

# Every Voice Counts

**I** WAS FIRST elected to the board of directors of my Rego Park co-op 21 years ago and have been an on-and-off member for about 16 years. I volunteered because I wanted to understand the workings of the board and how my building was being managed. The first two to three years offered a big learning curve. There were a lot of city laws that I needed to be aware of as well as abatement programs that the building was eligible for. In addition, I had to get to know the other board members and figure out a strategy to work with them.

Working well with other board members is the biggest challenge for a board member. I remember there was a long stretch where I felt my ideas weren't being heard. There were alliances among board members that were hard to break. I felt certain board members had their own agendas and were simply using their alliances on the board to push them through. I left the board for a while, because I didn't feel my voice counted. I didn't expect my ideas to be accepted all the time, but to go in month after month with a feeling of not being a productive board member told me it was time to take a break.

During my time away, it occurred to me that shareholders weren't aware of the decisions being made on their behalf. I reached out to other shareholders to encourage them to run for a seat on the board, so that they could participate in the decision-making of our co-op. It is very difficult to get shareholders to commit the time and energy to be a board member. It can seem very intimidating to someone who has never been on the board. The bottom line is to ask shareholders if they know how their maintenance is being spent and if they like it being spent that way. And ask if shareholders know why their maintenance is going up every year.

When I returned to the board, we finally got a newsletter started. Newsletters are vital in keeping shareholders informed of board decisions. We also started open shareholder meetings.

## VIDEO VISIT

### QR Code Instructions

To watch a video interview with Joyce Soo, scan the square QR code with your barcode scanning app. (If you don't have a barcode scanner, download a free app such as I-Nigma, Quickmark or Barcode Scanner.) You can also visit the URL in the internet browser on your phone or computer.



[tinyurl.com/tktkkt](http://tinyurl.com/tktkkt)

## Joyce Soo

**President of 63-84 Saunders  
Rego Park, Queens**

Two years ago, I was elected president. In that role, I scrutinized our budget by working with our treasurer to try to balance the budget. We hired attorney Geoffrey Mazel, a partner at Hankin & Mazel, because he specializes in co-ops and condos. It is so important to have an attorney who knows the ins and outs of a co-op. We also changed management, further reducing our costs.

We are moving forward. The lesson? In brief, to be truly effective, you have to employ a good management company, retain an attorney who specializes in your type of building, and, finally, communicate your ideas to your fellow board members and your shareholders. ■