

Muriel Lester Cooperative House

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Greetings from the big red barn! Lester House is a cozy fifteen person vegetarian (with vegan option) cooperative house. We have one triple, four double, and four single rooms. Our house is located on the corner of Arbor Street and Oakland Ave, two blocks south of the University of Michigan's main campus.

Lester is one of the smallest houses in the Inner-Cooperative Council, so it has a decidedly homey feel. Also one of the oldest houses in the ICC, we pride ourselves on our long, colorful, progressive history. Visitors and friends are always welcome to join us for dinner at 7 pm, every night of the week.

History

Muriel Lester (1883-1968) was an English social worker, writer, pacifist, and advocate of social justice. A proponent of voluntary poverty, joyous living, and world peace, she traveled and lectured throughout the world for over forty years. A close friend of Gandhi and a strong advocate of the teachings of Jesus Christ, she rejected her affluent upbringing and dedicated her life to working with and improving the plight of the poor. Lester believed that capitalism was inherently selfish and wretched; she thus advocated socialism as a just economic and social system. Also a dedicated activist for women's suffrage and equality, she called on women to stand up for their political and social rights as well as to organize against war and military aggression.

It was in the spirit of this beautiful woman that Muriel Lester Cooperative House was formed in the fall of 1940. Originally an all-women's house, the founding members challenged unspoken social rules by establishing the first intentionally diverse women's cooperative house on campus. Given the racial climate of the era, this was no small feat. As founding member Jo Howard recalls: "They were not trying to start a girl's cooperative house, they were trying to get black and white girls together. Not only that, they were trying to get people who didn't believe in any God at all."

Retaining these commitments to social equality and responsibility, Lester House continues today as a loving, inclusive home.

The House

As mentioned above, we have one triple, four double, and four single bedrooms. Room selection is based on seniority within the house and within the ICC. The selection of rooms for the upcoming school year happens in a house meeting in April. The bedrooms come in a variety of shapes and colors, and each has its own story to tell.

We have a beautiful, expansive front porch with several comfy couches. In the warm spring and summer months and on chilly autumn days, the porch is a wonderful place for eating dinner, impromptu musical performances, curling up with a book and tea, knitting, people-watching, or just about anything else you can imagine. It's also the best place to sit and watch a summer rainstorm.

Stepping inside the front door, there is the foyer, with its old hardwood floor and wood-paneled walls. Many coats and snowy or muddy boots live here. The foyer is also where our mail is distributed.

To the left of the foyer is the parlor. This room is home to a number of Lester treasures that make our house what it is. Aside from the requisite couches and lamps, the parlor contains the infamous Lester waterbed, envy of the entire ICC. Also, in the living room are (almost-perfectly-tuned) piano and the stereo with accompanying cd and record collections. On the bookshelves, you will find an expansive selection of literature on almost any imaginable book (we have even found a university yearbook from 1928!). It is quite likely that you will find a number of your texts right here. The living room is also host to a large collection of piano music, a variety of musical instruments, board games, and jigsaw puzzles.

Noticeably absent from the house is a television. We find that this fosters greater interaction among house members and helps us more fully appreciate our subscription the *New York Times*.

Our huge kitchen is equipped with every culinary tool imaginable. We have an industrial sized refrigerator, a number of big sinks, a center island for food preparation, and a lot of cabinet space. Also of note is the vibrant dragon mural above the stove. Next to the kitchen is the dining room.

In the basement are shelves, a freezer for Zingerman's bread (which we get for free), two refrigerators (for delicious vegetables), the laundry room, a tool room, a storage room, a bathroom, and the scary boiler room.

On the third floor is another Lester house treasure: the meditation closet. A small enclave, it is a perfect place for a contemplative experience.

Food

Lester is a very food conscious house. Not only do we LOVE food, we are vegetarian house. Our constitution states that no meat may ever be brought into the house. We do, however, allow dairy products. Most of the house members are ovo-lacto vegetarians, but there are also a number of vegans. Every dinner is made vegan, and the house makes every effort to make guff (aka communal) foods vegan. Guff food can include everything from hummus, bread, and kimchi, to granola, cookies, cakes, and brownies. Yum! We also have a large selection of teas, spices, and dried goods.

We try to buy as much food as our budget will allow from organic (and preferably local) sources,

especially produce. We also try to buy food grown and produced by cooperative businesses. In this way, we support environmentally-conscious agriculture and support the cooperative movement.

We also have a number of boarders who do not live in the house but eat with us. They pay a monthly due and contribute three hours of work to the house each week.

Work

Each house member contributes five hours of work per week. Some of the tasks available are cleaning, cooking, being a house officer, taking care of the yard, etc. Work is assigned by the Work Manager based on the personal preferences of the house's members.

Self-Governance

We hold house meetings every two weeks. Meetings are key to the democratic operation of Lester, and we use the time to make important decisions that affect daily operations and to plan for bigger events. Under the facilitation of our elected house president, we debate openly and rationally about house issues and make decisions (with the exception of electing house officers) by kwuncensus. In this way, everyone's opinions are fully respected and decisions are made.

Lester meetings are characterized by their relaxed nature, mutual respect, and often uproariously humorous exchanges. They are a great time for the whole house to come together and share in that wonderful thing called "cooperation."

The People

So who are WE? It is difficult to categorize a group of people as interesting, neurotic, and varied as those of Lester House. We possess a myriad of interests, beliefs, and talents. Anything written can be little more than a generalization, but there are a few characteristics that distinguish us as the excellent human beings that we are:

We are thinkers. One frequently hears the issues of today's headlines and the eternal questions of existence being debated on the porch or late night at night in the kitchen. We study a wide range of subjects.

We are artists. Many house members are interested in and involved with the arts: music, dance, theater, poetry, drawing, painting, knitting, ceramics, and many more creative mediums.

We are environmentalists. We try as best we can to live in an ecologically responsible and low impact manner. This is evident in our commitment to recycling, composting, buying environmentally sound products, and, of course, the Keeper.

We are activists. House members are involved in a variety of student groups, volunteer projects, local government initiatives, and community initiatives that work to improve and change the existing conditions of the world. In general, our activities and beliefs would be considered as leftist/liberal/progressive, but this, again, is only a generalization. We have no uniform political,

religious, or economic adherence.

MURIEL LESTER COOPERATIVE HOUSE

CONSTITUTION

Revised 10 August 2015

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Muriel Lester Cooperative House, associate ourselves in accordance with the spirit of the Rochdale Principles for the purpose of providing room and board to students of the University of Michigan. The Rochdale Principles we adopt are as follows:

1. **Open Membership:** There will be no restriction on membership for any reason other than available room and ability and willingness to discharge duties as house members.
2. **Democracy:** Each member has one and only one vote, each shares the house duties in a nearly and equitable manner as possible and each shares equally in the benefits derived.
3. **Education:** The house will be working example of cooperative living and will educate its members and others on campus in the principles of cooperatives.
4. **Expansion:** By supporting the Intercooperative Council the house will help the cooperative movement on this campus. By its membership in other cooperative organizations it will support the movement in general as much as possible without impairing the efficient functioning of the house.

ARTICLE I

Sec. 1 The name of the group which operates under this constitution is the Muriel Lester Cooperative House.

Sec. 2 This house is a member of and abides by the rules of the Intercooperative Council at the University of Michigan.

ARTICLE II Membership

Sec. 1 Membership in the Muriel Lester Cooperative House requires:

- a) Acceptance by the Intercooperative Council.

- b) Payment of membership deposit fee.
- c) Boarding at the house.

Sec. 2 Duties of house members:

- a) House members are responsible for work assigned by the Work Manager of the house. Under no circumstances may a member hire another person to do their work.
- b) House members are responsible for payment of bills as determined by the house and the Intercooperative Council.
- c) House members must abide by rules passed at house meetings.
- d) House members may be required to serve on ICC committees.

Sec. 3 Expulsion

- a) A committee made up of the president, treasurer, and work manager will consider all the recommendations for expulsion brought by house members. They shall gather evidence from all interested parties including the member in question, and form an opinion to be presented at an open house meeting with the member to be judged and their accuser present if possible. This meeting is to take place within one week of the recommendation.
- b) The house shall hear the evidence from interested persons and a defense by the accused.
- c) The member shall be voted on within one week after the meeting above and will be expelled by a 3/4 majority of all house members.
- d) Grounds for expulsion shall be only failure to perform house duties and obey house rules and behavior which is potentially harmful to other house members or the proper functioning of the house.

ARTICLE III House Meetings

Sec. 1 The house shall make all decisions by kwuncensus at all house meetings except in cases in which another process is deemed more appropriate by consensus of the house, such as irresolvable time-critical issues. For voting rules in the cases of expulsion and officer elections, see Article II, Section 3.c) and Article IV Section 1.a) of the constitution.

Sec. 2 Quorum: A quorum shall consist of 1/2 of all members at a regularly scheduled and special house meeting for the total membership. A quorum for regularly scheduled and special house meetings for the roomers only shall consist of 1/2 of all rooming members.

Sec. 3 A regular house meeting is one called by the President and should be held every other week.

Sec. 4 An agenda for all house meetings must be posted 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Sec. 5 All members are required to attend all house meetings. If a member is to miss a house meeting it is their responsibility to let the president know 24 hours in advance. Any member who misses a house meeting for any reason (excluding extreme circumstances) and has not notified the president 24 hours in advance is responsible for work hours equivalent to the length of the house meeting. Hours are to be completed within four weeks of the meeting and will otherwise be considered missed work and subject to fines. The four-week rule may be ignored in the case of a

special project on a specific date scheduled with the work manager. Any fine may be appealed at a house meeting.

Sec. 6 Special House Meetings:

- a) Special house meetings may be called by any house member.
- b) The purpose of the special meeting must be indicated on the agenda which must be posted for 24 hours prior to the proposed meeting.

ARTICLE IV: House Officers

Section 2: House Officer Positions

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) | President |
| b) | Board Representative |
| c) | Work Manager |
| d) | Maintenance Manager |
| e) | Treasurer |
| f) | Food Steward |
| g) | Secretary (Optional Position) |
| – See Section 4) | |
| h) | Sustainability Steward |
| (Optional Position – See Section 4) | |
| i) | Social Chair (Optional |
| Position – See Section 4) | |

Section 3: Duties of the House Officers

a) President:

The President shall coordinate house business and the efforts of house officers, preside over all house meetings, post all notices relevant to the members of the house, post notices of house meetings stating the time and date of the meeting, and set and send out a meeting agenda at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. The president shall see that members carry out appointed responsibilities, ensure that the members of the house abide by the rules and policies of the ICC and operates in accordance with the House Constitution, by-laws, and standing rules, and ensure that these policies, including the House Constitution, remain up-to-date. The president shall promote cooperative living and house goals, be the key-holder for the House, hold officer meetings at their discretion throughout their presidency, and at the end of the year compile a list of seniority for room pics for the following year. The president shall act as an official representative for Lester House in its relations with all other organizations, other ICC houses and the ICC Central Office, resolve conflicts and mediate house disputes and/or problems, encourage leadership development and involvement, and fulfill other duties as

assigned by Lester House or the ICC. The person holding this position shall receive full work hours and will hold this position for the entire 8 months of their contract (unless the house decides to remove the President after the first term).

b) Board Representative:

The Board Representative shall act as an official representative of Lester House, be a communication link between Lester and the ICC Board of Directors, ensuring that the needs and opinions of house members are represented and informing house members of ICC-wide issues and events. The Board Representative shall represent the house by attending the Board of Directors meetings and reporting Board decisions, proposals, and changes to the house, remain loyal to the ICC and vote to make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization as a whole, and serve on an ICC committee of interest (e.g. Finance, Maintenance Policy, Development, Membership, Multi-Cultural Affairs, Education, etc.). The person holding this position shall receive full work hours and, in addition to the President, will hold this position for the entire 8 months of their contract (unless the House decides to remove the Board Rep after their first term).

c) Work Manager:

The work manager shall be responsible for assigning in an equitable manner the work necessary for the efficient and sanitary functioning of the house, creating a work schedule at the beginning of each term and updating it as needed, ensuring that members are completing work hours as assigned properly, consistently, and to a house-wide accepted standard, and pursue appropriate action when work hours are missed. The Work Manager will work with the President and Maintenance Manager to schedule and organize a work holiday once a term, and will oversee, in conjunction with the President, all other House Officers. The person holding this position shall receive 3 work hours.

d) Maintenance Manager:

The Maintenance Manager shall be responsible for the maintenance of house appliances, facilities, and of the house in general. The Maintenance Manager shall make investigations into the purchase of necessary materials, utensils and appliances with the approval of the house when necessary. They shall perform all maintenance work to the best of their ability, or arrange to have the work contracted out, shall respond in a timely manner to house maintenance requests, organize and keep the maintenance closet clean, and shall follow the preventative maintenance program as described by the ICC maintenance committee and shall keep accurate records on all house work. The person holding this position shall receive 3 work hours.

e) Treasurer:

The treasurer shall formulate the house budget and present it to the house for approval at the beginning of the term in a timely manner, reimburse house members for approved purchases for the house, keep track of financial transactions, submit a monthly financial report to the ICC, be responsible for keeping the house informed on its financial status and tracking monthly budget expenditures, remind members to pay house charges,

and direct members who are experiencing financial difficulty to the resources the ICC provides for members in such positions (scholarships, payment plans, etc.). The person holding this position shall receive 2 work hours.

f) Food Steward:

The Food Steward shall be responsible for ordering food, kitchen supplies and equipment, ensure that the kitchen and pantry are in compliance with the codes set by the city sanitation inspector, maintain a sufficient supply of food for the house while remaining within the house budget, keep track of food delivery receipts and be responsible for properly storing food, respond to food requests for the house as they see appropriate, make periodic inventories of food as required by the Treasurer, and be responsible for seeing that the food storage area is kept in good order. The person holding this position shall receive 3 work hours.

g) Secretary:

The Secretary shall take meeting minutes at all house meetings, post minutes of each meeting no later than 48 hours after the meeting, make sure that house minutes and records are maintained and turned into the ICC Office at the end of each term for the permanent house archives, and be responsible for sorting, rerouting and forwarding mail to former members. The person holding this position shall receive 1 work hour.

h) Sustainability Steward:

The Sustainability Steward shall track and report energy and resource usage to the House and to the ICC Sustainability Committee, attend monthly meetings of the ICC Sustainability Committee, educate house members on issues of sustainability and encourage and facilitate sustainable living, energy use, and consumption, and identify and address areas of wasted energy or resources and plan sustainability projects where deemed appropriate and necessary. The person holding this position shall receive 1 work hour.

i) Social Chair:

The Social Chair shall plan and execute both intra-house and inter-house gatherings either on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis depending on the event and the time needed to plan it, utilize funds, as approved by the house, for the purpose of these gatherings, and be responsible for helping foster the interconnectedness of house members through both planned and spontaneous social gatherings and activities as desired by the current house members and their expressed interests. The person holding this position shall receive 1 work hour.

Section 4: Optional Officer Positions

The positions of Secretary, Social Chair, and Sustainability Steward are optional House Officer positions and are only included as officer positions when members of the house deem them appropriate and necessary. At the first house meeting of each term, members should discuss whether or not the house would like to include these positions

during the year along with other house officer positions before beginning officer elections. Elections to these officer positions function exactly the same as other house officer position elections (See Section 1).

ARTICLE V Financial Assessments and Rebates

Sec. 1 If expenditures exceed the amount budgeted, members will be equitably assessed.

Sec. 2 Rebates will be in cash only if accounts are paid in full and the member is not returning to the house. Otherwise, rebates will be applied to the member's account.

ARTICLE VI Room Assignments

Sec. 1 House members exercise room choice on the basis of seniority with the person having the highest seniority to have the first choice, the person with the second highest seniority, second choice, etc.

Sec. 2 Seniority is determined in the following order:

- a) The determination of seniority is based on a point system. The member with the most points has seniority; the member with the second-most points has seniority after the former; and so forth.
- b) Every four-month term (e.g. Spring/Summer, Fall, Winter) living at Lester Muriel Co-operative makes two points; every four month term boarding makes one.
- c) A two month contract (e.g. spring term only) makes one point for roomers and a half point for boarders.
- d) A member (boarder or roomer) may leave for three consecutive terms and lose no seniority. After three consecutive terms, however, the member loses two points per term without contractual association with the house until epicene-person has no more points.
- e) In case of a tie, the member is granted seniority who (in order of determination):
 1. Has at some point signed a short term contract (less than two months).
 2. Has lived the most terms in the ICC without accreting relevant seniority points.
 3. Having stripped to epicene-person's underwear, wins a match of rock-paper-scissors, best of 25.
- f) In case of a tie for new members, the earliest date of contract signature wins the day.

Sec. 3 Procedures for determining fall room choices:

- a. A list of seniority rankings shall be made in April for all members who have signed contracts for the fall semester. Each member shall be granted the seniority due to them at the time the list is made. A person who intends to remain in the house during the summer can not count that summer towards their seniority for the following fall, nor they displace the designated fall occupant of that room on the basis of their summer occupancy.
- b. Room choices shall be made according to this list and the choices shall be recorded at the time they are made. This list shall be kept by the house president during the summer and a copy shall be turned into the ICC office.
- c. At the beginning of the fall semester no member may be displaced from the room they chose the previous April.
- d. In the case of contract cancellations during the summer, the choice for the vacated room shall be made according to the seniority ranking at the beginning of September.

Sec. 4 A seniority list for the winter term shall be made in December and a separate seniority list for the summer term shall be made in April for those who will be in the house during the summer.

Sec. 5 In case of room vacancies during the year, room choice is made according to the seniority of those living in the house at the time the vacancy occurs. No member can be displaced during the winter from the room they have been living in during the fall semester.

Sec. 6 Roommate preferences should be worked out between the members concerned. It will be left to the house members to resolve any conflicts in a fair and cooperative manner.

Sec. 7 The president shall be responsible for maintaining an accurate seniority list and for seeing that room choices are made in accordance with the rules established above.

Sec. 8 No member may stay in the same room longer than one year unless no one else is interested in living in that room.

ARTICLE VII Work Policy

When work is done late, incompletely, or not at all it makes our living environment uncomfortable and unhealthy, and weakens our ability to function as a community. As members of Lester, we make a commitment to the house community, that we will do our work completely and on time. We consider any failure to do so a serious breach of trust which should be addressed by the house community as a whole. If someone fails to demonstrate a commitment to their work, they shouldn't be living in our co-op.

Therefore, EVERY time a job is not done, done incompletely or finished late ("missed") the Work Manager is responsible for bringing it up for discussion at the next house meeting (unless arrangements were made with the Work Manager prior to the job) and notifying the person in question that they must

attend. The work manager must also keep a year long record of every missed job, for reference in later discussions.

We present the following as a general indication of what one could expect from such a house meeting:

1. The person has never missed a job before, and showed up to the house meeting: a discussion of the incident and the importance of work, and the procurement of a commitment to complete all future jobs.
2. The person has missed jobs in the recent past or failed to show up to the house meeting: serious consideration of referral. seri
3. The person is already on referral for missed work, and missing work is not unusual: probable expulsion. proba

Each job shall have a description of what needs to be done and the time it must be completed by. These descriptions will be maintained and made accessible by the Work Manager. It is the sole responsibility of each house member to learn and fulfill the expectations of their jobs.

ARTICLE VIII Vegetarianism

The house will buy neither fish, fowl, nor red meat including gelatin and no member shall store, prepare or consume meat of any kind within Lester House. No items containing gelatin are permitted to be guffed. It will be the responsibility of the owner of the item to check for gelatin in the item. The house will buy no animal products with the exception of eggs, honey and dairy products.

ARTICLE IX Smoking

Neither members nor guests will be allowed to smoke tobacco in Lester House. Members may only smoke "other" substances in their own rooms with permission of their roommate(s).

ARTICLE X Amendments

Amendments to this constitution shall be made in accordance with the following rules:

- a) Proposal of an amendment: It shall be proposed in a house meeting by kwuncensus.
- b) Amending of proposed amendment: The secretary shall write up and post the proposed amending statements. After having been posted for 24 hours in its final form, the proposal is subject to change by kwuncensus.
- c) An amendment to this constitution shall be passed by kwuncensus, voting after the proposed amendment in its final form has been posted for 24 hours.
- d) Amendments shall be deleted by kwuncensus members after the proposal to make deletions has been posted for 24 hours.

ARTICLE XI Ratification

This constitution shall go into effect after it has been ratified by kwuncensus.

Lester House Standing Rules

1. Roomers complete five hours of work per week. Boarders do three hours of work per week. The house can vote to alter these standards in the case of unusual circumstances.
2. Missed work will be handled by the work manager as follows:
 - a) Depending on the chore missed, either the original chore will be made up within a week or an equivalent amount of makeup work will be assigned by the work manager and completed within one week.
 - b) If the original chore or the makeup work is not completed within a week, a fine of \$15 per missed work hour will be administered. Any fine may be appealed at a house meeting.
3. Televisions will not be allowed in common areas such as the living room and dining room, nor shall house funds be used for the purchase of a television.
4. Lester House shall comply with the ICC Alcohol Policy of not purchasing alcohol with house funds nor serving alcohol to minors.
5. Quiet hours shall be from midnight to 9 am on weeknights, and from midnight to 10am on weekends. Courtesy hours shall be in effect 24 hours a day, seven days a week, meaning that a member has a right to ask another to lower the noise level if it is disturbing.