Community Members Affirm "Chinzilla" Poster's Message: Stop the Racist Displacement Agenda of Margaret Chin

In response to the AMNY article which amplified the voices of those seeking to frame Councilmember Margaret Chin as a victim of racism, members of the NMASS Workers Center were joined by community members in a press conference to invite everyone who cares about ending racism to join us in denouncing the racist displacement agenda of Chin and Mayor de Blasio.

On the NMASS poster titled 'Chinzilla,' Councilmember Chin is depicted as a monster tearing apart the neighborhood and forcing the scattering of panicked people. This is because Councilmember Chin has made a career of displacing families and workers of color from Chinatown and the Lower East Side. “Me and my neighbors and friends here have seen all the ways that Margaret Chin has acted like Chinzilla,” Louise Velez, a LES resident for almost all her life, said. “Chin’s divided our community. She’s kicked out poor people from the neighborhood—making it so expensive that you can't afford to live here. She’s giving our community to the developers.”

For the decade that Chin has been our City Councilmember, she has refused to support the full Chinatown Working Group Rezoning Plan, a community-led plan that would protect the neighborhood's largely low-income Black, Latino and Chinese residents, workers and small businesses, from displacement and predatory development.

The Chinatown Working Group Rezoning Plan (CWG) was created after Chin and Mayor Bloomberg made sure that the East Village, a wealthier and whiter neighborhood, received zoning protections from over-development. Their plan excluded Chinatown and the Lower East Side. The CWG Plan would extend the same protections to our community. Yet Chin underhandedly attempted to divide the CWG Plan, by protecting a mere intersection in Chinatown only, excluding the Lower East Side, Section 8 and NYCHA complexes on the waterfront, leaving the community vulnerable to luxury high-rises, extortionate rent increases, eviction, and homelessness. We called her out for being racist then and will continue to call her racist for refusing to extend protection to our community that is majority families of color.
We are also furious that Chin has been working hand in hand with Mayor de Blasio to give our tax dollars to real estate developers to bring luxury mega towers into Two Bridges, home to a working-class community of color whose rent is already too high. She handed SPURA, which sits on public land, to rich developers, even though NMASS and coalition allies delivered to her 10,000 petition signatures calling for 100% low-income housing on SPURA, and for the passage of the CWG plan. “Her reaction spoke volumes,” according to NMASS member David Nieves, whose family was pushed out of SPURA decades ago. “She said that these signatories did not know what they were signing.”

Meanwhile Chin co-signed the deal with the City to close East River Park under the guise of flood protection in order to prime the area for market rate housing (“Infill”) on NYCHA land.

We are calling out an elected official for robbing her constituents of color of their homes, livelihoods, and community, and handing them to developers on a silver platter. This is racism.

The elected officials who accuse us of propagating racism should look at their own policies: you, too, are the monster if you support the destruction of communities of color. JoAnn Lum, member of NMASS, asked, “If the critics of this poster are so concerned about racism, why aren't they concerned about the evictions, the homelessness, the uprooting of so many people and small businesses in our community of color caused by Chin and de Blasio's land-use and rezoning policies?”

We call on everyone to join us in fighting the City’s racist displacement agenda, and uniting working people of all races to demand equal protection for the LES and Chinatown. We look forward to working with our next councilperson who we hope will not repeat the wrongs of Chin, but will work with our community to pass the CWG Plan in full so that we and our next generations can stay and thrive in our community.

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