

The Human-Scale NYC Report Card

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Which Candidates Align with the Human-Scale Vision for NYC?

How We Did This Report Card

Our committee developed a 30-question survey on land use and real estate issues. The survey also covered community board reform, affordable housing, campaign finance reform, upzonings, MIH, and air rights transfers. We sent it to over 300 candidates and kept after them to fill it out. We communicated through Twitter, Facebook, phone calls to their campaign, and through email over a three-week period.

We got 42 responses, mostly from Council candidates. We did get a fair set of responses for candidates for Manhattan Borough President. Only one Mayoral candidate responded (Donovan) to the survey. You can read all the questions and all the responses of the candidates [here](#).

How We Graded the Candidates

To get a high grade, or even a grade at all, the candidate had to do several things. First, the candidate could not take significant amounts of money from the real estate industry or the real estate industry's lawyers, spouses, underlings, relatives and lobbyists. That second criteria eliminated a lot of candidates from our consideration. Second, they had to simply fill out our survey.

After that our committee subjectively filtered and graded the candidates on the degree to which their answers to our survey questions reflected ***a critical understanding of the city's current housing, zoning, and land use policies and the extent we thought the candidate seemed aligned with the HumanScale vision for New York City*** and the degree to which they were aligned with our policy agenda (all of which is on our website). Then we interviewed potentially high scoring candidates (though would end up with a grade of B or higher). We did this via Zoom. We also read through the housing and land use sections of their public platforms and checked what we could find about the candidate in the real estate press, in case we missed

anything. We attended quite a few candidate forums put on by other organizations to ask a few more questions and to get a better sense of possible alignment or not.

We don't report on anyone who got a grade lower than B- from us except in the case of the all-important Mayor's race. So here is our report card.

Mayor's Race

C- Shaun Donovan

Comment: Donovan has a compelling urban planning policy in the 15-minute city idea (it isn't his idea, it's just a popular concept among urbanists these days), but he doesn't understand the B.S. behind the phrase "high opportunity areas" of the city or the problem of how to distribute density. And he gets a total fail grade on his lack of understanding of the value to our city of historic districts and landmarking. On that matter he echoes the right-wing, libertarian line of Edward Glaeser. He wrote: "A Donovan administration would seek legislation to require the City Planning Commission or the City Council to estimate the loss of buildable square footage resulting from new district designations and expansions, and to consider this factor in its approval of such designations." That's a real problem for us. For all his policy wonky reputation he seems to have limited his reading to right-wing material when it comes to historic districts.

He also supports the SoHo/NoHo and Governors Island upzonings. At Human-Scale, we are also big on "big money out of politics" philosophy: we understand that we are not responsible for our parents but it did go over well with us that his father was supporting Donovan with a PAC.

No other Mayoral candidate filled out our survey. Reviewing their websites, the only non-real estate backed candidates turn out to be Kathryn Garcia (not that Garcia doesn't take real estate money, just not enough to make her a possible tool of the industry) and Dianne Morales. Garcia's housing and land use policies are unclear - in DID's candidate forum she denied the importance of displacement, but on her website she seems to support giving up on MIH (a good move, in our opinion if she would do so clearly). She also sadly supports the ill-conceived SoHo/NoHo rezoning, as does Wiley.

That leaves Dianne Morales as the only Mayoral candidate standing, but we aren't sure of her positions on many of our land use and real estate and good government issues as she did not fill out our survey, despite promising to do so. If that changes, we'll let you know.

Comptroller's Race

None of the Comptroller Candidates answered our survey, so we did not grade anyone, although we advise our readers this: Brad Lander and Corey Johnson are way too close to the real estate industry in terms of real estate donations and professional connections and would never make it past that single criteria even if they did fill out the survey.

However, we are fans of **David Weprin's** tweet a couple of weeks ago in which he pledged *not* to use the job (if elected) as a springboard for Mayor. He tried to get the other candidates to sign it but nobody took the bait. We also like his other promise: to audit every agency every year. (We were surprised that intense auditing doesn't already happen, but hey, this is NYC and getting the government to do its job is often pretty hard! Think how refreshing it would be to have a Comptroller who actually did the job, is qualified to do so, and who would not spend all of their time trying to be Mayor!

Manhattan Borough President Report Card

A- **Ben Kallos** The minus comes from this candidate's dependence on Gale Brewer and our disappointment with Kallos for not speaking out strongly on all the disastrous current upzonings in Lower Manhattan and ignoring our requests for commentary on the Penn Station project of Vornado. We did not think he did a good job on the Void Loophole bill of two years ago. That said, on many other matters Kallos strikes us - through his track record of votes and op-eds - of being fairly well aligned with the Human-Scale vision for the city and we think his longer record shows he does understand how to defend Manhattan from the forces of overdevelopment that are lining up here in the city waiting to be unleashed in the next administration. He wrote: "Most Council Members have used member deference to upzone to print money for developers and fill their campaign coffers over the objections of their communities. I've been widely criticized for "breaking" member deference by using it to protect my districts from the march of supertall buildings across billionaires row into residential districts." He is also has a track record of being a good government reformer with many long and detailed documents outlining ideas on how to improve the functioning of city government.

B Lindsey Boylan Boylan got very high scores for what she has said out loud to us and for her strong public stances on Governors Island, SoHo/NoHo, Seaport Rezoning, and East River Park fight, but her grade really came down for her neo-liberalish survey responses on land use and for her deep professional history with real-estate aligned planners and managers. All those set off alarm bells for us that we can't turn off despite Boylan's personableness. For example, she wrote on the deference issue, "that deference will extend so long as each community board district *meets its housing targets*" [emphasis ours] thus suggesting she has swallowed the Kool-Aid of the Soviet style community planning bill that is being pushed on us hapless citizens of the city. The survey responses were full of those kinds of concerning responses, with mention of Nimby's always winning (a factual error on her part). To be fair, lots of candidates have swallowed that nonsense about the planning bill, but you have to emphatically reject it to get an A from us. An A and a C average out to a B.

We did not grade candidate Brad Hoylman as he did not answer any of our questions, but we have been happy to work with him on the Penn Station debacle. And candidate Mark Levine is too close to the real estate industry: he is the candidate of choice of REBNY's running dog YIMBYists so we do not grade his work.

City Council Races Report Card

Grade of A - Top of the Class

A Chris Marte District 1, Manhattan "there are many vacant hotels and buildings in our district - they should be converted to affordable housing". Marte is also a long-time fighter for justice from the ridiculous real estate plans for Lower Manhattan that the city keeps pushing on us.

A Lena Melandez, District 7, Manhattan, who wants "height limits within contextual limits" and is a clear grassroots warrior for tenants rights and a warrior in the fight against the Inwood rezoning.

A Keith Taylor, District 9, Manhattan, wants an "independent public trust which will utilize federal vouchers to raise capital for substantive repairs and maintenance of NYCHA properties, avoid privatization, and greatly improve the quality of life of long-suffering residents." Taylor is also a strong advocate for historic districts in Harlem.

A Erin Hussein, District 2, Manhattan Hussein wrote: "the benefits and burdens of density should be shared throughout the city..." Attorney and mother, Hussein is a more than credible challenger to incumbent Rivera who has a very poor voting record on our land use issues and

history of taking money from big real estate. Unlike the incumbent, Erin Hussein is a strong supporter of historic districts and thinks East River Park should be saved.

A Marni Halasa, District 3, Manhattan “I do not support the Mayor’s MIH plan which is a housing doctrine of gentrification...” Fierce fighter for NYCHA tenants rights and a small business advocate, Halasa is a refreshing voice.

A Victoria Cambranes, District 33, Brooklyn, “I believe community boards should be chosen by the community through popular election” and that the ULURP process must be flipped on its head so that public input starts when the first application is submitted to the DCP”

A Michael Hollingsworth District 35, Brooklyn “MIH has been a failure and history will categorize it along with Robert Moses’s notorious projects which sacrificed communities of color to the highest bidder.” Couldn’t have said it better ourselves!

A Rodrigo Camarena, District 38, Brooklyn “We need ULURP reform and a real comprehensive Citywide plan for housing and land justice that is long-term, community led and grounded in racial, economic and environmental justice.” Lucky Sunset Park/Red Hook residents - they have a great choice here of someone closely aligned with the Human-Scale vision.

A Anthony Beckford, District 45, Brooklyn, a lifelong resident of the area, Beckford has been a fierce housing advocate and is dedicated to education equity. He says of air rights transfers “ that’s how we get these monster towers that are not beneficial for our community members.”

A Emily Sharpe, District 26, Queens. Attorney and activist founder of Stop Sunnyside Yards is well aligned with the Human-Scale agenda and at one time served on its Board (although she has stepped down during the election season). Sharpe believes the EDC should be abolished and wrote “MIH and upzonings have made our housing crisis worse” and “I’d like to see rent control as well, but not the bill that is currently floated because it gives the mayor too much power...” Sharpe is also a strong supporter of historic districts and has a deep understanding of the problems with the Sunnyside Yards proposals.

A- - Lou Cespedes, District 45, Brooklyn. Architect Cespedes has a ton of credible ideas for the neighborhood and for the city. He wrote “As someone who works with

developers I know MIH is used as a tool to extract higher FAR” and “the entire ULURP process is flawed.”

A - Joanna Garcia, District 10, Manhattan. Former Chief of Staff for Robert Jackson when he was on the City Council, Garcia writes “small business tenants should have the same kinds of lease renewal protections as rent-stabilized residential tenants. We also need to implement commercial rent controls.” Johanna was also a founding member of Northern Manhattan is not for Sale, which was the plaintiff for their Article 78 lawsuit against the Inwood rezoning.

Grade of B

B+ Cordelle Cleare, District 9, Manhattan. Cleare supports “legislation that limits luxury construction and overdevelopment in the District.” We had a hard time pinning the candidate down for a Zoom interview and finally gave up.

B+ Arthur Schwartz, District 3, Manhattan, says that “historic districts are a layer of protection against communities being overrun by developers.” Schwartz is an attorney and has used the courts to good effect on a number of progressive causes.

B+ Rebecca LaMorte, District 5, Manhattan “MIH is well intentioned but its poor implementation and half-stepped policy measures empowered real estate interests over community needs and exacerbated the affordability crisis in New York City.”

B- Maude Maron in District 1, Manhattan, a SoHo resident and education activist, Maron wrote “I genuinely believe that the skyline is rising too rapidly and there should be far fewer high-rise developments”, but then she showed a lack of understanding of the public nature of air rights when she said “I hesitate to take away assets from homeowners, the potential right to sell air-rights.” Actually, readers, please know that undeveloped FAR above a building is a publicly created “regulatory asset”, one determined by regulation, one that the State is free to give or take. It is not a private asset like a shoe.

