



Sunday, September 19, 2021

Citizens Union 2021 Candidate Questionnaire - City Council

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for New York City Council!

Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serve the public.

In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform issues and your plans for office. The form includes five short sections: serving constituent, elections and voting, police accountability, council rules and procedures, and miscellaneous.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for city offices, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by April 17 and no later than 48 before your interview.

If you seek our support, we will need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. Given time constraints and the limited capacity of a member-based organization, we may not be able to evaluate all contests or candidates in this election cycle.

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If you cannot complete the questionnaire in one sitting, you can click Save and Continue Later at the bottom of every page.

Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. Citizens Union will not be able to see your answers unless you submit the form. We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).

For any questions, please email candidates@citizensunion.org

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Tony Avella

Running for Council District number

19

In which primary

If elected, which legislative conference will you join (e.g., Democrat, Republican, other)?

Democrat

Age

69

Education

B.A. Hunter College, Political Science Major 1974

Occupation/Employer

Retired

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Prior to elective office, I was president of numerous community civic organizations including the Bayside Historical Society, College Point Civic Association and Northshore Anti-Graffiti Volunteers.

I was a Democratic District Leader prior to holding public office. I served in the New York City Council from 2002 through 2009 and the New York State Senate from 2011 through 2018 as a Democrat. Also, my past government experience includes working for Mayors Koch and Dinkins, for a Council Member and for a State Senator.

Campaign Contact Information**Website**

tonyavellaforNYC.com

Twitter

@tonyavella

Facebook

TonyAvellaforNYC

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

Yes

Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?

Yes

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?

Yes

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union's endorsements)

Signature



SERVING CONSTITUENTS

1. For most New Yorkers, the most important thing that their council members do is provide constituent services. How would you run your office to serve your community needs? Please give specific examples.

My office would concentrate on constituent services, conducting on-site meetings with residents and holding town hall meetings. As I have done in the past, my first newsletter will be a "civic action checklist", which lists all the problems residents may have. The constituent simply has to check off the problem, list its location and get the form back to me for action. This has been very successful in the past in handling local problems and identifying district wide issues.

2. If you served as an elected official, what did you do to help your constituents during the Covid-19 pandemic? Please be specific.

3. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running for office?

40 years.

4. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce?

Legislation to create a new police precinct out of the 109th Precinct in Queens

VOTING AND ELECTIONS

5. How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use your power as a council member to improve the operations

of the NYC BOE?

I believe the Board of Elections should be restructured to create a non-partisan staff. I also believe that the petitioning process should be eliminated and ballot access tied to obtaining certification/matching fund approval under the Campaign Finance Program.

6. Do you consider yourself a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? How will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works?

I do not believe that the Ranked Voting System worked for City Council races. In every situation in Queens, (except for one ranked cycle) the person who was ahead on Primary night lead through every ranked cycle.

7. The next City Council will appoint members to the city's redistricting commission and decide whether to approve or reject the commission's districting plans. In doing so, future council members will be responsible for shaping a fair political map for the coming decade. If elected, what would your approach be in proposing or voting to appoint commission members, and in considering proposed district maps?

Commission members should be non-partisan, reflective of the City's diverse population , including race, gender, religion and sexual orientation.

8. Now that New York City has implemented Ranked Choice Voting, do you support moving to an Open Primary system (eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system)?

Yes

Comments

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Citizens Union has been studying police accountability and performance in New York City for more than a decade. In our reports and advocacy efforts we have urged city government to strengthen the accountability of the New York Police Department to the public and create a more cohesive system of police oversight. Previous reports include: [2016 issue brief](#), [2013 position brief on Stop and Frisk](#), [2012 report on the CCRB](#), [2008 policy statement on police misconduct](#). Citizens Union's 2021 agenda for police reform, [published as a report](#) in March, calls for establishing a Deputy Mayor for Public Safety,

allowing the CCRB to appeal the Police Commissioner’s decisions, making the appointment of Police Commissioner subject to advice and consent of the City Council, consolidating agencies with oversight authority, ending qualified immunity, and

9. Do you support making the appointment of the Police Commissioner subject to the advice and consent of the City Council?

No

Comments

10. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the police department? How would you ensure penalties are imposed on police officers that commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?

These issues should be discussed with all parties to determine what is the best approach.

11. Do you support consolidating the three bodies that exercise oversight of the NYPD: the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), the Inspector General for the Police Department, the Mayor’s Commission to Combat Police Corruption?

Comments

Not sure. Requires significant research

12. Do you support giving the CCRB prompt and full access to footage from body-worn cameras, police officers’ employment history and disciplinary records and all other document and materials in the possession of the NYPD relevant to its investigations?

Comments

Not sure. Requires significant research

13. Feel free to add any other policy proposals you support in regards to police accountability, misconduct, and oversight, or to effective policing including functions, training, and community relations.

HOW CITY COUNCIL WORKS

One of the first items on the next City Council’s agenda will be adopting its rules of proceedings. Those rules will have a substantial effect on the ability of lawmakers to advance their goals, and can send a signal to New Yorkers about elected officials’ commitment to making the Council more representative,

deliberative, accountable, and efficient. In the last decade, the Council took important steps to reform its rules, including a 2014 overhaul by then-Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and a 2018 administrative change by Speaker Corey Johnson. These reforms have made the body more democratic, given members a more meaningful role in the legislative process, ensured greater equity in the allocation of discretionary funding, and made drafting procedures more transparent. Still, more work is needed enable members to function more effectively and independently of the speaker, and to increase public participation.

14. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?

Yes

Comments

15. Do you support reducing the overall number of committees so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?

No

Comments

It is up to the member to participate.

16. Do you support making all actions designed to influence any City Council outcome, including the choice of speaker, reportable as a lobbying expense?

Yes

Comments

17. The Council Speaker controls the allocation of a large share of the Council's overall discretionary spending, and in 2020 it was reported that the Speaker used this power to "punish" council members who opposed the 2021 budget. How would you balance control and order in the council with reasonable dissent?

Mandate thru Council rules or legislation requiring that whatever funds are allocated to the City Council in the budget be equally split among members, except for City-wide projects.

18. The ability of citizens and advocates to make their voices heard in City Hall has been severely curtailed since the council and city

government shifted to work remotely. How would you propose to improve community engagement and public participation while using remote technology (in public hearings, meetings, etc.), particularly to ensure equity in participation?

More attention needs to be given thru education and funding to provide the public with computer technology and usage before we can improve remote participation.

MISCELLANEOUS

19. New York City has suffered an immensurable loss from the pandemic and its effects and the city's economy, social life, and culture. What is your path to recovery from this crisis?

We must provide financial relief to those most affected by the pandemic, helping those individuals that loss jobs regain employment and helping small businesses reopen.

20. What experience have you had, if any, with good government and reform issues? (e.g. voting and elections, campaign finance, ethics, police accountability, government transparency and oversight). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

Have introduced during numerous pieces of legislation during my previous tenure in office to improve and reform government, working with Citizens Union, Common Cause and NYPIRG. Have brought issues to the City and State ethics commissions in the past, which have resulted in action taken.

21. What are the top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected? Feel free to reference an answer above rather than restate it.

First: Assure COVID vaccine access

Second: Address Climate Change

Third: Create new Police Precinct

ADDITIONAL INFO

Please feel free to attach any additional information such as resume, campaign brochures, or issues statements.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

Please review your answers by clicking PREVIEW ANSWERS below. You can submit the questionnaire at the bottom of the preview page by clicking SUBMIT.

Once you click SUBMIT, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. *If you don't see the email, please check your spam box.*

If you have any further questions, you may contact us at candidates@citizensunion.org.