



Greenwich Village

SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

232 East 11th Street
New York, NY 10003

City Council District 2 Candidate Questionnaire

Please email the completed form or any questions to andrew@gvshp.org

No character/word limit

Candidate Name

Carlina Rivera, City Council District 2

1. Do you support the proposed rezoning of the University Place/Broadway and 3rd/4th Avenue Corridors put forward by GVSHP and City Councilmember Rosie Mendez which Mayor de Blasio and the Department of City Planning have thus far opposed? If not, why?

Yes, I support the proposal to rezone University Place/Broadway, as well as the 3rd/4th Avenue Corridors. A contextual rezoning that spans Third to Fifth Avenues from 8th Street & Astor Place to 14th Street is desperately needed to stop the proliferation of commercial out of scale development that is currently taking place. I believe that the Bowlmor Development Site is proof that a rezoning is needed since the out-of-context and over-scaled building that is currently going up actually could have been taller under the existing zoning. Furthermore, the current zoning incentivizes commercial development and that threatens our existing residential buildings. The proposal to lower the commercial FAR to 2.0 would dissuade such speculation, stabilize the residential housing and preserve existing residential units.

2. The City is proposing a Tech Hub for 124 East 14th Street. Whatever the merits of the proposed project, under current conditions it is extremely likely this project will accelerate the extension of "Silicon Alley" south from Union Square down to Astor Place, and through the University Place/Broadway/3rd Avenue/4th Avenue corridors, vastly increasing pressure for out-of-scale and commercial development in this largely residential area. Community groups and Councilmember Mendez have said that the City should be required to approve the proposed zoning protections for the University Place to 3rd Avenue corridors in order to get City Council approval for the Tech Hub. Would you be willing to use your leverage as a City Councilmember to condition your support for the Tech Hub upon the city approving zoning protections for the adjacent residential area? If not, why?

Since the NYC Council has to vote to approve or disapprove any ULURP (Uniform Land Use Reform Procedures) matters and other Councilmembers have successfully negotiated zoning changes and benefits for their district in exchange for the support of a Mayoral Administration project, then I would use my leverage as Councilwoman to condition my support for the Tech Hub upon the city approving zoning protection for the adjacent residential area. While I understand that the TechHub will bring valuable training and job opportunities to the district, without the needed zoning protections for the neighborhood, it would lead to acceleration in out of scale development for the surrounding residential neighborhood. The district deserves both a contextual rezoning and job development, and the Administration can make that happen.

3. Do you support the Small Business Jobs Survival Act? Though the bill has support from a majority of City Councilmembers, it has never been given a hearing, much less a vote. If you support it, what would you do to help get the bill a hearing and vote? If you don't support it, why not?

Yes, I support the SBJSA and the opportunity it creates to put power back into the hands of small business owners when they go to the negotiating a lease renewal with their landlord. While on the Community Board, I helped issue a Small Business Guide to Lease Negotiations to provide a resource to local operators. Additionally, while legislative director for Councilwoman Mendez, I worked to help secure funding to support small businesses and job creation. Preserving local small businesses that provide a diversity of goods and services at affordable price points is important to maintaining the culture and diversity of the community.

As Councilwoman I will use my knowledge and relationships to build a diverse coalition of support to demand a hearing and the passage of this bill. This will be one of the many things I will factor into my decision on choosing the next NYC Council Speaker.

4. What other measures would you support to help small businesses survive in our neighborhood? Would you support a special zoning district for the East Village that limits the size of stores and the number or placement of chain stores?

While I believe that some competition can be healthy in terms of giving consumers options, too much of anything, especially chain stores, can make it difficult for retailers to thrive. This is why since 2011, and as a member of CB3, I have supported a Special Zoning District for the East Village that limits size of stores and the number or placement of chain stores. As Councilwoman, it will be my priority to support diverse local retailers, entrepreneurs, and remaining Mom and Pop shops that have weathered the changes and stayed true to the community. Additional measures worth exploring include legislation that calls for fair commercial rent setting practices, funding in the form of low interest rate loans or grants, technical support and resources to help small businesses compete with online retailers, and supporting shop-local programs, incentives, merchant associations and MWBE initiatives.

5. Do you support having the former P.S. 64/Charas-El Bohio Cultural Center at 605 E. 9th Street returned to a true community use, rather than converted to a dorm, as the current owner/ developer has sought to do? If so, given the owner's opposition and the City's resistance to taking a more active and helpful role, how would you achieve this?

Yes I support having the former P.S. 64/Charas-El Bohio Cultural center be returned for true community use. As a resident, I have followed this issue for many years, and as District Leader I have spoken publicly in support of a model that addresses our needs. While at Councilwoman Mendez' Office, I worked with the DOB to expose Singer's use of permits without being in compliance with City rules and as required by the deed restrictions.

There is clear ongoing investment in this process as shown through efforts by local leaders and groups over the past 17 years. As Councilwoman I will support and lead these efforts and continue to petition the Mayor for true community use as defined by the stakeholders and residents who have been fighting for justice for so long. I will engage community supporters in a public campaign that will show others how important this building is to the community and how the current developer/building owner is attempting to push his own agenda with no regard to the deed restrictions, current laws or community ask.

6. Many preservationists and New Yorkers feel that the Landmarks Preservation Commission has become increasingly lax in its regulation of historic districts and landmarked properties, in that it has allowed increasingly out-of-context changes to landmarked buildings and new construction within historic districts. Do you agree with this assessment, and if so, what would you do as Councilmember to help address this?

Yes I agree. As Councilwoman, I will work with my colleagues and advocates to hold the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) accountable in following the regulations for historic districts and landmarked properties. Through hearings and research, I will work with colleagues and advocates to explore new policies, regulations, and reforms that give the public more tools and resources to ensure that the LPC follows its mandate to preserve our historic districts and landmark properties. To that end, notice on public hearings to ensure the public's ability to weigh in on projects before they are destroyed or dramatically altered is key. Preservation is an important tool for understanding, learning from, and celebrating our past. This is especially critical in communities with historic assets that are constantly attracting developers and where even minor changes can jeopardize architectural integrity.

7. The Mayor has made clear that he is opposed to any rezoning of any area UNLESS it involves a very significant upzoning (increase in allowable size of development), EVEN if the proposed rezoning would introduce affordable housing incentives or requirements where none currently exist. What do you think of this? And if you are not in favor of the Mayor's position, what would you do about it?

I am in favor of responsible growth where possible and don't believe that upzoning is the only way to incentivize the creation of affordable housing. Zoning should be used as a tool to plan for well-balanced neighborhoods where preservation, affordability, character and culture are prioritized.

The problem with the Mayor's model is that it does not allow enough community-based planning and as a result the Mayor's recent rezoning efforts have been met with opposition across neighborhoods. Communities understand the local needs best and can more appropriately determine what areas can sustain an upzoning and what areas cannot. As I understand, the successful community-led plan that was passed in 2008 to do a contextual rezoning of the Lower East/East Village encountered problems as housing advocates opposed voluntary inclusionary zoning as a result of the proliferation of construction and large-scale buildings. Community leaders came together and reviewed block by block the proposed rezoned area. The detailed, thoughtful, and responsible act of reviewing each block led to substantial areas that have voluntary inclusionary zoning and larger swaths of the community that does not since it could not sustain more height.

There have been many proposals that would allow for the preservation and/or the creation of affordable housing that does not require a very significant upzoning. I believe these are the kind of zoning proposals that should be supported and championed. As Councilwoman, I will work with residents, leaders, local organizations, elected officials, and the community board to stand united in pushing forward proposals that achieve these goals. I will work within the NYC Council to explore legislation that provides for more community oversight and meaningful input opportunities. There is too much power consolidated within the corresponding agencies and not enough mechanisms to ensure the community has a real role and say in the rezoning process.

8. How would you work to reduce the inordinate influence of the real estate industry over policy in New York City and in city government?

The real estate industry and their lobbyists have amassed too much power over our city and government. This is almost entirely made possible by campaign contributions, PAC's that are supported by the real estate industry, and unfettered access to Elected Officials from paid lobbyists. The biggest abuse in this kind of pay-to-play behavior is at the State level, where officials have no limitations on campaign contributions and where the LLC loophole is exploited, resulting in bankrolled candidates friendly to developers without our best interest as priority. Moreover, upstate elected officials have no real stake in what happens in New York City, but are making decisions about various laws affecting us while accepting large campaign donations from big money industry. As Councilwoman, I will support legislative measures that limit this unfair access and leverage by setting stricter disclosure requirements, capping contributions, larger monetary fines and restricting access by lobbyists for both City and State officials.

9. Some, including the Real Estate Board of NY, have tried to make the argument that historic preservation and preserving and promoting affordability are incompatible. Do you agree or disagree with this perspective? Please explain why.

I do not believe that historic preservation and affordable housing are at odds. It is my opinion that developers embrace that position so that they can make larger profits by flipping or demolishing buildings at proposed development sites. While it is true that doing renovations in historic districts or landmarked buildings is more expensive since permits have to be reviewed by LPC and DOB, contractors have to be diligent and knowledgeable in landmarks law and preserving physical structure.

An example of a building that GVSHP and Councilwoman Mendez were unsuccessful in landmarking, but ultimately successful in that the building was renovated and not demolished is Congregation Mezritch Synagogue located at 415 East 6th Street. The then developer Jarod Kushner said the structure's only option was to be demolished and constructed with a new synagogue inside. GVSHP, Councilwoman Mendez and the community fought for landmarking and, in the interim, a new developer approached the Rabbi with a plan to use the existing architecturally-significant structure and return important priceless religiously significant artifacts to the synagogue, while also including some residential units in the upper floor of the synagogue. Today that building's existence, its renovation and the restoration of the synagogue were possible because one developer has the moral backbone and skill to complete a project and save an important structure.

10. Where would preserving neighborhood scale, character, and historic resources fit into your priorities, and how would you go about achieving it? What obstacles or conflicts would you anticipate, and how would you deal with those?

The East Side has experienced significant changes over the past few decades that have threatened the character, scale, historic resources, and much more. This change is causing gentrification, displacement, and a loss of our community businesses and assets. Working to curb this change is high on my list of priorities. I will work to explore legislative and policy measures that would promote and require local oversight, preservation measures, affordable housing development incentives, resources for real community engagement, and stronger protections. I will work with advocates, resident leaders, and the community at large to develop strategies, policy measures, and community initiatives that help us get ahead of the curve and help us preserve and protect our assets, diversity, and culture.