

## **Melissa Mark Viverito and Others Vote to Gentrify Harlem**

Movement for Justice in El Barrio 2008-05-02 19:38

**To Our Fellow Members of the East Harlem Community,**

**On Wednesday, as predicted, the Council Member who is supposed to represent our district, Melissa Mark Viverito, voted in favor of the 125th Street rezoning plan despite fierce community resistance from across Harlem. Although we are not directly affected by this proposal, as Movement for Justice in El Barrio, community members of East Harlem, we are against the plans that the Council Members and city government have to displace communities throughout Harlem. Movement for Justice in El Barrio was present to witness Melissa Mark Viverito in action at the Chambers of the City Council.**

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Around 100 community members, mostly African American and Latino, from across Harlem were also present, relegated to the balcony of the Chamber to witness the vote and to express a passionate dissent, while the supporters of the plan were given special place as honored guests in the front of the Chamber.

Nonetheless, the voices of the people came raining down strong as each of the three Council Members had their names called for role call, Robert Jackson of West Harlem, Inez Dickens of Central Harlem and Melissa Mark Viverito were all booed with shouts of "sellout" and "liar." When Inez Dickens started as the first of the three council members to speak, the people's voices continued strong, united and angry as they listened to the manipulations and lies from the politicians that claim to represent their community.

But, as we know, the Council Members prefer to cast their votes against the community in secret and out of the public eye. As Council Member Robert Jackson took the podium amid continued dissent, he made the special demand that the balcony be cleared and the house be emptied.

As the police swarmed onto the balcony to remove the people from their seats, Melissa Mark Viverito made her stance towards the community clear and stepped up to defend the proposed plan, one which she had played a special role in orchestrating and devising and was aggressively pushing forward in the City Council. For the first time, she turned to face the people, she stood up and walked over to stand next to Jackson with her arms crossed, and in a show of force and intimidation she stared the people down as they were removed from the balcony by the police while singing "We Shall Overcome." Other Council Members followed the lead of Melissa Mark Viverito and Robert Jackson and joined this face-off between the Council Members of Harlem and the people who they claim to represent, as the people were removed from the chamber by the police. It was long before the Chamber was emptied, and the people were forced out to the streets so that so-called "democracy" could take place among those with power.

So, the community could not be present to hear whatever manipulations, lies, or pretexts Melissa Mark Viverito shared with her fellow council members and an empty room, but the vote speaks for itself, the council members voted in favor of this devastating plan in a vote of 47-2, with the sole dissenters being Charles Barron and Tony Avella. Once again, Melissa Mark Viverito was able to cast her vote behind closed doors and free of the scrutiny and dissent of the public.

We know that Melissa Mark Viverito claims to be anti-displacement, but we have seen time and again that, despite empty words and media stunts, when it comes down to the moments in which she actually exercises her power in the form of votes in the Council, she votes against the people and for displacement. In addition, she exposed her attitude towards her

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community very clearly as she collaborated in an unusual show of force against a public made up predominantly of people of color. We will not buy into her efforts to trick the people while she gives Harlem away to corporations and slumlords! We will never forget her votes in favor of displacement in West, Central and East Harlem!

We ask all people of good will and good conscious to circulate this report widely to all those who are interested in stopping displacement in our community in East Harlem.

Sincerely, Movement for Justice in El Barrio

P.S We are attaching some of the media coverage of yesterday's vote below.

Council Approves Rezoning of 125th Street, Over Loud Protests of Some Spectators By Timothy Williams NYTimes.com | Published: May 1, 2008 [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/nyregion/01harlem.html?\\_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/nyregion/01harlem.html?_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin)

Quinn Kicks Public Out By Courtney Gross on April 30, 2008 The Gotham Gazette

<http://www.gothamgazette.com/blogs/wonkster/2008/04/30/quinn-kicks-public-out/>

Council OKs Harlem rezoning plan; cops called to clear opponents By Kate Rudish and Frank Lombardi / Daily News Staff Writers NYDailyNews.com | Thursday, May 1st 2008, 4:00 AM [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/2008/05/01/2008-05-01\\_council\\_oks\\_harlem\\_rezoning\\_plan\\_cops\\_ca.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2008/05/01/2008-05-01_council_oks_harlem_rezoning_plan_cops_ca.html)

City Council approves rezoning of Harlem's main business district The Associated Press NYDailyNews.com | Wednesday, April 30th 2008, 8:30 PM [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/2008/04/30/2008-04-30\\_city\\_council\\_approves\\_rezoning\\_of\\_harlem.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2008/04/30/2008-04-30_city_council_approves_rezoning_of_harlem.html)

Council approves controversial Harlem development plan By Marlene Naanes [MNaanes@am-ny.com] / amNewYork Staff Writer amNY.com | 4:58 PM EDT, April 30, 2008 <http://www.amny.com/news/local/am-harlem0501,0,601197.story>

How Harlem Council Members Disguise Plans to Sell Out Our Communities and How Our Communities are Fighting Back  
On Wednesday April 30th, the City Council voted in favor of the destructive "River to River" plan which would rezone historic 125th St. to include thousands of luxury apartments and displace over 70 local businesses and hundreds of workers and tenants. The Council Members would have the community believe that it is all for the good of the people. But people know better and are hitting the streets to expose their deceptive claims.

On Sunday, April 27th, communities across Harlem came together in "A Day of United Action Against Displacement in Harlem" to protest simultaneously in front of the offices of Inez Dickens, Robert Jackson and Melissa Mark-Viverito for promoting the destruction of our communities while at the same time deceiving our communities by disguising these plans as beneficial. Communities across Harlem are not buying into these manipulative claims and are exposing these false representatives for supporting displacement and gentrification. Protests were organized by Movement for Justice in El Barrio, the Coalition to Preserve Community, the Harlem Tenants Council, Mirabel Sisters Cultural and Community Center, Preserve Harlem's Legacy, and V.O.T.E People.

The threat of community displacement and gentrification has been rearing its ugly head across all of Harlem. The three Council Members, Inez Dickens, Robert Jackson and Melissa Mark-Viverito who claim to represent the three districts that make up Harlem: West Harlem, Central Harlem, and East Harlem, have banded together time and again to support gentrification and displacement with complete disregard for the voices of our communities of low-income people, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Indigenous people.

Melissa Mark Viverito, Inez Dickens, and Robert Jackson have supported displacement throughout Harlem by:

- Voting in favor of the Columbia University expansion plan, which seeks to bulldoze affordable housing, displace small businesses, and relies on eminent domain to take over West Harlem and to push people from their homes and community.
- Supporting the "River to River" 125th St. proposed plan which will rezone historic 125th St., displace hundreds of tenants due to construction of thousands of luxury apartments, and displace over 70 local business and hundreds of workers.
- Standing by and ignoring the displacement in our communities across Harlem as low-income tenants are attacked by multinational corporations, landlords, and city institutions.

Movement for Justice in El Barrio was founded by immigrants and low-income people of color to fight against displacement and gentrification and for dignified housing in East Harlem, the district of Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito. Movement for Justice in El Barrio and community members of East Harlem are opposed to this plan and are denouncing ALL THREE

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Council Members who are pushing it forward. The three council members, Dickens, Jackson and Mark Viverito recently unveiled a revised plan for the rezoning of 125th St. which they claim addresses the communities concerns around displacement. This plan merely disguises a plan that will redesign 125th St. in favor of corporate interests and contribute to the gentrification of a community with a long dignified history and culture. Claims that the new so-called affordable housing mentioned in the "points of agreement" between the Council Members and the Administration will resolve the push towards gentrification and displacement that is intrinsic to the plan in both its original and revised versions, are attempts to make a destructive plan, that was formed with no community participation and sustained community opposition, politically palatable. While Council Members claim that the plan will create 1785 "affordable" or income-targeted units in addition to the 2023 market rate units, only 18% will be permanently affordable while the remaining 82% could quickly revert to market rate. In addition, 550 (or 30% of units designated as income targeted) will be targeted at potential residents who have an income of 130% to 165% the median income of the area. With New York facing one of its most dire affordable housing crises, these measures do not even approach a real sincere effort to address the needs of the community.

These council members have repeatedly ignored the needs and just demands of our communities, they have voted in favor of the Columbia expansion plan, and now they have excluded the community from behind-the-scenes negotiations to push forward a manipulative and destructive revised proposal to redesign 125th St. We will not have the wool pulled over our eyes as our communities are sold off piece by piece!!

Past coverage of Harlem Gentrification:

<http://www.indypendent.org/2008/04/25/harlem-uproar/> Harlem Uproar by Renee Feltz

<http://www.indypendent.org/2008/02/25/1507/> 125th Street on the Line by Renee Feltz

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/01/94322.shtml/> Harlem Community Forum Blasts Bloomberg's Gentrification Plan by Alex Kane

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/03/95380.shtml/> Movement for Justice in El Barrio Denounces 125th St. Gentrification Plan by MJB

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/05/96858.shtml>