
Board Election 2024 Candidates



Michca Ballard-Fortin

1. Describe your involvement with the Co-op.

I'm a relatively new member, maybe joined 2 years ago. I had shopped in the downtown location, primarily for grab & go items on my lunch, before I joined. I have attended one Board meeting, but plan on attending more, whether I'm a Board member or simply a Co-Op member.

2. What skills or experience will you contribute to Board service?

I am a human resource professional and think I could add skills in community outreach and organizational or governance if needed. As a neighbor, my family lives in Strathmore, I am looking forward to doing more work in the community as I am 'cycling out' of volunteering in schools. My children have finished college now. I have experience with Board membership on the board of Home Headquarters, and have volunteered for United Way, the Good Samaritan Center and David's Refuge.

3. What do you see as the Co-op's role in the broader community?

I'm not sure but think that the Co-op has the opportunity to continue to be a positive healthy food source presence. My initial exposure was when I was working downtown and looking for healthy lunch options - BAM - the Co-op was a wonderful addition. The Co-op is great at highlighting its use of organics and locally grown products and can lean more into the 'word of mouth' of providing these options. Since becoming a member, I have shopped at both

locations in Syracuse and have talked about it more with friends.

4. Please provide any other details you would like to share in connection with your candidacy.

I enjoy shopping at the Co-op & am proud to support it by being a member. I have been looking to volunteer and help with would be happy to support the future activities and promote the Co-op as I can, letting City residents know the gem the Co-op is.



Lauren Boldon

1. Describe your involvement with the Co-op.

I joined as a member in December 2023, but have been shopping at the Co-op for 15 years now. I joined the Board of Directors in April 2023, as an appointee to fill a vacant position.

When I first considered joining I was a student and did not feel I could afford the membership fees believing it was an annual fee, but was happy to shop in my neighborhood and benefit from the bulk section and the great selections. When I finally decided to join, I was surprised to learn all the benefits membership offers. This makes membership a no-brainer and I wish I had joined sooner!

2. What skills or experience will you contribute to Board service?

I am a residential general contractor and consultant for the Allyn Foundation both of which I love for the people involved and the value I can bring to others. I am currently working on the redevelopment of the Chimes Building for mixed income housing. I have a Master's Degree in Fine Arts from Syracuse University and have 10 years experience in Real Estate Investing and Construction Management. I believe strongly and take pride in investing my time and money in our community by creating healthy, inviting spaces in which other people can live. Additionally, I had a couple amazing years in Grocery management experience in a small health food store in Lubbock,

Texas called Well Body Natural Foods, so an environment like the Co-op which prides itself on providing healthy food options is very near to my heart.

3. What do you see as the Co-op's role in the broader community?

Having an opportunity to buy good quality food in a community is essential to that community's health and wellbeing. And having a Co-op grocery that gives back to the community and owners can take pride in is even better.

4. Please provide any other details you would like to share in connection with your candidacy.

I really appreciate all who take the time to consider us for this position. It would be a joy to represent the community interests in the Co-ops continued success.



Colleen Cicotta

1. Describe your involvement with the Co-op.

My earliest visits to the Co-op began around 2010, when I had a friend who lived on Roosevelt and we would share the CSA that we picked up at the Co-op. In 2016, my family and I moved into our current home on the city's eastside and began frequenting the Co-op more regularly on bike. During summer 2020, our bike trips to pick up a summer Co-op food share were our family 'outings' - the outdoor pickup felt safe and accessible and the offerings were always delicious. We became members that summer and have shopped at the Co-op since.

In 2022, I grew curious about how I could become more involved in supporting our market. I joined the Board as an appointee in 2023, and was then elected to a one-year term in 2024. During my time on the Board, I've enjoyed serving as member and chair of the Policy Review Committee (2023-2024), and as Vice President (2024).

2. What skills or experience will you contribute to Board service?

The strongest skills I can offer the board are in strategic planning, assessment, and evaluation. I enjoy facilitating learning across the lifespan and creating opportunities for reflection and connection.

I grew up on a small family farm and understand the work of making food happen. My previous board experience includes Brady Faith Center, LiteracyCNY (when it was known as Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse), and SUNY Potsdam. I have also served on the Human Service Leadership Council, Leadership Greater Syracuse, and Campus Compact.

I currently run a consulting business where I support nonprofits and community-minded businesses. In a previous professional role, I partnered with SCSD and neighborhood educators to develop nutrition literacy programs among other things. My own education includes a Bachelor's Degree in English Communication/French Language and Literature, a Certificate of Advanced Study in Conflict Resolution, and a Master's in Public Administration.

3. What do you see as the Co-op's role in the broader community?

As a member/owner, I see the Co-op as an incredible resource for trusted products and community connections. I can't remember the last time I went into the Co-op without having a conversation, with staff, neighbors, and friends old and new. While operating in the grocery business, the Co-op uniquely appeals to folks who have shared values.

My youngest child begs to visit the market every day to find out what unique produce offerings he can bring home. The Co-op appeals to members of our community without cartoons or tricks or tons of added sugars, by simply offering great goods.

4. Please provide any other details you would like to share in connection with your candidacy.

Thank you for your consideration of my candidacy and the opportunity to apply for re-election. Regardless of the decision, we are Co-op fans for life.



Ben Jones

1. Describe your involvement with the Co-op.

I just joined in November 2023, but have lived in the Westcott neighborhood my whole life and am deeply familiar with the co-op's benefits to the neighborhood.

2. What skills or experience will you contribute to Board service?

I bring DEIA training with an eye for accessibility and criticality to the white lens. I have a master's degree in disability service in higher ed and an undergraduate degree in anthropology.

3. What do you see as the Co-op's role in the broader community?

I see the co-op as being beneficial to people who (like me) do not currently drive or have limited transportation options. I also see it as a way to promote diversity in the neighborhoods that the co-op serves.

4. Please provide any other details you would like to share in connection with your candidacy.

I was referred to the Co-op's nominations committee by a member who I am the Syracuse University disability events planning board with.



Alex Olt

1. Describe your involvement with the Co-op.

I recently moved to Syracuse in this past August 2023, and when I heard of the co-op I joined right away. I joined the Co-op's Board of Directors in January 2024, as an appointee to fill a vacant seat, and I am now seeking election to a full term.

I knew that having access to organic, healthy food at an affordable price was something I wanted to become involved in and contribute to. I believe every community should have a co-op. Becoming a member allows one to understand issues pertaining to the agricultural system such as food waste, support our community by buying locally grown produce, and make conscious healthy choices.

2. What skills or experience will you contribute to Board service?

I have been a volunteer firefighter for 2 years on Long Island where I am originally from, and recently joined Taunton Fire Department as a volunteer. I frequently donate blood and grow my hair out to donate to children with cancer. I volunteered as a sailing coach at my alma mater, the University of Miami. I graduated with a degree in Economics, with a triple minor in Math, Art, and Latin American Studies.

I work for a technology company that uses RTLS to track assets and protect infants from abduction in hospitals. I love helping the most vulnerable people in our communities through my job or volunteer endeavors.

3. What do you see as the Co-op's role in the broader community?

I believe the co-op's locations are not only convenient to a majority of people who can benefit from access to healthy food and affordable prices, but also are located in places that allow for more opportunities for broad community involvement. I believe that holding more events to educate about ethically and responsibly sourced food through guest speakers and indoor/outdoor markets can create a more robust and cooperative local economy, especially to local farms and business. The people of Syracuse love to come together to eat, network, and communicate, and having a monthly event as described will help promote not only the co-op, but promote connecting our community to achieve health and economic goals.

4. Please provide any other details you would like to share in connection with your candidacy.

[No response]