



May 2021

## 2021 New York City Council District 7 Candidates Poll

The Morningside Heights Community Council (MHCC) recently conducted a poll of candidates for New York City Council District 7 – our neighborhood. MHCC offered candidates an overview of the District and our work in it, in addition to posing questions on two issues which have repeatedly been demonstrated as very pressing in our community through multiple surveys, town hall meetings, and anecdotal evidence.

**The two questions were:**

**1. Because you are a candidate for the City Council in District 7, the MHCC requests that you publicly support preserving Columbia University housing for low- and middle-income non-affiliates and investing in Grant Houses. If you support these positions, please let us know what you will do to advance them if you are elected.**

**2. Because you are a candidate for the City Council in District 7, the MHCC requests that you publicly support rezoning Morningside Heights. If you support this position, please let us know what you will do to advance it if you are elected.**

Following are the replies to these questions we received from seven of the District 7 candidates. They appear in alphabetical order. MHCC maintains a non-partisan approach in its community advocacy and development work. The organization does not endorse candidates. We will share this poll widely in our community in order to enhance individual residents' awareness of relevant issues and the candidates' stands on them.

In the responses below, the first sentence of each of the two answers is **bolded**. The responses are presented in full.

### **Shaun Abreu:**

**I will push for long-term rent regulation of Columbia University housing in order to preserve housing for low and middle-income non-affiliates, and to keep families in our community.**

Our campaign is committed to investing in public housing. Earlier this month, I stood alongside Council Member Mark Levine, who endorsed our campaign, as we pushed for a greater allocation of infrastructure investment in public housing. The reality is — public housing is infrastructure. The

ceilings, elevators, and pipes in the buildings is infrastructure. For too long, the residents living under the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) have had the rug pulled under them without any recourse in sight. Now, with President Biden's infrastructure plan, we have an opportunity to put public housing at the forefront of the conversation.

I will work with New York City's congressional delegation to secure additional funding for NYCHA's capital needs and operating costs. My hope is that we can leverage our relationship with Congressman Adriano Espaillat, Congressman Ritchie Torres, and President Joe Biden, to funnel more federal resources to NYCHA. Further, if NYCHA campuses are located within my Borough Delegation, I would fight for capital funding towards improvements and maintenance by working hand-in-hand with my local Congress Members to ensure sustained funding.

In addition, I am committed to using our capital funding to support projects, like playground and community center upgrades for the NYCHA developments in my district. While these upgrades may be cosmetic in nature, they are critical for our NYCHA residents who deserve and need state-of-the arts, recreational spaces.

**Limiting out of context, luxury super tall from Morningside Heights is essential to counteract the rise in residential taxes, which pushes long-term residents out of their homes.**

I strongly support rezoning Morningside Heights to create density and more opportunities for contextual affordable housing. The application of contextual zoning discourages luxury supertalls, which preserves housing security for long-term residents.

"Community-led" rezoning objectives centers both contextual and individual needs of communities we're working in while moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach that has proven to be detrimental to communities. In the City Council, I will work hand in hand with the Morningside Heights Community Coalition, the next Manhattan Borough President, the Speaker's office, and relevant stakeholders to raise money for both the environmental impact and the Morningside Heights rezoning plan. I am eager to work with MHCC to get this done.

### **Marti Allen-Cummings:**

**I decided to run for City Council because as a gig worker, I know firsthand how hard it is to make it in this city that is increasingly built for the wealthy.** It is time to prioritize and invest in working people and there is no better way to do that than by making housing more affordable. I strongly support MHCC's objectives to limit luxury overdevelopment, promote affordable housing and preserve the character of Morningside Heights.

Columbia University is an important part of the Morningside community and the landscape of District 7. As an employer and institution, Columbia serves an important role in our communities but as the largest landlord in the area, Columbia's success has come at the expense of displacing families and burdening low-income people. Because of its history of broken promises, I share many residents' concerns over Columbia's continued expansion and the millions of dollars still owed by the University to the local community.

While on City Council, I will fight to ensure that Columbia pays their fair share - including Columbia housing for non-affiliates. This is a simple and cost effective way to address the shortage of affordable options in the vicinity of the campus. There is growing support for Columbia to participate in a PILOT

program (payment in lieu of taxes) to compensate for the city services they use and their massive footprint in the community. I think opening Columbia housing to low and middle income non-affiliates could be a key part of any agreement.

I am also in support of investing in Grant Houses. NYCHA must be at the center of any successful affordable housing plan. On City Council, I will vote down any budget that does not substantially increase our commitment to public housing and the urgent repairs needed in Grant Houses. In addition to Grant Houses the neighboring NYCHA residents at Manhattanville Housing are being impacted by the Columbia expansion. Through the American Rescue Plan and the likely passage of a federal infrastructure plan, New York City will receive \$40B+ back from the federal government for various projects-- and NYCHA should be at the top of the list. I will make Grant Houses a top priority and work closely with other Councilmembers from our neighboring Districts (6,9,10) as well as members from Districts across the city to fully fund our public housing. Building a coalition with other Council Members as well as with our counterparts in Albany and Washington are of the utmost importance as we work with the community to support, fund, and provide for public housing.

Finally, I would like to introduce legislation to empower NYCHA residents when their urgent repairs are not addressed. By creating a grant program separate and apart from the NYCHA budget, residents could qualify for, and automatically receive, funds for repair projects when their maintenance requests go unanswered for 60 days. NYCHA residents deserve a safe and healthy environment to live and I am committed to pursuing every possible path to make that a reality.

**The longtime work of MHCC and community members has thoroughly demonstrated the need for rezoning Morningside Heights, the tremendous benefits of doing so, and has provided a roadmap for true community-led development.** We must work to rezone Morningside Heights to protect the character of our neighborhood, the small businesses on our corners, and our quality of life. Because of its outdated zoning, we know that luxury developers looking to turn a profit uptown are targeting Morningside specifically and the only real protection will be to complete the zoning changes as proposed by MHCC.

All development should be community-led. The existing model does not capture the needs of the local community and offers an up-or-down vote at best, putting developers in the strongest position. We must create proactive visions throughout our city just like MHCC has done. That is why I support providing Community Boards with experienced professional staff AND I commit to provide access for groups like MHCC to the City Council's land use staff.

I would also like to see additional restrictions on "as of right" developments in the district to require 30%+ affordable units for all 20 possible new developments between 110th and 125th. We need real affordable options for working people who make our community diverse and vibrant. In addition, I will leverage the powers of City Council and any existing relationships/contracts with the city to secure a Community Benefits Agreement on the sale of air rights and portion of construction costs. Any CBA would need to be structured differently with a more stringent timetable than the Columbia CBA from 2009.

We can and should demand more from the corporations making a profit in our communities. It is imperative that developers in the district hire union labor, provide community jobs, support local businesses and contribute to the local community. Overdevelopment is not inevitable - we can preserve Morningside Heights and address the problems we face (like empty storefronts and noise pollution) if we build our coalition block by block. The voices of the community must be brought to the decision making table at all times to ensure they are being heard and their needs are being met. I hope to join you in that work as your next City Councilmember.

**Dan Cohen:**

**I absolutely support the position of preserving Columbia University housing for low- and middle-income non-affiliates and investing in Grant Houses.** As I made clear in my statement above, I support investing in NYCHA across the city, both in Grant Houses and in other NYCHA campuses in District 7, and through the entire public housing system. Such an investment is long overdue.

**I have stated publicly previously that I support the rezoning of Morningside Heights.** I would support it if it came before Community Board 9 while I am still a member, and would support it as a member of the City Council as well. I have a small matter of whether the rezoning will impact CB7, by upzoning two sites for affordable housing – I support this effort, and welcome additional density, although I would prefer to keep the height limits previously established by CB7 in 2013. The increased density proposed by the rezoning can be fully absorbed in CB7 without increasing the height, just shorter, thicker buildings, and I have attached a zoning study that demonstrates this further. Nonetheless, I look forward to working with MHCC in any capacity to make the Morningside Heights rezoning a reality.

**Stacy Lynch:**

**Grant Houses is not the only NYCHA development within District 7, which stretches up through West Harlem to Washington Heights, and all are in intense need of investment in maintenance and upkeep to restore them as quality affordable housing for some of our most vulnerable communities.**

To the degree federal stimulus moneys are sent to the city without strings attached, I would support using a significant portion of that money for NYCHA upkeep, while using my contacts within national Democratic and government circles to lobby for greater attention to the nation's largest and most critical supply of public affordable housing. This is especially true as Grant and other NYCHA developments have aging populations of people who have raised their families there, creating in a sense NORCs that require greater attention for people who have invested their lives in this city and this neighborhood.

As far as Columbia's stock of rent-regulated units, I agree totally with the argument that those apartments should be made available in a rent-regulated status to non-university people when they become available, instead of turning them into market-rate units or reserving them for Columbia-connected people. While President Bollinger's comments are welcome, experience has taught us that Columbia rarely listens when it comes to the needs and justified desires of the community in which it sits. We have seen how many Columbia-owned storefronts have transitioned away from locally-owned businesses to national chains, undercutting the neighborhood's character, and we cannot simply trust them to do the right thing when it comes to maintaining affordability in the rent-regulated units it now controls.

I look forward to working closely with the Morningside Heights community to understand what levers we could bring to bear, and you have my commitment to stand with you and provide whatever leadership and clout could best achieve a goal I wholeheartedly share with you.

**I will work with the Morningside Heights community to finalize the rezoning proposals that were pushed by Councilman Levine, Speaker Johnson and Borough President Brewer, in order to protect the neighborhood from the as-of-right, market rate and unaffordable "affordable" development that has happened and is planned.**

This is happening because areas north and south of Morningside Heights have been rezoned, leaving the neighborhood a “donut” where developers have rushed to build out-of-context buildings such as ones on the JTS and UTS campuses.

Morningside Heights is particularly vulnerable as the large institutions – Columbia, Mount Sinai West-St. Lukes, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine – have and can be expected to continue to attempt to monetize their landholdings at the expense of long-term residents.

In addition to protecting and expanding affordable housing opportunities, it is critical that rezoning protect and enhance the locally-owned businesses that have anchored the neighborhood, hiring local residents and keeping the dollars spent in those stores circulating in the neighborhood instead of being sent back to some far-away corporate headquarters. We have seen too many chain stores better able to withstand increasing commercial rents, including in Columbia-owned buildings. I have outlined a program to support small and locally-owned businesses on my website ([stacyforcitycouncil.com](http://stacyforcitycouncil.com)) that includes support for tax incentives to maintain long-term commercial tenants, a 1 percent tax on big-box chains' earnings to create a small business fund to make low-interest loans and other assistance to small businesses that commit to local hiring practices and a state commercial lease law limiting rent increases based on the size of the business and size of the workforce.

I will work with other elected officials, as well as neighborhood leaders, to present a united front to the new mayor and new Planning Commissioner to let them know it is long overdue to rezone Morningside Heights consistent with the needs of current and prospective residents.

That includes putting pressure on Columbia to maintain apartments it controls as rent-regulated when tenants leave, instead of turning them into market-rate units. (See above.)

It is more than the character of the neighborhood at stake. It is a commitment to keeping the diversity, both ethnic and income-wise, that has made Morningside Heights a welcoming home for so many, for so many years. And it will take a coalition-builder to bring together stakeholders to use whatever levers are available – whether legal, legislative or public pressure more generally – to preserve, protect, restore and enhance Morningside Heights' unique character as an affordable, welcoming community.

### **Maria Ordonez:**

**I am committed to preserving Columbia University housing for low- and middle-income non-affiliates and investing in Grant Houses.** I will do this by working with state and federal officials to push for greater funding for NYCHA. I will oppose any further expansion or development from Columbia into West Harlem if it does not meet affordability for the community. We need to ensure that all rezonings have clear affordable housing requirements. I will also work with grassroots organizers, residents, and students to hold Columbia accountable to its Community Benefits Agreement where it promised support for Harlem, yet failed to do so. Furthermore, I will legislate and support legislation for a Green New Deal for NYCHA that would address the issues with lack of repairs, lack of heat and hot water, while creating a green union jobs program for NYCHA residents. Ultimately, we would be creating a more sustainable community where its residents have greater democratic ownership of their homes.

**I do support the long overdue rezoning of Morningside Heights.** Since the 1960s rents continue to go up, but salaries are not going up at the same rate. I will advocate for a rezoning that would impose limits on the continued overdevelopment and luxury development in Morningside Heights.

As a Councilmember I will work with local elected officials, neighborhood organizations, and the community board to ensure that we are creating transparency around our rezoning and land use process. One of the key messages of our campaign is to co-govern with the community and that means ensuring that residents, from all backgrounds, can have a voice in the process. I will ensure the center the voices of those that often have gone unheard and ignored so they too are part of a greater movement to fight for more affordable housing in Morningside Heights.

### **Corey Ortega:**

**I support these positions.** We are in desperate need of more affordable housing and we must have partners like Columbia University who are willing to do their part to preserve and enhance the number of truly affordable units. I will advance these positions in the same manner as I have sought to advance the labor rights of graduate students at Columbia, by being a vocal advocate and participating in direct action to ensure that we preserve these low and middle income affordable units. And with NYCHA housing, I will fight for investment in the City budget and organize my Council colleagues to bring their united voices to Albany and demand the State do more to provide the long overdue funding to repair and replace crumbling infrastructure in NYCHA. I will seek to partner with nonprofit developers to expand our stock of truly affordable housing.

**I am supportive of any plan to increase the stock of affordable housing and to provide for greater opportunities for small businesses in the district.** Communities must have far greater say in the development of their neighborhoods and the preservation and expansion of rent-regulated units is a priority for my campaign. I am glad to see local colleges partnering with communities to offer their expertise in the overly complex and often intentionally misleading ULURP process.

### **Raymond Sanchez:**

**Yes, I support and agree that we need green-sustainable investments.** I grew up in an NYCHA complex and am intimately aware of the challenges it faces. I would allocate additional Reso A monies for repairs and improvements.

I would coordinate with other elected officials, such as the Manhattan Borough President, and state officials to receive additional appropriations. Unfortunately, bureaucracy impedes the implementation and spending of these allocations. For example, when I worked for the Bronx Borough President, we designated millions of dollars from our capital budget for new boilers that languished for years.

Moreover, it was reported in multiple media outlets that residents were suffering from a lack of heat and hot water. As noted in 2019 by City Limits “49 NYCHA buildings had heat or hot water outages, affecting a total of 9,122 residents.” The same article noted multiple delays, over several years, in releasing hundreds of millions of dollars from NYS for repairs.

Similar delays have been documented with installing cameras, new building entrance doors, and mold remediation. We must substantially improve engagement with NYCHA residents. I would work closely with the tenant association presidents to reduce the backlogs. We have to find the operational disconnects. Moreover, we need to leverage technology and hire more dedicated staff to perform outreach to the residents. Additionally, we need to recruit more NYCHA residents into building trades and similar

professions. Whether the buildings are publicly or privately managed via the RAD program, the repairs should be built with union labor. By accelerating hiring within NYCHA for union apprenticeship programs, we will significantly improve communication, trust, and transparency in these communities.

**I support rezoning Morningside Heights in a manner that facilitates community input, amenities, and benefits.** Rezoning needs to create facilities that incorporate the existing residents. I would issue a public statement about the rezoning and pass a resolution. I would work with community organizations to amplify their work.

We need to pass rezoning laws that create more affordable housing. When I was in the Borough President's office, we built thousands of units and funded millions of dollars toward affordable housing. I support a community benefits agreement that sets goals for hiring local residents, contractors, and services.

Specifically, the properties under the Westside Highway, south of 131st Street are substantially underutilized adjacent waterfront structures. We should rezone these parcels and repurpose them in a manner that meets the Morningside Heights community's most pressing needs. We need to bring quality partners to the table. Whether it is non-profit developers like WHEDco, or Community Access, or workforce development organizations like Per Scholas, we're scratching the surface of what we can do for the residents of Morningside Heights.