

# THE *Morningsider*

Number 7

February 2021

## DIRECTION:

We asked our neighbors for input last month.  
We received it.

### Inside: *What We Heard*

- Community Survey results
- Preserving rent-regulated apartments
- Calls for hyper-local action



## A Shared Approach

In our last issue we asked for input on community priorities in Morningside Heights and announced our Open Meeting to develop a greater shared awareness among our neighbors.

The effort has been successful. You can watch the one-hour meeting [here](#). The Morningside Heights Community Coalition continues to seek and receive feedback on priorities, even as our three main focus areas have been validated:

- **Limiting real estate overdevelopment** in our neighborhood,
- **Promoting local affordable housing**, and
- **Preserving our community's character and quality of life.**

There are no surprises here. As neighborhoods across New York City are threatened by disruptive outside forces, overtaxed infrastructure, and economic hardship, MHCC recommits itself to understanding and representing local views.

Read *What We Heard* last month on page 4.



*Honoring April Tyler*

MHCC is deeply saddened by the recent loss of April Tyler, a key leader in the West Harlem community and member of Manhattan Community Board 9.

April's decades of selfless efforts on affordable housing issues benefited many of our neighbors.

We honor the life and legacy of this wonderful neighbor and advocate and will carry her work forward.

Photo courtesy of the HDCC Coalition

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## *The Morningsider*

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### MHCC Executive Committee:

Andrea Brecker  
Harry Schwartz

Laura Friedman  
Robert F. Stern

Kwesi McDavid  
Barry Weinberg

David Robinson

### Editor:

Dan McSweeney

### Contact:

[mhccnyc@gmail.com](mailto:mhccnyc@gmail.com)

[www.mhccnyc.org](http://www.mhccnyc.org)

[f mhccnyc](https://www.facebook.com/mhccnyc)

# Local Engagement

## Comments & Questions

You can submit yours [here](#).

- *If you do not act vigorously now to create truly affordable housing, you will have lost an opportunity that may never come again. Tom K.*
- *I'm interested in trash issues and in removing the incentives to keep storefronts empty. Are there really tax benefits? Robin G.*
- *Some residents are not fully aware of their rights of tenancy and hesitate to press them. Can MHCC note some landlord-tenant attorneys who might be available to help? Tim C.*

### MHCC Responses:

- One critical way we are engaging on affordable housing: We are in talks with Columbia and are strongly urging them to **preserve existing rent-regulated apartments in perpetuity**.
- We will be exploring storefront issues as our **emerging Merchants Association** takes shape.
- A very effective tenant advocacy group is **PA'LANTE Harlem**. They can be reached at [palante@palanteharlem.org](mailto:palante@palanteharlem.org) or by telephone: 212. 491. 2541.

## Calendar

As public health guidelines allow, MHCC will plan events to foster greater engagement within our community. Please let us know if you have [suggestions](#) for socially distanced or virtual gatherings.

## Volunteering

The vast majority of MHCC's work is carried out by volunteers — local residents, business owners, employees, students, and even visitors. We are grateful to them. If you'd like to be involved, please let us know [here](#).

## And...Action!

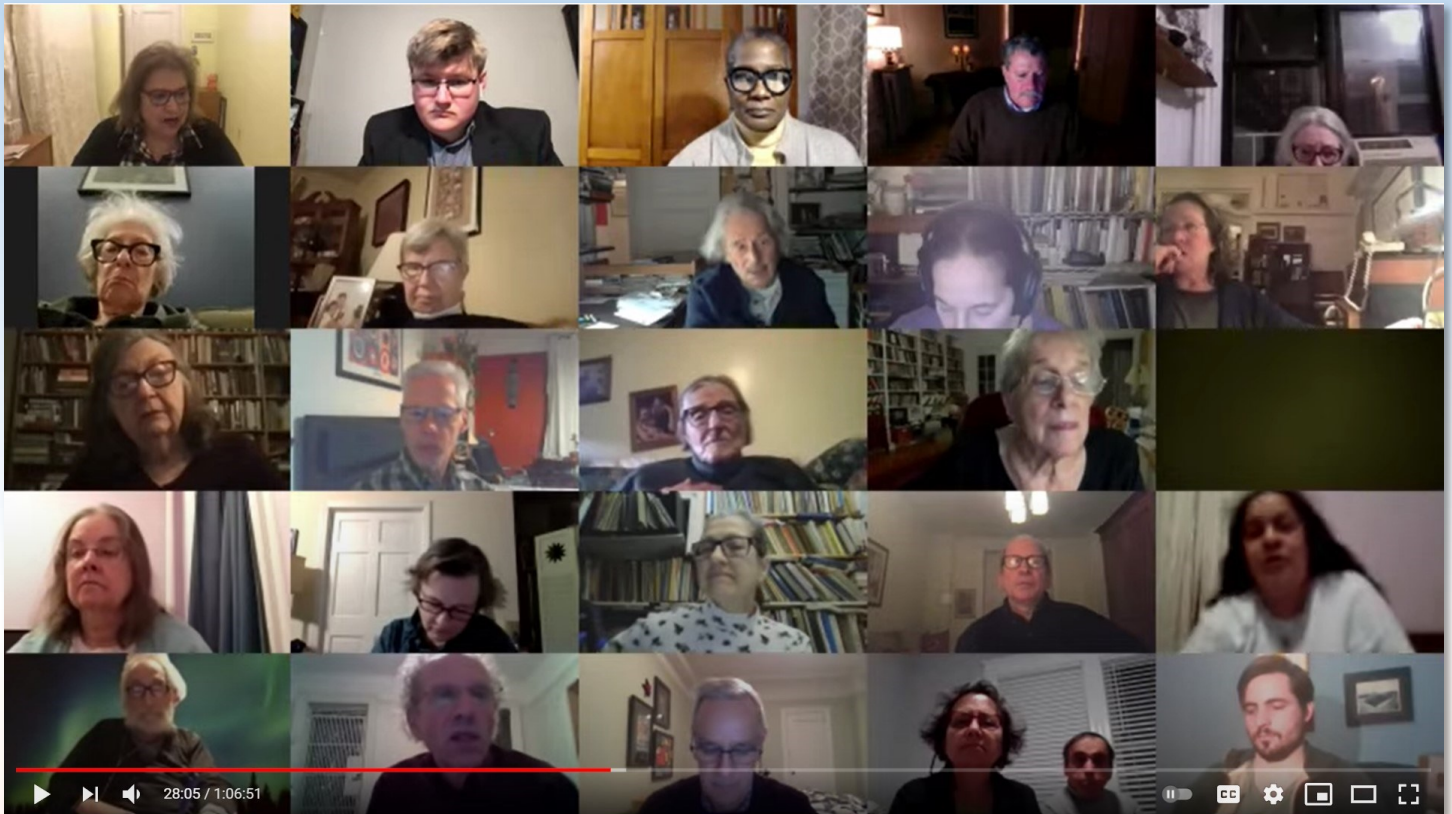
**COVID vaccination** appointments can be made [here](#). **Free COVID testing** information is [here](#).

**26th Precinct Community Council** meets online, typically on the third Wednesday of each month. For information, email: [26communitycouncil@gmail.com](mailto:26communitycouncil@gmail.com).

The W. 111th Street Block Association will hold a **neighborhood cleanup: 2/27, 10am at Broadway and 111th**. Refreshments will be provided.



# FEATURE: *What We Heard*



A sampling of meeting participants. Click on the photo to watch a video recording of the meeting.

**At our Open Meeting on January 28, we listened to a wide variety of community members describe the issues they consider most pressing in Morningside Heights.**

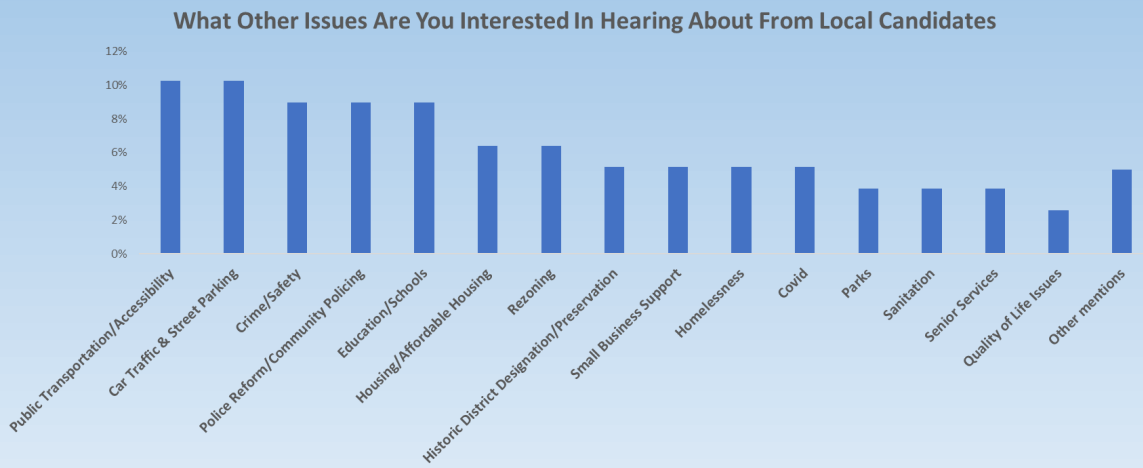
Before moving into breakout rooms and an open forum for detailed discussions, we offered updates on MHCC's work in the following areas:

- Neighborhood rezoning
- Landmarking McGiffert Hall
- Support for additional Historic District protections in our neighborhood
- Construction site code and safety monitoring

- Affordable housing efforts
- Responses to COVID-19
- Morningside Heights Community Fund
- January Community Survey.

We also welcomed Erik Cuello of Council Member Mark Levine's office and Manhattan Community Board 9 Chair Barry Weinberg, who serves on the MHCC Executive Committee.

Feedback from community members was the critical element of this meeting. We received a significant amount in real time and the ensuing discussion was informed by a summary of our January Community Survey responses.

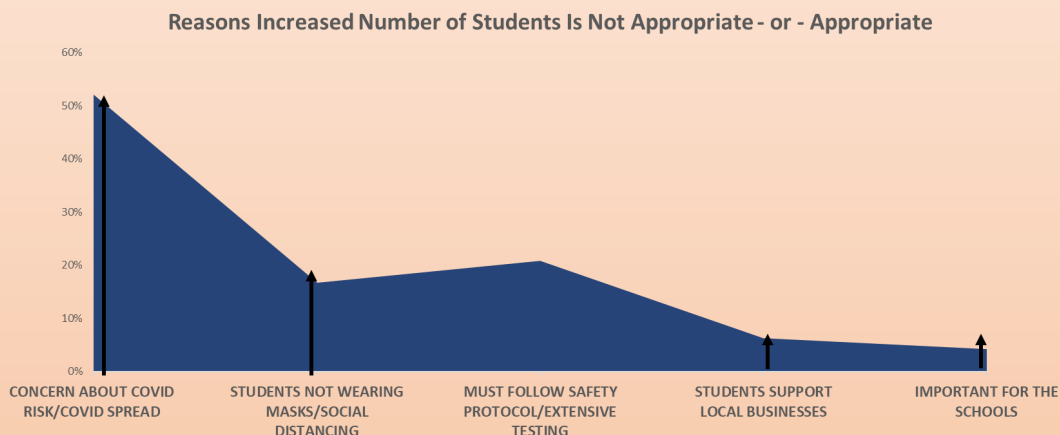


## Morningside Heights Community Survey

**Our online survey was conducted January 13–21 and almost 60 neighbors participated.** These results augmented our September [survey](#), in which 259 community members offered their views. Last month's questions focused on the significance of upcoming local elections, quality of life issues in Morningside Heights, and the impacts of COVID-19.

**Key takeaways include the following. The full report is available [here](#).**

- Voters want to know how 2021 candidates for NYC positions will address issues that MHCC has been actively supporting: Rezoning, the Pandemic, Affordable Housing, and Support for Local Businesses. Among other issues that voters want to hear about from candidates are: Public Transportation, Traffic/Street Parking, Crime Prevention, and Schools and Police Reform.
- Residents remain concerned about COVID-19, including the impact that an increased student presence may have in spreading the virus to members of the community.
- By a margin of two-to-one, respondents felt it was not appropriate for Columbia and Barnard to increase the number of students as of the Spring 2020 semester. For those who support this presence, it is acknowledged that safety protocols delineated by the schools must be adhered to. Among those who find a larger student presence appropriate, local business and the school themselves are seen as apt to benefit.



# Breakout Room and Open Forum Discussions

With MHCC's updates and our survey findings presented, meeting participants entered breakout rooms to discuss pressing local issues in detail. These groups generally corresponded to MHCC's main areas of focus.

Participants expressed their concern over key issues and a sense that our community continues to demonstrate resilience and a commitment to inclusivity and social justice. Following are points expressed in the breakout rooms and the open forum which followed.

## **On Real Estate Overdevelopment:**

- Rezoning and landmarking are two important ways to limit overdevelopment. Concerns over whether and how McGiffert Hall is redeveloped must be addressed directly with The Riverside Church. **(See page 8.)**
- We should establish relationships with coop boards and real estate management firms.
- We should table on our blocks to raise local awareness and engagement.
- We should engage on the NextDoor social media app.
- We need more “eyes and ears” at local construction sites to monitor code compliance.

## **On Local Affordable Housing:**

- Participants expressed support for making “affordable housing” truly affordable to the neediest residents. City programs do not do this.
- Greater connections are needed with state and national groups working on low-income housing issues, for example the National Low Income Housing Coalition.
- Columbia should be engaged to preserve their rent-regulated apartments. **(See page 7.)**
- We can address quality of life issues by communicating more with our elected officials.

## **On Preserving Community Character and Quality of Life:**

- Community Benefits Agreements are supporting the Morningside Heights Community Fund to help local groups providing direct services and conducting advocacy.
- We should promote local cleanups and encourage businesses to clean their sidewalks.
- How can we engage with and support local businesses? **(See page 8.)**
- Issues like rat infestation, vehicle noise, and reclaiming street space can be addressed better by linking with other groups, including the Riverside Park Conservancy.
- We would like to see Columbia offer COVID-19 testing for community members.
- Some local landlords aren't fully compliant with mobility regulations.
- Bicycling issues remain a concern, in terms of designated lanes and appropriate use.



# Takeaways and Next Steps

Though there were no surprises during our discussion, the important thing is that we are engaging with greater numbers of local residents and other community stakeholders. If our efforts are going to continue gaining traction, we need to raise further awareness and encourage greater neighbor involvement.

**Based on the input we received last month, MHCC is sharpening its focus on a number of key issues in 2021. Following are three priorities for the coming months, each relating to MHCC's mission areas.**



## **Promoting Local Affordable Housing — Columbia Rent-Regulated Apartments:**



As the largest landlord in Morningside Heights, Columbia owns hundreds of rent-regulated apartments. Our view is these should maintain their status in perpetuity, in order to preserve this vital aspect of local affordable housing.

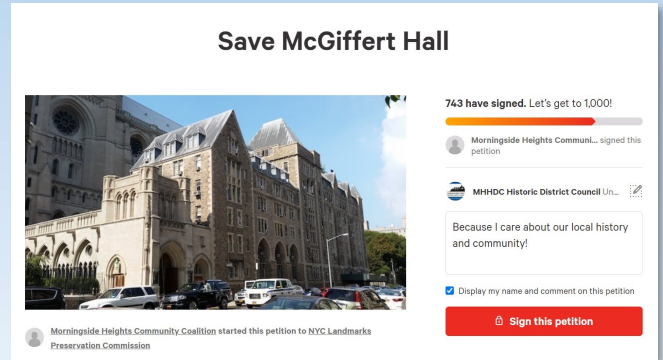
Last year, MHCC joined with Manhattan Community Board 9 in developing resolutions on this issue. We have also sent a memo proposing this action to the University leadership and have requested a meeting to discuss it in detail. Please click [here](#) to view our memo and the relevant resolutions.

This is an immediate and relatively simple way to begin addressing the affordable housing crisis in Morningside Heights and would reinforce Columbia's stated commitment to local community development and diversity. In that light, it's a perfect example of the "win-wins" possible through greater communication, coordination, and collaboration among all members of our community.

# Takeaways and Next Steps

## Limiting Real Estate Overdevelopment — Rezoning and Historic District Protections:

By advancing on two mutually supportive fronts, MHCC seeks to influence how our neighborhood is developed with an eye toward reinforcing community priorities. Our work to rezone Morningside Heights was propelled in September 2019 by City Council Speaker Corey Johnson's pledge to support the effort and we have been diligently following up since then. Simultaneously, we have been supporting our sister organization, the [Morningside Heights Historic District Committee](#) to expand local landmark protections. A focused campaign to individually landmark McGiffert Hall, which was [purchased](#) by The Riverside Church in 2018, is a main effort. This historic structure faces an uncertain future and we are concerned it could be demolished and redeveloped with no provisions for affordable housing, as has occurred with other nearby buildings. Please join almost 800 neighbors in signing our joint [petition](#). We are following up with The Riverside Church on this issue.



## Preserving our Community's Character and Quality of Life — Local Business Support:



Indications are the NYC Department of Small Business Services will be awarding MHCC a grant in support of our commitment to small businesses in Morningside Heights. Local shops and restaurants are a critical element of our neighborhood's unique and vibrant culture. If we receive this funding, we will begin by collecting data on challenges faced by local establishments. This can lead to establishing a business association to address COVID-related and longer-term issues. This can usher a new era of local economic development.

**Thank you to everyone who participated in our Open Meeting. MHCC greatly values our ongoing engagement with all members of the Morningside Heights community.**

**Request: Please donate.** MHCC's work depends on the input and participation of community members. As we continue to expand our reach and impacts, please consider a [donation](#) to MHCC. Our efforts rely on these contributions.





# News & Resources

## Articles of Interest

[CB9 Leads Protest Calling for Permanent Affordable Housing \(CB9 Chair/MHCC Executive Committee Member Barry Weinberg featured\)](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Morningside Heights Restaurants Struggle to Survive](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Columbia Students Back to Campus Despite COVID Protocol Violations](#) — Columbia Spectator

[CB9 Protests Lack of Vaccination Sites \(CB9 Chair/MHCC Executive Committee Member Barry Weinberg quoted\)](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Columbia Manhattanville Campus Expansion Progresses](#) — YIMBY

[Grant Houses \(NYCHA\) Maintenance Issues Harming Residents \(MHCC Executive Committee Member Dave Robinson quoted\)](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Community Safety Improvements A Year After Murder of Tessa Majors \(CB9 Chair/MHCC Executive Committee Member Barry Weinberg quoted\)](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Environmental Racism in West Harlem](#) — Columbia Spectator

[MTA Subway Elevator Issue Debate](#) — The Gothamist

[West Harlem Residents Distrust of Local Hospitals](#) — Columbia Spectator

[Summary of Report Critical of De Blasio Affordable Housing Record](#) — City Limits

[100 Claremont at UTS Site Begins to Rise](#) — YIMBY

[Colleges Promising Safety Facing Rising Covid Rates](#) — NY Times

[University Campus Helps Shield Neighborhood Community from COVID](#) — NY Times

## Local Support

This month we feature **New York State Senator Brian Benjamin**, who represents District 30, encompassing Harlem, East Harlem, and the Upper West Side. Sen. Benjamin has been a stalwart supporter of many local community initiatives. He has acted decisively on promoting affordable housing, expanding Historic District protections in our neighborhood, criminal justice reform, supporting youth development, and expanding access to health care locally. You can reach him [here](#). Thank you, Sen. Benjamin!



A comprehensive list of local resources is [here](#).

# Back-Page Diversion



## And it's back to TRIVIA!

Thank you to those who have participated in our past puzzles and submitted *Morningside Diary* entries. This month, we're returning to neighborhood lore — there is plenty of it!

In support of MHCC's emerging local Merchants Association, the first three readers to submit correct answers will receive gift certificates to local shops. Please submit your answers to [mhccnyc@gmail.com](mailto:mhccnyc@gmail.com).

**Question:** The 1940 tax photo above shows 112th & Amsterdam Avenue. It is one of 1.6 million images in the New York City Archives. (Check out this amazing collection by clicking on the photo.) **What federal government program sponsored this massive 1940 image-collection effort in New York?**

Good luck!