted by @foodcoop left the city. The anonymous chef behind @clintonhilltestkitchen put their membership on pause. Nutritionist Sydney Greene (@greenehealth) moved to Colorado. Food blogger Smita (@hakunasmitata) left Brooklyn. And Kaori Goto and her family moved to her home country of Japan (@kaori\_brooklyn).

Kaori and Smita share that they both miss the Coop and enjoy the vicarious glimpse into produce and organic offerings they get by staying connected through Instagram. Both were generous enough to share spring recipes, and we included one further down in this article.

## TIPS FOR HOME FOOD PHOTOGRAPHERS

The account's contents are currently monitored, shared and maintained by a lone Coop member. Other Coop staff have limited involvement.

“SHOOTING IN NATURAL LIGHT IS A MUST FOR ME—I’M SOMEONE WITHOUT A LOT OF FANCY LIGHTING EQUIPMENT.”

*FOOD WRITER CATHEY ERWAY*

When contacted for comment (via Instagram direct message), the staff member who manages the Coop's Instagram account seemed to prefer remaining anonymous.

The Coop's Instagram manager did, however, offer tips for members posting photos of what they make with Coop-sourced ingredients:

- **Tag @foodcoop.** We love to share your grocery cart, your refrigerator contents, your shift, and occasionally your dinner.
- **Avoid kids.** We don't want to share other people's children, no matter how

cute they are, unless the guardian has agreed (we try not to share any pix taken without the subject's explicit consent.)

- **No self promotion.** Sometimes people try to publicize themselves through the Coop, like their fitness or nutrition business, or a cause the Coop is not explicitly signed up for. We can't do that. There's no way to do it equitably for all members, so we avoid this sort of repost altogether—unless it's directly related to the store or a co-operative endeavor that we're officially connected to, e.g., a food drive or another Coop we're helping out. Otherwise, we're not reposting it.

- **Set to public.** Your post has to be set to public for us to share it. We've had people tag us and not realize their account and posts are private, and so unshareable. So, tag us if it's a Coop thing, and make sure your post is shareable!

- **Focus.** We usually don't re-gram blurry pictures, and we tend to re-gram fewer videos than still pictures, and almost no boomerangs.

When reached by email for additional guidance, cookbook author and food writer Cathey Erway (@cathyerway) offered this advice:

“Shooting in natural light is a must for me—I'm someone without a lot of fancy lighting equipment. I like shooting backlit images of food, preferably in the morning when the sun is lighter.”





*Kaori's Chirashi-zushi*



PHOTO PROVIDED BY KAORI GOTO

## TWO SPRING RECIPES

**Recipe 1: Shortcut Spring Risotto** (full recipe)

**Recipe 2: Kaori's Chirashi-zushi** (full recipe printed below)

*3 - 4 servings*

This is a popular rice dish for Hinamatsuri or Girls' Day Celebration (March 3) in Japan. It's also commonly made for gatherings and picnics and eaten throughout the year.

*Ingredients:*

Sushi Rice

- 1.5 cups sushi rice (uncooked)
- 3 - 4 Tbs sushi vinegar (5 Tbs vinegar, 2 Tbs sugar, 2 tsp salt)
- (Optional) 2 - 4 tsp roasted white sesame seeds

Vegetables to mix in the rice:

- 3/4 cup shiitake mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup chopped carrot
- 3/4 cup chopped burdock root
- 2.5 Tbs soy sauce
- 2 Tbs sugar
- 1 Tbs Mirin or sake
- 1/4 cup water

Toppings:

- 1 cup snow peas, loosely packed
- (optional) 2 eggs + a pinch of salt
- 1 sheet of nori, cut thinly with scissors or ripped in small pieces

### *Steps*

1) Cook the vegetables with the seasonings and water until soft and flavorful. Let cool, drain the excess seasoning broth, and set aside.

2) Cook the sushi rice. (If you are cooking rice in a pot, soak the grains for 30 minutes or more and drain once. Cook with exactly the same volume of water, e.g., 1 cup of rice + 1 cup of water, at medium low heat with the lid on. Once it starts boiling, turn the heat to low, let it cook for another 2-3 minutes, turn it off and let the residual heat cook the rice thoroughly for 10-15 minutes.)

3) Blanch the snow peas in lightly salted water and cut them thinly.

4) Beat the eggs with a pinch of salt and make a few thin egg “crepes.” Slice them thinly like spaghetti.

(If you roll up the “crepes” together, it’s easy to slice them.)

5) Sprinkle the sushi vinegar on the warm cooked rice and sesame seeds. Mix thoroughly but lightly. Once well mixed, mix in the cooked vegetables.

6) Spread the snow peas and eggs on top of the rice, and it's done! Sprinkle the nori on top right before serving.

Other topping ideas: Shelled edamame, lightly salted cooked salmon pieces, sliced avocado, mayonnaise (Japanese-kind recommended) or anything else you can think of!

Enjoy!

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## INSIDE THE COOP HEARING PROCESS

March 8, 2022





By Jess Powers

*This story is the second of a two-part series on the dispute resolution process at the Coop. See also: [How the Dispute Resolution Process at the Coop Works](#).*

In the first part of this story, I reported on the rules and procedures of the dispute-resolution process and interviewed members of the Dispute Resolution Committee (DR-C). While *Gazette* reporters are assigned to cover hearings, a few high profile



“cases” and member comments at General Meetings (GM) suggest that there is murkiness about the dispute-resolution process, especially because the DRC sometimes asks the *Gazette* not to publish the story. This raises a question of the appropriate balance between respecting confidentiality and being transparent to Coop members. How much should members know about uncooperative behavior by fellow members?

When there is a grievance at the Coop due to issues such as theft of time or product or, more recently, due to lack of compliance with mask wearing, members can file complaints. Complaints are investigated by the DRC, parties and witnesses are interviewed and all stakeholders seek a resolution. At times, the process can clear up an interpersonal misunderstanding. In other cases, a letter provides a gentle warning that the behavior cannot continue because it violates Coop rules.

Of the 20 or 30 cases annually, only two or three escalate to a hearing, generally because the behavior is ongoing and not remedied by the investigation process. Hearings are scheduled by the Hearing Administration Committee, conducted by the Hearing Officer Committee, and observed by a panel of randomly selected Coop members (the Hearing Group) and a *Gazette* reporter.

The hearing is the most legalistic part of the dispute-resolution process and can result in termination of Coop membership. Out of respect for the confidentiality of the accused, the other people involved in the process can't openly comment on the proceedings. The accused person can publicly complain that the process is unfair. But unless he or she is willing to have an open hearing, the other members involved are in an untenable position because they can't speak about the case.

For these reasons, the hearing can provoke controversy. As our society examines failures in the criminal justice system and adversarial legal processes, how might the Coop re-think its own hearing system, with dual goals of preserving order and respect at the Coop and holding people accountable, with care?

“SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE WHEN PEOPLE ARE UNCOOPERATIVE. IF THERE WASN’T THIS PROCEDURE, HOW WOULD THAT HAPPEN?”

*ANDY FELDMAN, COOP MEMBER SINCE 1979*

## TRANSPARENCY AND COOP PECULIARITIES

Some members of the Hearing Officer Committee (HOC) did not respond to requests to be interviewed for this article; another responded to a few questions by email. A second HOC member commented anonymously that addressing previous cases or decisions would be “in tension” with the committee’s objectives of confidentiality and impartiality. Considering that the *Gazette* is a primary vehicle to share information with membership, this seemed like an unusual position.

At the January 2022 GM, new rules were passed to publish the names of committee members on the Coop website, to require annual or twice-a-year updates on committee activities at the GM (depending on how “essential” the committees are), and to require committee updates in the *Gazette* at least two times a year.

Andy Feldman, a professional photographer, part-time family court mediator and Coop member since 1979, volunteered to help create the initial grievance process. (I first met Feldman 15 years ago while working at a nonprofit that provided mediation services.) He recollected a GM where two Disciplinary Hearing Committee members (as it was then called) were up for re-election. One of them was unable to attend the meeting and received more votes than the candidate who was present. “The curmudgeons had a target,” he mused. In other words, people tend to lash out when a process is closed, whether intentionally or not.

## WHAT DO HEARING ADMINISTRATORS AND OFFICERS DO?

The Hearing Administration Committee (HAC) schedules the hearing and venue and

manages logistics and administration on the day of the hearing. They receive a list of 200 randomly selected Coop members and contact them by phone or text to serve on the Hearing Group. By most accounts, the role of the Hearing Officers Committee (HOC) is limited. They ensure that the hearing runs smoothly. Any Coop members who participate as witnesses only attend for the duration of their testimony. The Hearing Group—a panel of Coop members that is different every time—decides whether a member violated the rules, and it is the HOC that ultimately decides the consequences of their actions.

Dominique Bravo, an attorney and associate executive director of the Center of Race, Law and Justice at Fordham Law School, was a member of the HAC years ago and recently rejoined. She explained that at a hearing, the DRC functions as a prosecutor, presenting a case; and that the HOC, similar to judges, run the hearing. The other members of the HAC, Kathy Kadagishvili and Israella Mayeri, were elected at the February 22 GM.

Marian Hertz is a litigation lawyer on the HOC. A seasoned HOC member, her experience of more than a decade and familiarity with the written guidelines help to provide a fair hearing. She added, by email, that it's a "unique setting involving the very tiny number of Coop members who possibly are not following the rules . . . and not being 'cooperative'" in a way that is not fair to the wider Coop community. Hertz said that the HOC will confer ahead of a hearing "about how to phrase questions for the Deciding Group to determine [whether or not a particular rule or rules were violated] at the hearing."

Members of the HOC and HAC earn FTOP credit for their efforts. They work when there is an arbitration or hearing and are not part of standing committees with regularly scheduled meetings.

## HOW DOES THE HEARING PROCESS CONTINUE TO IMPROVE?

Feldman describes an iterative process that has evolved over time. He believes that

Coop members involved in the dispute resolution process try to do the right thing under difficult circumstances.

Since the process is confidential, and the hearing officers make recommendations, Coop members generally don't have full knowledge of the proceedings. The question arises: How can improvements evolve further?

Hertz stated that the "usual process of presentation . . . at a GM needs to be followed." Bravo's goal is to ensure that the process is as fair as possible. She welcomes feedback and pointed out that "we can make changes." She added that only Coop members are currently permitted to attend a hearing; an accused member cannot bring a nonmember as a character witness or for social support.

"MOTIVATIONS ARE VARIED. SOMETIMES IT'S CLEAR THAT THERE'S AN UNDERLYING PROBLEM DRIVING PEOPLE TO STEAL."

***SABINE RHYNE, FORMER GENERAL MANAGER AT THE BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP***

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AT BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

If, as Elena McCalla of the DRC mentioned in the first part of this series, the legalistic nature of the Coop's hearing process "could take a healing component," what can we learn from other coops?

At the Brattleboro Food Co-op (BFC) in Vermont, "Motivations are varied. Sometimes it's clear that there's an underlying problem driving people to steal," shared Sabine Rhyne, former General Manager at the BFC. Since the BFC, like most food coops, is open to the general public, it's a markedly different environment from the PSFC. When there is an issue with a BFC shareholder saying offensive things or threatening

an employee, for example, the BFC management sets up a meeting to discuss it.

Anyone who is banned from shopping at the BFC is generally given one more chance after a period of separation of six months to a year. An individual can then ask for readmittance and offers a verbal acknowledgment of intention to comply with the agreed-upon norms moving forward.

At the height of the opioid crisis, BFC began a collaboration with the state attorney's office and the local police department's restorative justice center to triage cases of theft and to have an alternative outside of criminal punishment. For those struggling with addiction, working through solutions such as community accountability or counseling might be a better option than being forced to lose membership. The successes of supporting people through the accountability process, though rare, "were really awesome," Rhyne adds.

## EMOTIONAL TOLL

Back at the PSFC, Bravo pointed out that most hearings have to do with theft of time or product. Generally, a hearing does not get called until a member's inappropriate or illegal behavior has persisted after multiple warnings have been issued. Bravo recalled a former member who expressed contrition after "stealing a lot of time." The consequence for an accusation of ongoing time theft is revocation of Coop membership. This can impact a household: if one member's status is revoked, nobody in that home can remain active.

"It can be overwhelming," Feldman admitted. Although he is no longer part of the dispute-resolution process, he recalls that bearing witness to "that kind of energy" was draining. "Something has to be done when people are uncooperative," he continued. "If there wasn't this procedure, how would that happen?"

A Coop hearing slated for Saturday, February 26, 2022, was canceled when the member voluntarily resigned.

*Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and eating. IG: @foodandfury*