

# Syntropy Autonomy: FAQ

A quick guide for members + other interested folks

Updated 6/30/20

## What is MCC?

MCC stands for Madison Community Cooperative. Technically, Syntropy itself is not a housing co-op. It is a house owned by a co-op. We are one of 11 houses in this system.

The majority of our rent goes directly to MCC, rather than to our house (\$393 out of \$475). We are required to send a representative to board meetings and committee meetings for membership, maintenance, and finance. We are all expected to participate in General Membership Meetings. In order for us to complete maintenance projects or write contracts, we have to work through MCC.

We believe that the organization is structured in a way that upholds systems of power and oppression, including white supremacy culture and misogyny. For years, we went on rent strike to try to address these issues internally, but we have turned our focus now towards autonomy, like other independent co-ops in Madison.

## Why does Syntropy seek independence from MCC?

1. We believe we cannot address oppression in an organization structured around power and control.<sup>1</sup> Our main aim in rent strike was to address the racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, etc that was perpetuated by MCC. We eventually came to realize that these efforts cannot be truly effective because of the structure of MCC. We cannot dismantle systems of oppression using an oppressive structure that wields power and control over houses and members.
2. Our small size has led to patterns of house member burnout ever since Syntropy became part of MCC in 1989. Many of the other houses in MCC have 20-30 people, and the organization becomes centered around those structures. As a house of 8, we do not have the capacity to manage our house, participate in the membership, finance, maintenance, and board committees, and have personal/work lives of our own. Members of Syntropy have been expressing this since 1989<sup>2</sup>, right after we became part of MCC.
3. Our small size leads to a loss of power. MCC allows us to proxy into committee meetings, thus recognizing that we are at a structural disadvantage. But if we don't show up at these meetings, we cannot advocate for our needs to be met

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<sup>1</sup> "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" - Audre Lorde

<sup>2</sup> A letter to "Staff and Members of the Board" by Mary J. on April 3, 1988: "We at Syntropy have learned this year that a co-op this small requires that the **majority** of people living here be exceedingly motivated, responsible, and "co-op minded" if the house is to work well.... If we continue [the status quo], it is questionable whether MCC will be able to hang on to Syntropy.."

or have a voice in other important matters. Syntropy has serious maintenance concerns that we believe have been issues since as early as 1991. It's harder for us to serve on the board as officers, because just sending a board rep is a strain. By having fewer votes, we are structurally disadvantaged relative to other houses.

### **What could independence look like?**

Here are a few things we've considered:

- Lower rent, increasing accessibility for low-income/ low-wealth members
- Less time going to MCC board meetings, maintenance committee meetings, finance committee meetings, membership committee meetings, and General Membership Meetings means more time for meaningful work in community
- Continuing to meet with other co-ops to share best practices around buying bulk, gardening, membershopping, and more
- An independent version of TUPOCC (The United People of Color Caucus), which we could continue to support financially, and that could hold all housing co-ops in the area (not just the ones currently part of MCC) accountable for ending racism and White Supremacy Culture
- More power to manage our own household repairs and maintenance in a timely manner
- "Selling" our house to a Black or indigenous-led nonprofit or collective

### **What are we doing about it right now?**

- Writing documents like this to help clarify what we're doing and why; drafting proposals to move us toward independence, including a request to talk to MCC's lawyer about possibilities
- Researching through archives to get a better sense of the depth of the situation and what else has been done before we got here
- Meeting with other houses and members to talk about perspectives and ideas
- Designing and maintaining a [website](#), Facebook, Instagram, and ic.org page to support our separation from MCC and increase communication options
- Reaching out to other collectives, organizations, and co-ops to brainstorm
- Taking on additional work inside the home to support the time that others are putting into these efforts