

**Candidate Questionnaire for NYC City Council, Manhattan District 9,  
Special Election February 14, 2017**

Dear Harlem Voter,

Please see below responses to the HDFC Coalition's Candidate Questionnaire from the following candidates, in alphabetical order:

**1. Do you believe that creating and preserving affordable home ownership in Harlem should be the priority, or is it more important for the City to focus its efforts on creating and affordable rental housing?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** I do not think we should pit one against the other. What I am against is spending untold dollars on homeless shelters.

**Charles Cooper:** I don't think it's an either or solution. However, I do think we need to address this issue in a new paradigm. New City Council District 9 is one of the fastest gentrifying neighborhoods in the world. The price of real estate will continue to rise. I support all and any efforts that are presently underway to ensure that working class and middle class citizens can live in Harlem. But my focus is on expanding economic opportunities in the form of contracts and jobs. Columbia University is building a \$7 billion campus that is going to change the face of Harlem. But they committed to hire 30 percent of Harlem residents and make a good faith effort to give 30 percent of the contracts to local businesses. They have done neither because Harlem's political leadership has refused to take them on. I will do that, not only with Columbia, but any development moving forward. Here is what I promise: 1. Have 30% of affordable housing units, 2. Have a 30% goal for jobs and minority and women owned Harlem residents and businesses, 3. Have a 30% goal for contracts to local and minority firms.

**Marvin Holland:** I believe it should be an equal effort. As an owner of an HDFC cooperative, I know what a great opportunity it is for NYC residents to have a potential lifetime home that is building equity at the same time. But I also know that when the AMI is classified at \$90,600 for a family of four, and \$63,500 for an individual, yet Harlem median household incomes average \$36,000, it's not something realistically within reach. And there should be equal options for affordable rentals, allowing them to save for ownership someday.

**Athena Moore:** I am a cooperative homeowner and I have family members that currently reside in HDFCs and were at the forefront of the movement to protect and preserve HDFCs in Harlem. Creating and preserving affordable homeownership in Harlem should be the priority. I have continued to advocate for this through my service as the former Director of the Manhattan Borough President's Northern Manhattan Office as well as working in coalition with HDFC tenants, elected and community leaders and other housing coalition advocates. It is not enough for the city's sole efforts to focus on creating rental housing. We must work to empower Harlem residents through homeownership opportunities like HDFCS and as a City Council member I would do everything in my power – legislatively, budgetarily and through the land use process to

ensure that they are not displaced, especially those who have sacrificed, raised their families and invested in this community.

**Todd Stevens:** Creating and preserving affordable home ownership in Harlem is my priority. It is more like my calling as real estate has been my passion, career and livelihood each day of my past fifteen years in Harlem.

**2. Do you feel that the City should put more funding towards moving all existing T.I.L. buildings from rentals to become HDFC cooperatives and give the residents ownership and equity?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** Of course! Item number 1.

**Charles Cooper:** Home ownership is key. Rents will continue to rise on the island of Manhattan. District 9 is now one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the world to live in. We must focus on homeownership. A mortgage does not go up, leases do.

**Marvin Holland:** Absolutely. The TIL program is one of my housing priorities and as Councilperson I intend to explore all avenues for reviving a well-intentioned plan that is sadly neglected.

**Athena Moore:** As City Councilwoman, I would advocate for more funding for support of both the T.I.L program and HDFC Cooperatives. We need to expand and assure as many opportunities are provided as possible to give harlem residents ownership and equity. We need to create pipelines that help as many more individuals and families as we can access affordable homeownership. Those who were previously in the T.I.L. Program should also have an opportunity to transition from being rentals to becoming HDFC cooperatives if they choose as it would further elevate their circumstances.

**Todd Stevens:** Home ownership is the answer to self-empowerment, retirement and wealth for all Americans. I believe the City should put more funding towards moving all existing T.I.L. buildings from rentals to become HDFC cooperatives and give the residents ownership and equity.

**3. What impact do you think home ownership has had on the Harlem community?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** HDFC's coops are the heart of the community. They are the buildings that were the shining stars on the block and in the neighborhood.

**Charles Cooper:** Home ownership has to be the central strategy going forward, combined with creating economic development opportunities for our community to ensure we can afford to buy. Upper Middle class families are being forced out of New York neighborhoods because of increasing rent.

**Marvin Holland:** Ownership is stabilizing. It's security. It's knowing you won't be moved out of your rapidly gentrifying neighborhood against your will - but when you are ready to go, you'll

be able to afford to. But more than that, it makes you take more pride in your community, and want to invest time and energy into making it the best it could be.

**Athena Moore:** Homeownership provides an opportunity for residents to build wealth through investment in their homes, it helps to lift those who would otherwise not have a chance to build equity, and to pass on one's home to their families and future generations. It is a critical necessity and I would as City Councilwoman continue to commit myself to helping the harlem community increase its chances for homeownership. Gentrification has also become a real problem as a result of the inequity in homeownership opportunities for harlem residents. Many families who could not afford to own or buy their homes have been displaced, and I would do everything I can to assure greater equity and to prevent widespread displacement of families who have long been here and helped to build the harlem community.

**Todd Stevens:** Home ownership has had enormous and exponential positive impact on our Harlem community. Home owners, regardless of the price of their home, take ownership of their home and their neighborhood from their first day of ownership. Home ownership also effects residents to stay in our community longer. It has a large effect on the excellence of our schools, the success of our Harlem-resident owned businesses and the beautification of our parks, blocks and sidewalks.

**4. HDFC shareholders have worked for decades, through "sweat equity" and investment of personal funds, to rebuild their buildings as well as their communities. To what degree do you feel that this happened because the residents became home owners with equity?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** Harlem is Harlem because of the people who stayed here. The tenants who became homeowners, because they stayed and protected the property and made it attractive to others. They are initialed to equity as others.

**Charles Cooper:** No one is coming to save us. Not the city, not the state, not the federal government. We have got to figure this out on our own. HDFC is a model going forward toward home ownership. We must own our homes if we are going to stay in Harlem.

**Marvin Holland:** I would believe it had everything to do with becoming owners with equity. You work hardest for yourself.

**Athena Moore:** Numerous HDFC shareholders who have worked for decades and rebuilt their communities investing sweat equity and personal funds, and they deserve to be supported in all ways possible, acknowledging the tremendous sacrifices they made when no one wanted to live in or cared about the harlem community. These shareholders had to fight to keep their properties, and the majority of them are still sacrificing and fighting, and have not achieved they equity they should have. I would continue fighting for them.

**Todd Stevens:** As a real estate broker in Harlem for the past fifteen years, a representative for many HDFC homes and a homeowner, I know the HDFC owners have sweated their every muscle and mind to sustain their building's structure, cleanliness and quality of life when the government turned a blind eye to assisting HDFCs as best the government could. The survival

and greatness of our HDFCs has relied upon the HDFC owners who have paid their maintenance payments, invested in their building and personally done everything they can to continue. I know as the City Council candidate with many times the experience of any other candidate in real estate and with HDFCs that I can bring solutions to the table and fight for the betterment of all HDFCs without having more government control.

**5. HPD has floated a proposal to eliminate the DAMP real estate tax abatement for HDFCs within a year, instead of letting it run until 2029 as it was designed to do, while market rate co-ops and condos enjoy a real estate tax abatement without restrictions attached. If you are elected to the City Council, would you vote to preserve the current DAMP tax abatement for HDFCs, exactly as is written, without any modification or additional requirements for HDFCs?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** I would advocate to extend the DAMP tax.

**Charles Cooper:** I support HDFC's mission and its trajectory towards homeownership for its residents. As City Councilman, I plan to work in tandem with HDFC to preserve this model program.

**Marvin Holland:** Yes, as Councilperson I would vote to preserve the current DAMP tax abatement, and would not make changes that target HDFCs. I would also call for the council to have hearings on HDFCs so that all concerned parties are present for and discussions transparent. Eliminating the DAMP program within a year is not a realistic solution.

**Athena Moore:** Yes, I would vote to preserve the DAMP tax abatement for HDFCs.

**Todd Stevens:** Eliminating the DAMP real estate tax abatement for HDFCs within a year is paralyzing, hurtful and discriminatory toward all responsible HDFC homeowners. I will vote and fight to preserve the current DAMP tax abatement for HDFCs, exactly as is written, without any modification.

**6. HPD has also proposed a new regulatory agreement for all HDFCs that would dilute the property rights and right of self-determination of HDFCs by stripping power from our co-op boards and handing it to a City-provided "monitor" that would have to approve major board decisions, even for HDFCs that are not distressed. Do you agree with this proposal?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** Do not agree!

**Charles Cooper:** I am against any proposal that will take power and control away from HDFC homeowners.

**Marvin Holland:** I disagree with HPD's plan to create a new agreement allowing them to take ownership regardless of the status of the cooperative.

**Athena Moore:** No, I do not agree with this proposal in its current state. Any new regulatory agreement for HDFCs must reflect that needs and input of current and longtime HDFC

shareholders. Protecting the affordability of HDFCs is essential to preserving one of the only pathways for low-income families to become homeowners. As Councilwoman, I would continue to work with HDFC shareholders and HPD to assure that the voices and concerns of HDFC shareholders are adequately addressed in any future plans that would change current oversight or regulatory measures that affect them.

**Todd Stevens:** I 100% do not agree with this proposal. I will do everything in my power as the most experience real estate professional amongst the fifty City Council members to obliterate and discontinue this proposal. There are HDFCs of which are running in perfect order and there are HDFCs of which are distressed. I will be the #1 advocate for all HDFCs to continue, while I won't allow for the currently self-sustaining HDFCs to be effected by those HDFCs that are in financial peril. I will meet with Harlem's HDFC boards to tackle any financial or board-related challenges. I don't write this as a political-answer, I write this as a vow. My concerns are regarding safety, education and housing, but every Harlem resident wants better housing solutions. I know that I will only have six months to prove to the people of Harlem that I should be re-elected this September so housing will be my #1 subject of concern every day that I'm in office as I know that I can promptly achieve housing solutions for the people of Harlem and across NYC.

**7. HPD has also proposed capping the equity that shareholders have earned through decades of struggle within the rules, even though HDFC shareholders rarely move because there is nowhere else to go that they can afford. HDFCs have always had income restrictions for new buyers, but never price caps. Do you agree that equity of shareholders should be restricted by HPD through the institution of price caps by HPD, or should this issue be left to each HDFC to determine?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** HDFC's should have autonomy.

**Charles Cooper:** Again, I support HDFC's right to control its destiny. But not just HDFC, I will introduce legislation to give residents of NYCHA the right to buy and own their buildings. The game in New York is development. In order to stay here, we have to master it. Tenants are subject to the whims of Landowners. Residents are stakeholders in their communities. Again HDFC is the model in that it transforms tenants into residents and homeowners.

**Marvin Holland:** I do not agree with price caps for existing HDFCs. These buildings from inception were meant to provide ownership to those who might not be able to purchase otherwise. But they were also created with the understanding that after a period of time, those owners who maintained their cooperatives well, would one day be able to enjoy ownership of a very valuable asset. For future builds, I do think there is a place for equity-restricted cooperatives, to maintain affordability for new buyers. However, I think that should be a component of the purchase, made clear up front so that the individual buyer could make the decision to purchase an equity limited cooperative; or not.

**Athena Moore:** I do not agree that the issue of the restriction and resale caps for shareholders should be left to each HPD or each HDFC alone to determine. We need a plan that is in balance with the history of HDFCs and takes into account the sacrifices made, while also giving

opportunity for those currently living in HDFCs the benefit to achieve a greater return on their investment than when they purchased it, while also preserving affordability for the future.

**Todd Stevens:** We have income-caps for every HDFC and there is not any need or positive result from having ‘price caps’. I will do everything I can so that this never happens.

**8. Some HDFC shareholders have discovered that they might not be able to pass on their apartment to their children, because the income of their children must be within guidelines. This can prevent a child from inheriting the family home and living in the community in which they grew up. If income restrictions are lowered even further as HPD proposes, more children would be unable to live in the family home after their parents pass away. Do you feel that children of HDFC shareholders should be exempted from income restrictions when applying to succeed their parents as shareholders?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** I will sponsor seminars to help with wills/trusts to ensure that heirs are protected.

**Charles Cooper:** Again, excuse my French but that is bull!!!. We have to fight any proposal that stops us from owning and passing our property to our children.

**Marvin Holland:** To an extent – the health of the cooperative, and value of an individual shareholders’ home depends on the financial stability of the other shareholders. The purchase process requires a certain income and down payment to ensure new buyers continue to maintain the building’s stability. I believe income restrictions for children of owners must be approached in a different way – there needs to be guidelines with minimum income requirements for transfer of ownership. There should not be a maximum, however.

**Athena Moore:** Children of HDFC shareholders should receive the maximum support in achieving succession where possible and I would work hard to assure that they living in HDFCS can pass down their properties to their children and future generations.

**Todd Stevens:** Yes, children of HDFC shareholders should be exempt from income restrictions when applying to succeed their parents or grandparents ownership of an HDFC home. These are homes, not mathematical investments. I’m sorry this is even a part of any discussion.

**9. Hundreds of HDFC shareholders Citywide have attended meetings held by HPD, Community Boards and the HDFC Coalition regarding HPD's recent proposal. The vast majority of HDFC shareholders are vehemently opposed to HPD's proposal and upset that HDFC shareholders have been excluded from the conversation. How should the City proceed, given this environment?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** Given the shareholder output, I would suggest a survey.

**Charles Cooper:** Again, no one is going to save us, but us. HDFC shareholders should demand that they be at the table in any decision that affects their lives. As your city councilman, I will be there with you. Home ownership is the only way we will stay in Harlem.

**Marvin Holland:** The City should immediately halt all plans for moving forward, and open up the discussion to HDFC owners across all boroughs. The Council should hold also hearings so that councilmembers can hear from the residents how this issue affects their district.

**Athena Moore:** I have held town hall meetings focused on this issue in Central Harlem. I would continue to use my position in the City Council to hold public hearings, to propose new legislation, to assure funding is earmarked in the budget and to provide education to further increase community awareness.

**Todd Stevens:** I am also vehemently opposed to HPD's proposal and I know, if elected to the City Council, I will be the leading real estate expert to help the City of New York and HPD make sound decisions regarding our homes.

#### **10. Do you have anything else you would like HDFC shareholders in Harlem to know?**

**Larry Scott Blackmon:** I was born and bred in Harlem. Grew up in Drew Hamilton, became a success story, not a statistic. I stayed back and gave back.

**Charles Cooper:** Right now our political leaders are playing musical chairs. They are swapping seats. We only have ourselves to blame if we keep doing the same old thing. I am not an expert on housing issues. But what I am and what I promise you is that I will stand in the city council and at the community board and on the street corners with you to fight to get our people into home ownership.

**Marvin Holland:** Yes. I am also an HDFC cooperative owner. My wife joined our coop board 10 weeks after we moved in – before we even had a completed bathroom or a working kitchen. She has served as President of the Board for the past four years, before stepping down and serving as Vice President for the past four months. I say that to say I have had a window into the incredible work and countless hours it takes to manage an HDFC cooperative (well) that most don't get to look through, and I applaud all who do the job. I do understand however, that some boards have issues and do need assistance, and there should be some oversight, though I do not agree that HPD is the answer as they are not an enforcement agency. I assure you, I share your concerns, and am personally vested in this struggle.

**Athena Moore:** If elected and given the support of the HDFC Coalition, I would continue to be a fierce advocate working across all levels of government, with the community boards, HPD and shareholders to assure the best results for those who have sacrificed, invested and remain in the Harlem community!

**Todd Stevens:** As the only candidate and the only person on City Council of whom has and will have 15 years of residential sales and rental real estate experience with the people of Harlem, I know that I'm the answer for everyone who seeks the empowerment of affordable home ownership in Harlem. If somehow I'm not elected to the City Council, NYC will continue having fifty persons with little or no experience in real estate making decisions of their most important asset, their home. I will have a full-time employee on my staff who is solely focused

on assisting me in advocating, fighting and providing solutions for the more affordable home ownership for all New Yorkers. Together, we can achieve the greatest result for HDFC owners in NYC.

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Thank you to all our candidates who responded!

Now, REMEMBER TO GO OUT AND VOTE ON FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>!!!

And don't forget to organize your HDFC building, and make sure each of contact your new Councilmember to tell them that you are an HDFC shareholder and you vote! Tell your Councilmember to tell the Mayor: "Don't take away our DAMP tax abatement, Don't force us to sign Regulatory Agreements, Don't take control of our buildings from us, Don't steal our equity!"

Also, don't forget to sign up on our website for free HDFC updates at [www.hdfccoalition.com](http://www.hdfccoalition.com).

Sincerely,

The HDFC Coalition