



"We who believe in freedom cannot rest." Ella Jo Baker

August 10, 2022

To The Cooperative Hall of Fame Committee:

Re: Application for Induction of Ms. Linda Leaks into the Cooperative Hall of Fame

I am writing to express my strongest support for the induction of Ms. Linda Leaks into the Cooperative Hall of Fame. Linda's work in the development of affordable housing in the Washington DC area and far beyond has spanned a period of over 50 years. I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Leaks in 2005 while attending a protest the closing of a prominent black-owned bookstore in Washington, DC. From that first meeting, I went on to encounter Ms. Leaks in a multitude of spaces in which she was advocating for local low-income residents to acquire or maintain their affordable housing or small businesses in a rapidly gentrifying DC area. At that time, I had no idea that I was in the presence of what I like to call a "Cooperative housing legend."

My more direct relationship with Ms. Leaks started in 2009 when I became a member of the Ella Jo Baker Intentional Community Cooperative, Inc. (EJBICC) and the President of the Board. It was during this time I learned more about Ms. Leaks work and was blessed with the privilege to be educated by her on how to effectively maintain a co-op and the commitment to maintain affordable housing in an anti-tenant/underserved population. I consider her a "guru" and she is my main go-to for advice on how to handle specific coop-related issues.

I believe that Ms. Leaks is a Cooperative Hero because in the 1990s she organized the tenants of Southern Homes and Gardens to purchase their building and become a limited equity cooperative. With this great victory, Ms. Leaks went on to do the same for Nehemiah Cooperative, Champlain Courts Cooperative, Florian Gardens Cooperative, T Street Cooperative, L Street Cooperative and a whole host of others. She also worked with these groups to obtain funding via government grants, special loans from community and economic development groups, and private loans to help with the purchase, renovation, and maintenance of their properties.





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Ms. Leaks also worked with tenants in public and senior housings including Judiciary House by educating them about their rights as tenants, senior and disability rights, teaching the laws and helping them to write and give their testimony before the City Council.

In 1999, Ms. Leaks gathered a group of four other like-minded individuals and led the charge on purchasing six buildings from the District government to create the Ella Jo Baker Intentional Community Cooperative, Inc. which is dedicated to providing affordable housing specifically for people who are active social justice workers, and who are a part of the low income and underserved communities; as those of us that do this work do not often get financial compensation to do so, or are not paid enough for their time and efforts. In order to make some of the ends meet during the process of purchasing and obtaining financial funding from DHCD and Manna Inc. to renovate the buildings, Ms. Leaks helped to organize multiple fundraisers including fish fries to help members purchase appliances for their units. Operating under the Cooperative Principles and the principles of the Nguzu Saba, the formation of EJBICC allowed for these social justice workers to collectively continue their work and still live in gentrifying DC amongst increasing rent and property charges.

Additionally, Ms. Leaks and several members of the EJBICC worked closely with a number of limited equity cooperative boards to petition the City Council to pass the Limited Equity Cooperative Property Tax Assistance and the Tax Abatement act which allowed limited equity cooperatives tax breaks which helped them in their efforts towards financial stability; these special tax breaks included a five-year abatement on real property tax and was a great help for EJBICC.

Ms. Leaks is a cooperative advocate, affordable housing organizer, founder of the Justice Advocacy Alliance, former justice worker for W.I.S.H., and co-founder of Empower DC. Today, well into her 70s, Ms. Leaks continues to be a strong force in the cooperative arena; her focus, commitment and dedication to cooperative and affordable housing has not wavered. She continues to selflessly sacrifice her time and is available for any group that calls for her help. She is an excellent educator on housing rights, development of cooperative housing and provides sound/logical solutions to obstacles or issues that might arise. She educates groups on how to develop effective house rules and regulations and by-laws so that they can effectively maintain their shared affordable housing.

Ms. Leaks' cooperative expertise, strong commitment to the cooperative model, and to affordable, safe, and consistent housing in the Washington DC and beyond, and her amazing ability to mobilize people to find their own voices so they can advocate for themselves, qualifies her for the honor of being inducted into the Cooperative Hall of Fame.





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If I can provide further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Takada Harris

Takada Harris,

EJBICC, Board President

