

DIVISION OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

July 10, 2022

The Cooperative Hall of Fame Committee

RE: Application for Induction of Linda Leaks into the Cooperative Hall of Fame

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to urge you to induct Linda Leaks into the Cooperative Hall of Fame. Linda has been a pivotal figure in cooperative housing in Washington, D.C. — and her influence as a cooperative organizer has spanned the globe. She has made a tremendous impact in cooperative housing, and it would be fitting if she were honored through being inducted into the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

I first became aware of Linda's work when I was organizing around gentrification and tenant issues in my D.C. neighborhood, starting in the mid-1990s. A few years later, when I was working on local D.C. affordable housing policy and advocacy questions, I became more familiar with Linda's work as a cooperative organizer with Washington Inner-city Self Help (WISH) and, later, Empower DC. The more I learned about the limited-equity cooperative model, the more impressed I became with it as a way to create sustainable affordable homeownership for working-class people. Linda was clearly one of the main organizers in the city helping tenants understand the limited-equity cooperative model as an opportunity for homeownership and self-determination.

In 2009, I began a year-long project working to organize the papers of Washington Inner-city Self Help, where Linda worked as a tenant and cooperative organizer for many years, until the organization disbanded in 2003. Fortunately, Linda had kept many of the organization's papers. Because of her commitment to keeping the historical record, we were able to create a robust archive of the organization, which is now held in the Community Archives of the Martin Luther King Memorial Library, the city's central public library. It was through the process of creating this archive that I became aware of the truly vast scope of Linda's work with D.C. tenants over the years. She began organizing in her own building in the Shaw neighborhood, ultimately helping her neighbors purchase the building and create a cooperative. Over the years, she worked with countless tenants associations, helping many of them through the slow and sometimes difficult process of becoming a cooperative. She was clearly a terrific organizer: she had total faith in the ability of everyday people to gain power in their lives, and she had the patience for the sometimes long processes of cooperative creation. When I decided to write my dissertation on D.C.'s limited-equity cooperatives, Linda was of course one of the first people I

knew I had to interview. Ultimately I published a book, *Carving out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), that analyzes the experiences of D.C. co-op members across ten cooperatives, many of whom have benefited directly from Linda's work.

Linda Leaks has been a force for cooperative housing in Washington, D.C. But her work has also spanned the globe. In the mid 1990s, Linda traveled to South Africa at the request of a group of Johannesburg tenants who wanted help purchasing their buildings and turning them into a housing cooperative. These tenants had heard about WISH's work with low-income tenants in D.C., and were eager to learn how they, too, could become collective homeowners. Linda worked intensively with the tenants, who lived in seven different buildings, all owned by the same landlord, to help them organize across buildings in order to purchase their homes in the waning days of apartheid. Though not all seven buildings remained cooperatives in the long term, the trans-Atlantic connections built by tenants, organizers and co-op members were inspiring for all involved. (I have documented this story in the chapter, "Struggling for Housing, from DC to Johannesburg: Washington Inner-city Self Help Goes to South Africa," in the 2016 edited volume, *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC.*)

When I moved into a D.C. limited-equity co-op myself in 2015, I became even more aware of the power of Linda's work. Though she did not help start our particular co-op, which the tenants had founded in 1990, she had helped build an ecosystem of D.C. co-ops of which my co-op was a part — to our great benefit. I served as Secretary of the Board for most of the six years that I lived in the co-op. During this time, I also worked with a member of the Ella Jo Baker International Community Cooperative, which Linda had helped found, to create a citywide federation of limited-equity cooperatives. In trying to bring together co-op members at the citywide scale, we were inspired by Linda's organizing work.

On a personal note, I am always delighted whenever I run into Linda on the street, on the bus, or at a protest. Even after all her years of working and organizing, she is still a visible presence for justice and people power in Washington, D.C.

For all these reasons, I am very happy to recommend that Linda Leaks be inducted into the Cooperative Hall of Fame. Please contact me at (202) 246-0112 if you'd like to discuss my recommendation further.

Sincerely,



Amanda Huron

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