

## **1. What is your name?**

Helen Rosenthal

## **2. What office are you running for?**

City Council, District 6

## **3. What is your plan for preserving and adding additional units of affordable housing in New York City?**

Preserving and expanding affordable housing requires a comprehensive approach. Highlights of my plan include: 1. Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning I support a citywide requirement that all new buildings with 10 or more units include affordable housing for middle and low-income individuals and families. I have a strong record of fighting to maintain the affordable housing that we currently have on the UWS. During my tenure as Chair of Community Board 7, I led two in-district projects which helped protect local residents from, respectively, purely profit driven real-estate practices and unregulated market forces. One involved formulating, with residents of Trinity House, a tenant-led buy out plan – which was embraced by building tenants and helped block a private equity-led plan that would have caused many tenants to lose their apartments. Another involved helping residents of Stern Housing, whose Mitchell-Lama status was terminated, successfully find new affordable housing units on the UWS. Further, the city should require mandatory inclusionary zoning for independent business owners in commercial development. Using the affordable housing model, we could require that 20-50% of commercial space be set aside for independent business owners. 2. Tax Fairness Developers organized as private equity companies presently benefit from the “carried interest” tax loophole that enables earnings to be taxed at rate of 15% as compared to the top rate of 36.9%. Until this loophole is closed, developers should be strongly urged to redeploy a substantial portion of this tax “windfall” to pay for more affordable housing units, as a condition for greenlighting development projects. 3. Increased, and more workable, Housing subsidies I support improving housing subsidies to emphasize deeper levels of affordability, a wider range of family and unit sizes, and permanent affordability, which includes a particular focus on using subsidies to build housing for middle and low income applicants. As Chair of CB7 we began the negotiations for at least 20 percent on-site affordable housing in Riverside South. Unfortunately, the final deal that was struck did not specify the percent AMI for affordability--the developer took advantage of better financing rates for including housing for those at the lowest income levels. Therefore, both categories of AMI must be included in the requirements. The recent housing crisis that resulted in the value of owned homes and apartments to fall nationwide, has paradoxically caused rents to increase – thus driving the need for dramatically improved housing subsidies. 4. Intervention in Foreclosure Crisis I support Intro 494, which would require foreclosing banks and mortgage-servicers to post a bond to guarantee that they will maintain foreclosed properties in good condition instead

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of allowing them to become derelict and blight their neighborhoods. Banks and similar financial institutions have benefitted greatly from government bailouts and economic policies in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Requiring a bond to ensure maintenance of foreclosed properties would represent merely a partial repayment of the extensive government subsidies they have received. I further support examining and using all possible avenues, including using eminent domain to seize underwater mortgages and reissue new lower mortgages, to ensure that homeowners can pay for their homes – on grounds of both fairness and ultimately, economic rationality.

#### **4. Do you support or oppose 421 tax abatements for development in buildings in already highly desirable neighborhoods?**

Oppose. I strongly oppose 421 tax abatements for development in buildings in already highly desirable neighborhoods. We need mandatory inclusionary affordable housing.

#### **5. As a Public Official, what actions would you take to promote the continuation and improvement of rent stabilization In New York City?**

I'll work to pass a resolution in the City Council calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to approve, the repeal of the Urstadt Law and return to the City the authority to control its rent and eviction laws. Furthermore, the City Council should appoint members of the RGB—and I will advocate for pro-tenant members. My campaign is centered on community and individual empowerment. The Urstadt Law is the antithesis of local empowerment and decision-making, and must be repealed. Until Urstadt is repealed, and as a City Councilwoman, I will expand upon the excellent work of UWS Councilwoman Gail Brewer in initiating monthly housing clinics where attorneys meet with district residents to provide pro-bono legal assistance in eviction and other tenant/landlord disputes. I will advocate for sufficient funding so these sessions can be continuous, and support using base-lined city funds for this purpose. For many years, I was an active board member of Stryker's Bay Neighborhood Council that provides anti-eviction services to tenants.

#### **6. How would you provide housing and mental health services to the homeless?**

I support addressing homelessness with workable, long-term solutions, starting with transitional vouchers and ending with permanent affordable housing that remains affordable to families below 50% AMI, including Section 8 vouchers, and deeply-subsidized housing. The supportive housing that the City currently provides is wholly inadequate--we are not receiving the services that we are paying for. The City must stop paying \$3,800 to unscrupulous landlords who don't maintain their apartments adequately and contract with supportive service providers who don't provide adequate services. Instability in housing deeply disrupts families, neighborhoods and the ability to maintain stable employment. Deeply subsidized housing reduces the human cost of dislocation; and promotes stable families and

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stable neighborhoods.

**7. What is your position on the leasing of NYCHA property to private developers?**

I'm completely opposed to selling off NYCHA property, especially to private developers. There is a long history of private economic interests benefitting from the purchase of public assets at bargain basement prices, and this cannot be allowed to continue.

**8. What is your position on the leasing of open space that is currently occupied by public schools to private developers?**

I am opposed to selling public space to private developers. Please see my opinion piece in the March 22, 2013 West Side Spirit <http://nypress.com/how-the-department-of-education-made-new-schools-a-cause-of-community-anger/> Where I write, "...There seemed to be no thought about community impact beyond "I guess we'll have to replace those schools." No thought about how two massive high-rises would impact our public infrastructure; our mass transit or our city services. No thought about thousands more people on the sidewalks, in the parks, and in need of things like day care. No thought whatsoever about what is right for this community."

**9. Do you support the continuation of mayoral control of schools?**

No

**10. Do you support or oppose the Mayor appointing a majority of the members on the Public Education Panel?**

Oppose

**11. Do you support or oppose the reappointment of Dennis Walcott as Chancellor?**

Oppose

**12. Do you support ending tenure protection for teachers?**

No

**13. Do you support or oppose a moratorium on school closings?**

Support

**14. Do you support or oppose the co-location of charter schools in public school buildings?**

Oppose

**15. Do you support or oppose a moratorium on new charter schools?**

Support

**16. Do you support or oppose giving local Community Education Councils greater power in determining use of school space?**

Support

### **17. How can you use your office to encourage the use of renewable energy?**

The reconstruction of the areas most affected by Hurricane Sandy offers an opportunity to rebuild them as renewable energy zones. The City can take advantage of its credit rating and historically low interest rates to offer direct loans and loan guarantees to rebuild businesses which rely principally on renewable energy sources. These financial tools, combined with property tax relief, can encourage residential reconstruction centered upon renewable energy. The goal should be, to the largest extent possible, to create an “ecosystem” centered on renewables. In terms of new development, in the same way which the City requires a certain portion of new units to be devoted to affordable housing, a certain percentage of new developments’ energy needs should be mandated to come from renewable sources. Once this principal is established, the renewable energy “percentage” required on new developments can be gradually increased over time. Because I believe in leadership by example, I’d make sure that at least one computer in my City Council office be powered by the energy generated from a stationary bicycle. This would serve as a visible demonstration of what each of us, in our own way, can do to reduce the City’s carbon footprint.

### **18. Are you in favor of closing the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant? If so, how will you use your office to support IP's closing?**

I strongly favor, on an expedited basis, the closing of Indian Point – which has a long record of safety and environmental mishaps and, in an environment where the Boston Marathon bombing reminds us of the threats to our major cities, a potential terrorist target. I applaud the announcement by Governor Cuomo of his intention to close Indian Point. Our task involves, among other items, to increase the priority of an Indian Point closing on the Governor’s agenda. In my first months in City Council, I’d look to sponsor a resolution – which I’d hope would pass by an overwhelming margin – requesting the NY State government to initiate closing in 2014. I’d also push for a non-binding referendum on the question to be placed on the 2014 general election ballot. We should use the fact that 2014 is an election year to increase public awareness and education around Indian Point, and to build popular support – in a measurable way – for prompt action.

### **19. Under what conditions, if any, would you support hydraulic fracturing in New York State?**

There are no circumstances under which I would support hydraulic fracturing in New York State. I’d encourage the New York City pension fund to review its investments in companies involved in hydraulic fracturing and to consider alternatives to these investments consistent with adequate return objectives and prudent portfolio management.

### **20. Do you favor or oppose commercial rent control?**

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I strongly favor commercial rent control. In the same way which the City needs to go the extra mile to insure affordable housing for its citizens, the City must also insure that small- and medium-size independently-owned businesses can set up shop and operate in an environment which is friendly to small enterprises – and make sure that their products and services (and not an excessive cost of space) determines whether they grow and thrive. Small businesses are and have historically been the engine of job growth; can enable ordinary people a chance to live the American Dream, and are vital to the charm of the City's many, diverse neighborhoods. Commercial rent control can help protect this. We need to expand the good legislation that Gale Brewer passed to rezone the Columbus and Amsterdam Avenue corridors to discourage landlords from combining small businesses for larger stores. I also think we need to rezone some areas to mandate rental to independent local businesses.

**21. Do you support zoning regulations that discourage owners of commercial properties from renting to large banks and chain stores?**

Yes – the City should actively discourage the rental of commercial properties to large banks and chain stores. The proliferation of these entities represents a growing blight in many of our neighborhoods. In the case of banks, these tenants will ultimately pull up stakes as financial business increasingly takes places on-line – leaving behind a ghost town of vacancies. In the case of chain stores, these pose a direct threat to local small businesses that form a backbone of stability and middle class income throughout the City. By and large, the beneficiaries of large bank and chain store invasions are the stockholders of these companies and not area residents.

**22. Do you support or oppose the leasing of public parks to raise revenue, such as private tennis courts in Central Park or private development of the Hudson River Park?**

I emphatically oppose leasing public parks to raise revenue such as private tennis courts in Central Park or private development of Hudson River Park. The single most disturbing economic development of the last five years has been growing economic inequality, and the government should not further put its thumb on the scale in favor of economically advantaged people by scaling back or otherwise selling off public assets which can be used by people with ordinary incomes. Revenue should be raised through closing tax loopholes like the carried interest exemption that result in private equity companies paying lower tax rates than most teachers; through surcharges on upper-income earners; and through increased excise taxes on activities the government should actively discourage (alcohol and tobacco consumption; firearm purchases; financial market speculation which relies on borrowed money).

**23. Do you think the power of eminent domain has been abused within the city? Is so, what examples would you cite?**

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The City has abused its power of eminent domain in the most morally disturbing way – trampling the private property rights of ordinary people to enhance the objectives of powerful, private economic actors. On the Upper West Side, the most recent and objectionable example involved the use of eminent domain to support Columbia University’s expansion plans. In Brooklyn, the abuse of eminent domain to clear the way for Atlantic Yards development shows the Columbia example is far from an isolated incident. To the extent the City uses its powers of eminent domain, it should do so to redress economic imbalances that harm ordinary people - rather than increase economic imbalances in favor of wealthy people or entities, which is what’s happening now. A more morally proper use of eminent domain would involve intervening in foreclosure situations to re-set interest rates to lower, prevailing market levels or to restructure debt obligations so that ordinary people can keep their homes.

**24. Do you support a bill mandating a living wage for anyone who works under a contract with New York City?**

Yes

**25. How do you define a living wage in dollars?**

I define a living wage as one that enables a family to feed, clothe and house themselves with a level of dignity. The rate of such wages should be responsive to the cost of living of the jurisdiction it covers and with automatic increases as costs continue to rise. It’s also a wage that enables families to ward off the predations of financial institutions that can charge near usurious interest rates on credit card and other forms of debt, which can trap working class families in a cycle of poverty.

**26. Should the living wage be applied only to NYC contracts or should there be a City minimum wage tied to the cost of living in New York city?**

City Minimum Wage tied to Cost of Living

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The benefits of the Living Wage legislation should be extended beyond NYC contracts and applied to all jobs, a solution best achieved with the implementation of a city minimum wage pegged to the cost of living in New York City. A place to start is the parameters of the existing living wage legislation that calls for a minimum of \$11.50 per hour without health benefits, or \$10.00 per hour with health benefits with automatic increases moving forward.

**27. Would you support the establishment of a City Department of Labor for complaints of violation of fair labor standards?**

Yes. I support legislation to create a Mayor’s Office of Labor Standards to document labor violations, penalize employers for those violations, and support the enforcement of hard-fought policies like Paid Sick Days that protect working families. A central theme of my campaign is vigorously addressing income inequality, and the creation of a Mayor’s Office for Labor Standards that reports jointly to the City Council, is vital to insuring this during the Great Recession. In addition, this Office must be given enforcement “teeth.”

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**28. Do you believe there should be mandatory paid sick leave in New York City for all workers regardless of establishment size?**

Yes. I support the mandatory paid sick leave bill recently passed by City Council and would support an over-ride of the Mayor's expected veto. Ultimately, the legislation can be improved in the future by expanding the number of paid sick leave days permitted for workers over age 55 – particularly those involved in physically demanding occupations.

**29. Under what circumstances, short of probable cause, should a police officer be able to stop and frisk someone?**

Under no circumstances short of probable cause should a police officer be able to stop and frisk someone.

**30. Would you continue, change or end the stop and frisk policy of the police department?**

Change stop and Frisk

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The current “stop and frisk” policy of the police department should be sharply curtailed, reducing its scope to the policy that prevailed during the Dinkins Administration—which worked in tandem with Community Policing and Safe Streets Safe City.

**31. Is there something you can do to keep people from getting arrested when, while being searched, they are found to have small amounts of marijuana that would not have been a crime if the marijuana was not in public view?**

Yes

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Within the five boroughs, I'd advocate that the penalty for possessing small amounts of marijuana be similar to that of a traffic violation, which would not result in an arrest. Arrests records for non-violent offenses impede young people from getting jobs, ensnaring them in a cycle of poverty which becomes difficult to escape and can in fact contribute to crime problems.

**32. Who would you appoint or support as police commissioner?**

I'd favor a the appointment of a person of color as commissioner who has served within the NYPD for at least two decades, and whose experience include some time spent as a foot patrolman.

**33. What would you do to improve city mental health services?**

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During both the Koch and Dinkins Administrations, there was a separate Department of Mental Health – which was later subsumed into the City’s Department of Health. We should return to the organizational format of the Koch and Dinkins years when the Department of Mental Health was a singular agency. The causes of and treatments for mental health issues are often misunderstood and subject to cultural taboos. Having a separate Mental Health Department will enable its Commissioner to use its distinct bully pulpit as a platform to educate the public on these vital issues, the courses of treatment available, and marshal public resources commensurate to the public needs.

**34. Would you continue (support) Bloomberg's policy of increasing the number of bike lanes?**

Yes, I’d encourage an expansion of Bloomberg’s policy of increasing the number of bike lanes. As Chair of Community Board 7, I played an instrumental role in the establishment of bike lanes on Columbus Avenue on the Upper West Side. Bike lanes not only help reduce our City’s carbon footprint, but encourage fitness and good health for bikers of all ages. Of course, the Department of Transportation must work closely with local businesses to ensure easy deliveries. We must continue to train the bike delivery guys to use the bike lanes—and use them appropriately. They must have identifying information on their bikes and shirts. I’ve been a life-longer biker and bike to all events within the 6<sup>th</sup> District and throughout the City. My first job, in fact, was at the bike store Brands in Massapequa, Long Island.

**35. How would you protect transit fares?**

Transit fares must be protected in part because the “cost of going to work” represents one of the most regressive taxes on our city’s working poor and middle-income breadwinners. We should suspend the partial rebate of Manhattan parking taxes to protect transit fares, and gradually increases those taxes to help hold transit fares at their current levels. To protect transit fares, I further support increased excise taxes on private car companies, whose use is predominately by large financial institutions and their service providers, who readily can (and do) pass along these costs to their economically elite clientele.

**36. Do you support congestion pricing?**

Yes, I wholeheartedly support congestion pricing. Within Manhattan, the goal should be to maximize mass transit and non-carbon emitting modes of transportation.

**37. What, if anything, do you think should be done to New York City's campaign finance law?**

We should start by acknowledging the substantial merits of the City’s current

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campaign finance system, one of the most progressive in the nation. Our goals should be to build on the principles and foundation of the existing system, which has served our City well. In October 2009, I authored a piece published in The Nation magazine which called for a major-league style “luxury tax” to level the playing field when well-heeled municipal candidates look to end-run the existing system by lavishly self-funding. I continue to support a “luxury tax” of this kind. In addition, we should expand upon the City’s existing system to further encourage small donations and empower those who can contribute only modest sums to campaigns. Specifically, if a candidate can gather small (i.e., \$20) contributions in a number equal to the number of signatures required to gain ballot access, that candidate should receive “full public funding” for their campaign, up to existing spending limits. At the City Council level, this means a candidate who raises \$20 from 450 in-district donors would receive full campaign funding from the city (an additional \$159,000 to supplement the \$9,000 raised). This expanded systems would result in a grassroots, ideas oriented candidate being able to compete on an equal basis with candidates tapped into wealthy financial networks. I concur with Dan Cantor of the Working Families Party that any candidate who can’t raise 300-400 donations of \$20 has no business running for office. Over 550 people have donated \$20 or less to fuel my campaign for City Council.

**38. Do you favor an increase in City income taxes for residents making more than \$250,000 per year?**

Yes. I favor an increase in income taxes for city residents making more than \$250,000 per year. Perhaps equally important, tax rates on capital gains and dividends should be increased to equal the rate paid on earned income; and tax loopholes such as the “carried interest” exemption – made famous by Bain Capital, which enables private equity investors to pay the lower, capital gains rate on their income – should be abolished. In addition, the tax avoidance scheme, which enables New Yorkers to claim a secondary residence outside the city as their “primary home” and evade city taxes, should be subject to increased enforcement and collection action.

**39. Do you favor or oppose an increase in the city sales tax?**

Oppose. Sales taxes are, by and large, regressive and should in fact be reduced on staples and other items which working class New Yorkers must purchase in the course of leading a normal life. Sales taxes on luxury items should be increased, as the purchases of these items are less “elastic” and the buyers have a greater ability to pay for them. To help restore the economic vitality of areas impacted by Hurricane Sandy, the city should declare a one-year sales tax “holiday” on purchases from businesses located in these areas.

**40. Would you support a transaction tax on Wall Street trades?**

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Support. I wholeheartedly support a transaction tax on financial institutions. In fact, there has been a stock transfer tax on the books since 1980, but these taxes are at the present time automatically rebated. As stock prices and financial institution profits have been propped up by the government's policy of ultra-low interest rates, it's reasonable to recapture a portion of this "market subsidy" provided to financial firms by a partial recapture of the stock transfer tax.

In addition, transaction taxes should be levied – to start – on stock transactions made with borrowed money; short sales of borrowed stock; high frequency trading; and transactions (such as "pre-paid forward sales"), whose principal motivation is deferral of income tax payments.

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**41. Do you think non-profits, including religious institutions, should be taxed when such institutions sell their property or air rights?**

Yes.

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Non-profits should not receive a tax preference, which enables them to avoid paying taxes when selling profitable assets, property or air rights. It's highly predictable that for-profit enterprises would find a way to re-characterize themselves as non-profits and embark on all sorts of financial engineering schemes motivated by tax avoidance.

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**42. What kind of a commuter tax, if any, would you support?**

I support a commuter tax, which is slightly higher than the tax paid by city residents. The fairness argument: people who earn their income in the city; pay property taxes and spend the lion's share of their money here should not be burdened with the same rate as those who earn their money in New York City and spend it elsewhere. This tax differential would discourage people from moving out of the city largely because of its tax rate; and in fact encourage people with well-paying jobs to continue to live within the city limits.