

## @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.



*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 cooperative 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*

## 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



ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

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?"

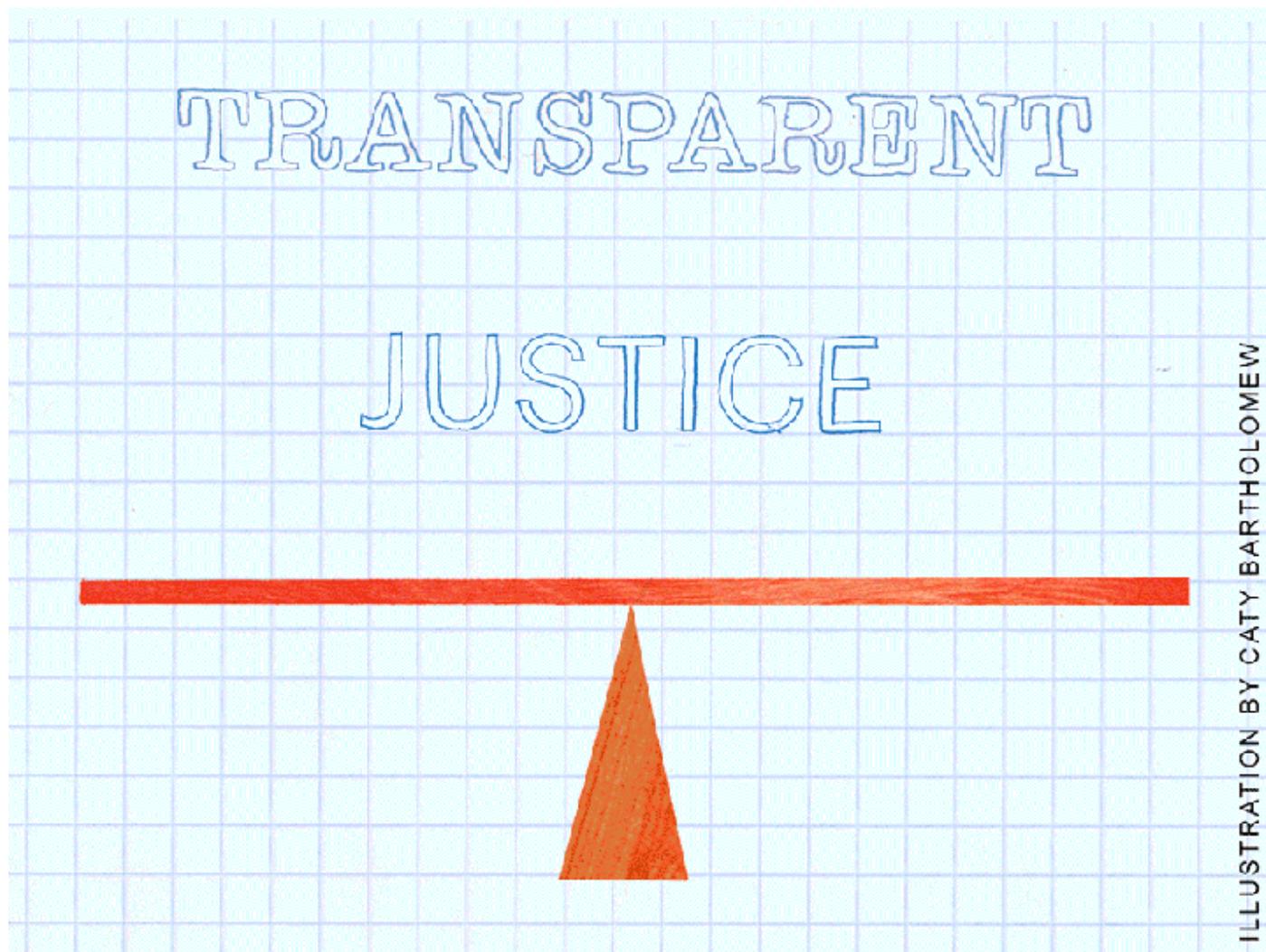
A Coop hearing slated for Saturday, February 26, 2022, was canceled when the member voluntarily resigned.

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

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## HOW THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS AT THE COOP WORKS

March 8, 2022



*By Jess Powers*

*This story is the first of a two-part series on the dispute resolution process at the Coop.*

The Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) is one of three member-worker committees involved when there is a grievance at the Coop. With so much recent attention on the failures of the U.S.'s criminal legal system, I thought it would be interesting to explore what alternatives exist or could be possible within a community like the Park Slope Food Coop. I found that DRC members are continually reflecting on the process—even though many Coop members are unaware of how the Committee works—and this piece is an attempt to bring some of that effort forward.

Simply put, the DRC's role is to review, investigate and settle complaints of member misconduct that are submitted to the Committee. When a situation warrants further action—up to and including membership termination—the Hearing Administration Committee selects 15 Coop members at random to serve as the Hearing Group to begin the process. Three members of the Hearing Officer Committee conduct the hearing procedurally. Nine members of the Hearing Group serve as the Deciding Group. A member of the DRC acts as Coop Advocate and presents the case.

These procedures do not include paid staff. Complaints about paid employees are referred to the General Coordinators (GC), while complaints about the GCs are heard by the Personnel Committee.

## ORIGINS OF THE DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

General Coordinator and founding member Joe Holtz explains that, sometime in the late 1970s, one member would come in and “yell at the top of their lungs.” People were uncomfortable, and there was no process to handle complaints. The General Meeting (GM) served as a default, and the member was invited to the GM by letter to discuss whether their membership should continue. The member did not attend and was removed from membership.

Throughout the 1980s there were rare instances of theft or gaming the system. These situations would be discussed at the GM, and, as Holtz describes: “It turned into a trial. [These discussions] dominated the meeting, and other Coop business didn't hap-

pen.” Because this part of the meeting wasn’t announced publicly beforehand, members attending the GM would be surprised and the meeting would be derailed.

“IT’S A COOP. WE FUNCTION BEST WHEN WE FUNCTION COOPERATIVELY.”

***DEB MAGOCSI, DRC COMMITTEE MEMBER***

By the early 1990s, as Coop membership approached nearly 5,000 people, someone—Holtz couldn’t remember whether it was a General Coordinator or a member—proposed a disciplinary committee. The procedures that govern how the dispute process works, the elections of the committee members involved and the rules that govern the Coop and are upheld by the DRC are all approved at the General Meeting. The “disciplinary” procedures—the committee changed its name in June 2017—were adopted in 2005, with amendments made in 2012 and 2018. Committee members serve renewable, three-year terms. The DRC can have up to 16 members and no fewer than seven, according to the charter.

## INVESTIGATIONS AND LETTERS

I interviewed four DRC members, roughly half of the committee, over Zoom: Helen Koh, Elena McCalla, Grace Cosachov Protos and Deb Magocsi. They come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds; some are newer and some are longer-term members of the Coop or the Committee. They share a common desire to be involved in the Coop at a deeper level and a commitment to a thoughtful, caring, and open process. Their careers range from academia to mediation and conflict resolution, from social work to media and filmmaking. This contrasts with the Hearing Officer Committee, they note, which is made up of individuals with legal backgrounds.

Grievances are generally either interpersonal (such as rude, racist, or sexist comments, or banging into someone with a shopping cart), procedural (disobeying Coop

rules such as parking in front of the fire department or “time theft”), or illegal (sexual harassment or product theft). In the guidelines, theft of services includes “concealing adult household members” and “failing to perform work duties in a conscientious and deliberate manner.” “Racist, sexist, homophobic or other biased conduct” falls under “extremely uncooperative conduct.” Cases of theft of product are at times prosecuted legally as well.

“THE COMMITTEE CAN’T DEFEND ITSELF.... AND THAT CAN BE FRUSTRATING AT AN INSTITUTION THAT [PEOPLE] CARE ABOUT.”

*JOE HOLTZ, GENERAL COORDINATOR*

When a grievance is filed via a complaint form available in the Membership Office, one of the DRC members is assigned to investigate. They interview both parties, any witnesses, and review video, if relevant. Committee members then discuss the observations, ask questions, and come to a consensus on how to respond. The discussions can be spirited. Cosachov Protos says that Committee members help each other to broaden their perspectives during this process: “We’ll say, ‘Did you ask this?’ It helps the person investigating.”

Most often, when a complaint is considered valid, they write a letter. These letters are kept in a file in case someone repeatedly behaves in a way that is uncooperative. It’s an “important tool because of turnover,” Koh points out. For example, members aren’t expelled for cheating on their workslot once, but if there is a pattern of stealing time, it may be escalated to a hearing. General Coordinator Ann Herpel mentioned that we’ll likely see a decrease in this issue after transitioning from the paper sign-in books during the pandemic. (Sometimes a change in our logistical systems brings about an end to certain types of infractions.)

Letters serve as a “warning” or an “admonition.” Repeat offenses or more serious

grievances can lead to pre-hearing disciplinary suspension of membership, mediation, work-slot adjustments, restitution, pre-hearing resignation or arbitration. Permanent expulsion of a member and their household is required when a member is found to have committed theft of merchandise or property.

Of the 20 or 30 cases a year, only about two go to a hearing. Most of these situations end positively, emphasizes Magocsi, “so often the outcomes are unexpected.” Investigations may “get to the bottom of a misunderstanding between two members and they agree to apologize to each other.” She continues: “It’s a Coop. We function best when we function cooperatively.”

## PERCEPTION PROBLEMS

When a dispute raises to a hearing, a *Gazette* reporter observes the hearing and files a story about the proceedings while maintaining confidentiality or protecting sensitive information. Yet, whenever there is an election to the committee at a GM, there are often gripes about the nature of the process itself. “We may not appear transparent because we can’t name names or specifics,” Koh states.

At times, Cosachov Protos says, as in a case with a walker who was harassing the people they were walking, people are frightened and don’t want to come forward. Magocsi adds that “there are not great channels to get information out to the membership,” particularly when the *Gazette* was on hiatus. Members have also been surprised or embarrassed to learn that their actions were caught on video surveillance.

“The Committee can’t defend itself,” Holtz agrees. “Unless someone wants to release the Committee from confidentiality, so the case can be presented publicly, they really can’t respond. And that can be frustrating at an institution that [people] care about,” he adds.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

These days, the majority of complaints brought before the DRC have to do with mask-

wearing: members repeatedly disregarding the Coop's policy, designed to protect one another and which, as of this writing, accords with New York State's mandate. One Coop member who opposed the mask rule wore a lace mask in defiance. The General Coordinators, acting in their role as Chief Administrative Officers, then updated the rules about what constitutes a mask based on official public health guidance.

Supporting Coop members through disputes can take a toll. It can be "emotionally draining" work, confirms Koh. There is attrition, which Committee members also see positively: New members bring fresh perspectives. When it is time for an election, they conduct an internal review of one another, a process that Magocsi describes as "self-regulat[ing]" and "constructive." Overall, members appreciate their role in, as Cosachov Protos frames it, "helping to reinforce a healthy environment at the Coop."

Accountability in community spaces and society at large invites broader discussions about creating a world that works better for everyone. In *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*, abolitionist and transformative justice organizer Mariame Kaba wrestles with questions about transformative justice. In an essay titled "Transforming Punishment: What Is Accountability Without Punishment?" she asks: "What could be lost by expanding the range of remedies available to us?" In some ways, the DRC is serving as a place of praxis to "try to imagine new ways of trying to address accountability." Can we go further?

When calculating the financial cost of ongoing theft, Holtz adds: "We need to be able to say to some people, 'This isn't a good fit because of your behavior' in order to survive. I believe that we must have that function."

Even so, the DRC is revisiting some of the language in their charter. It will then go through the process of approval at the GM.

McCalla is curious to see more of a restorative or transformative justice model during the hearing process. She describes it as having a more legal tone, with language that isn't accessible. "It could be traumatic," she observes, "a court-like setting with a

judge and jury. It could take a healing component.”

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