Cheyne Mayer - Candidate Statement

1. Personal Skills and Experience

I moved to the Palouse with my fiancée in 2016 for her graduate program at WSU, and we immediately became members at the Co-op. Food co-ops have long been a central part of my life. I had my first work experiences volunteering as a grocery stocker at the Olympia Food Co-op, and absorbed a lot of values from the people that worked at and frequented the store. To this day, I treasure food co-ops as places where I can find good food and gather with my community.

My background is in food access and agriculture. While earning my B.S. in Environmental Studies, I worked on my college's vegetable farm for three years, and it was through that work that my love of good food expanded into a love of growing that food. Since then, I've farmed internationally through the WWOOF cultural exchange program in Catalunya, Spain, and worked for the WSU organic farm. I understand the hard work it takes to grow deeply nourishing produce, and am passionate about promoting such food and the farmers who grow it.

I'm also passionate about improving access to that food. Since 2017, I have been involved with local efforts to combat food insecurity, including serving two years as an Americorps member at Backyard Harvest. I believe that everyone deserves access to fresh, healthy produce, and was immensely proud to contribute record years of produce donations during my service there. I also gained an extensive understanding of our local food system and honed my skills at building strong working partnerships, both of which have helped me be effective on the Board.

I have worked at the Co-op previously, both as a baker and cashier. I have first-hand experience of what it's like working at the Co-op on a day-to-day basis, and am pleased to bring that level of understanding to the Board to be an effective advocate for staff.

2. Why I would like to serve on the Co-op Board

I've been honored to serve as your Board member for the last three years. I've developed familiarity with our Co-op's finances, strategic priorities, and governance processes, as well as gained invaluable experience with group decision making, and would be pleased to carry that experience forward to help safeguard the Co-op's future in these trying times. I resonate strongly with the values cooperatives strive to embody and will always work hard to help guide the Co-op towards the best version of itself it can be.

3. Please describe how you have 1) demonstrated an ability to operate in a group decision-making environment, 2) shared power in a group process, and 3) delegated areas of decision-making to others.

My most recent and relevant experience with this is from the time I've already served on the Board. Every Board meeting and committee meeting is an exercise in operating in a group decision-making environment and sharing power in a group process. We delegate decisions and/or tasks to the GM, to committees, and to individual Board members and committee members on a constant basis. But for me, the process of revising our Ends honed these skills the most.

When the Board was considering how to revise the Ends in 2018-2019, I participated in multiple retreats and work sessions dedicated to the sole topic of discussing how we ought to phrase our Ends and what they ought to contain. These were some of the highest-stakes conversations that the Board faced during my time; they would, after all, guide every other strategic decision the Co-op made for years to come, and moreover, each Board member brought different opinions and perspectives to the table.

The first step was everyone getting on the same page about what purpose Ends should serve in relation to the strategic plan, and we spent a while in what our consultant called the "Groan Zone": a period in the group decision-making process where several divergent perspectives are competing to be understood all at once. I found this experience quite challenging, as I neither felt like I fully understood

where my fellow Board members were coming from nor like my own perspective was being heard. Under those circumstances, I fell back on two tools that have reliably helped me in group process: deep breathing and active listening. I was also encouraged by the model of group decision-making that the "Groan Zone" was part of, with its promise of eventual convergence of thought, which helped me remain patient and trust in the process. Eventually, that convergence did materialize, and we arrived at a shared understanding of what purpose we wanted our Ends to serve.

But there was still the matter of how our Ends should be written. Each Board member was encouraged to come up with their own draft Ends to advance the discussion, and I participated. I gave my draft a lot of thought and ended up believing quite strongly in the Ends I came up with, but I knew I should not hold onto them too tightly just because of my sweat equity. For one, other Board members might have come up with even better ideas, but furthermore, even if my draft did end up being liked the best, my fellow Board members were sure to bring great insights as to how it could be improved that I should be prepared to hear with an open mind. Or, I might end up in the minority of opinion and want to be ready to adapt to discussion of an alternative I didn't agree with. I went into discussion prepared to articulate my reasoning for my draft – to ensure it could receive full and informed consideration – and then listen to everyone and keep an open mind. Though ultimately the decision lay with the group, and I could therefore potentially end up in a situation where my opinion was overruled, I generally trusted in the group process to allow the best ideas to rise to the top, and in that way to produce a better final draft than any one of us could have done alone.

The end result was only arrived at after extensive discussion of, among other things, how much decision-making power to delegate to the GM. Previous iterations of the Ends had been excessively prescriptive (including one time, I later learned, where specific operational targets and strategies were even outlined, which had been inappropriate in the context of Policy Governance). But what degree of specificity was appropriate? The Board deliberated on this at length across the process, and ended up

agreeing on a revision that delegated more decision-making power to the GM than the previous Ends. I benefited greatly from the robust debate on this matter, and have carried it forward in fulfilling my other Board duties where delegation was called for.

4. I can indeed make a three-year commitment to the responsibilities outlined in the candidates' packet. In the interest of full discretion, I anticipate I may be moving away from the Palouse in summer 2022, assuming my partner manages to be matched with an internship site for her graduate program on schedule. However, if that plan comes to pass, I am committed to fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the candidates' packet remotely for the remainder of my term.

I agree to abide by the campaigning and electioneering guidelines established by the Nominations and Elections Committee.

5. I'm excited to be running again and hope I get to continue working with y'all!