

## East Harlem District Debate on Affordable Housing Turns Ugly

by Alicia Perez

Thursday, August 29, 2013 03:09 PM

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What could have been a straight-forward debate between the candidates running for City Council's 8th District on Tuesday turned into a noisy, raucous event with plenty of unexpected audience participation.

"She's a millionaire and living in public housing!," shouted one audience member, pointing at incumbent Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito. "She's a millionaire!"

Gathered in East Harlem's Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, the candidates took a range questions but were most passionate in talking about housing and affordability within the district. The district includes parts of northern Manhattan and the South Bronx, and is home to the country's second highest concentration of public housing units.

A second woman in the crowd put a complete halt to the forum when she shared her own story about being kicked out of public housing and into a homeless shelter.

"It's a revolving door," she said during the debate. "I'm stuck in a revolving door."

Another man accused candidate Tamika Humphreys of running for City Council simply to "split the vote," a charge that Humphreys denied.

While fellow candidates Ralina Cardona, Sean Garner and Gwen Goodwin were all in attendance from the start, Ed Santos came in right before closing statements. Santos told the crowd he was late because he "made a promise to NYCHA housing residents to stop by and

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actually listen to people issues."

Any good fortune that might have given him was thrown out the window when he followed it up with a quip.

"You come out of public housing and you smell different," he said, which earned him loud opposition from the audience.

Still, all of the candidates seemed to agree that housing affordability was a significant issue to the district, even if they all offered different solutions. Cardona invoked a federal law called Section 3, which she said allow "residents of a public housing authority or a non profit within the neighborhood can create a company to ensure that bid does not go to RFP." Meanwhile, Humphreys argued that the key to ensuring residents aren't priced out of their homes is to raise the minimum wage.

Goodwin spent most of the night bashing Mark-Viverito's stance against the New York City Housing Authority's plan to lease public land — including two locations on Washington Houses — to private developers as a way to fund repairs and provide long-term revenue. Last March, Mark-Viverito said she was concerned over the pace of the pace of proposal, rather than expressing the disapproval she stated during the forum.

At the forum, Goodwin said she's happy that Mark-Viverito "took" her platform idea concerning the NYCHA proposal.

"[Mark-Viverito] acts like she doesn't know about gentrification," Goodwin said. "Hello; she's leading the gentrification.

Mark-Viverito positioned herself far from the accusations, and argued that the district's communities should exert control and ownership over publicly owned land regardless of what NYCHA plans to do.

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"We need to truly ensure that we are using the resources of this city to create truly affordable housing," she said. "That is what I have fought for. That is my record. That is what I will continue to stand for."