

To: The Cooperative Hall of Fame Selection Committee

From: Sczerina Perot, Attorney

Re: Recommendation of Linda Leaks for the Cooperative Hall of Fame

Date: August 15, 2022

I am writing to endorse the nomination of Linda Leaks for membership in the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

Linda Leaks is an extraordinary community organizer who has worked for justice and equity in DC communities for 40 years. I first met Linda when she was the lead organizer at WISH DC in the early 90s. I worked with her further as the Co-Director of Empower DC from the founding, and even after her retirement when, at Georgetown University Law 's Harrison Clinic for Housing, I was the legal counsel for many DC Cooperatives. Throughout her long career she has been absolutely committed to strengthening the organizing power of low-income communities and building community led political power.

One of the little-known facts about DC is that it has a terrifically strong Cooperative Community, and that the leadership and organizing of Linda Leaks is one of the chief architects of this local success. Linda used direct engagement to inform tenants of the unusual right that tenants have in DC to purchase their buildings when sold (commonly referred to as TOPA). This tool provided the leverage to create affordable limited equity Coops in apartment buildings, and DC has over 4,000 such units in almost 100 buildings. DC has the highest concentration of Coops outside of NYC. Many of the Coops that are thriving today were founded by Tenant groups initially organized by Linda and using TOPA for the initial purchase. Indeed, she organized the Cooperative she currently lives in, the Ella Jo Baker Cooperative, named after the first Cooperative Hero.

Cooperatives in DC have faced many political struggles. There were efforts to end tax breaks, to reform the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) to remove the right of tenants to purchase, to charge extraordinary amounts for garbage collection, to decrease the availability of local subsidies. In every fight for affordable and equitable housing in DC over the last 40 years, Linda Leaks has been at the forefront, mobilizing and organizing a grassroots base of impacted low-income residents to win victories for their community and to preserve affordability.

While this work has improved the lives of all of us in DC, at its heart her work has improved the lives of DC's most overlooked residents, the Black community that was, and is, being displaced by gentrification at an alarming rate. Her commitment to community wealth development, housing preservation, and racial justice are woven tightly together. She was dedicated to growing Public Housing power as well as Cooperative power. Her vision for collective justice, wealth development, and racial justice doesn't end at housing. Linda was a leader in the advocacy for creating a public bank.

Linda has been a voice for accountability from public servants and for the use of public land. She was a leader in the fight against the condemnation of apartment buildings in the early 2000's, and through her leadership many condemned buildings were transformed into affordable limited equity Cooperatives. In 2011, Linda led a local campaign to stop cuts to housing in Congress when the Republican controlled House of Representatives proposed cutting \$100 billion from the non-military federal budget, drastically reducing the funds available for public and subsidized housing. In one memorable direct action, she organized DC residents to deliver handmade valentines to Federally elected officials with personal messages about the need for affordable housing. This action was typical of Linda, she was not in the forefront, she developed leaders and grew membership into leaders. She confronted power, and she did it with a literal message of love, on heart shaped cards. The community set the agenda, and the community felt the political victory was due to their actions and power when the cuts were abandoned.

I can think of no living person that deserve this award more than Linda Leaks.

SCZERINA PEROT | LEGAL HOTLINE

