



# 2023 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

Dear candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat on the New York City Council! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serving the public.

This form includes six sections with questions about your positions on various reform issues and your plans for the office:

- Serving constituents
- Elections and voting
- Campaign finance
- Oversight of City Hall
- Police accountability
- City Council rules
- There are also questions about the candidate's bio and the campaign

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for office and to issue our preference for the June primary.

Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

You can learn more about Citizens Union's policy agenda in our [issues section](#). \*\*

**If you wish to be considered, please submit this questionnaire by Tuesday, March 14, 2023.**

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** at the bottom of every page. Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. Citizens Union cannot 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

We thank you very much for your response.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

All fields marked with \* are required and must be filled.

### Candidate info

**Name\*** Susan Lee

**Running for Council District number\*** District 1

**In which primary\*** Democratic

**Age:** 44 YO

**Education:** Barnard College, Political Science Bachelor of Arts (2000) and Wagner School of Public Service, Master in Public Finance (2005)

**Occupation:** Freelance grant writer

**Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:** Candidate for City Council District 1 2021; Founding Board Member of Nomi Network; Board of Trustees of MercyFirst; Founding President of Alliance for Community Preservation and Betterment; Founding Vice President of SDR Park Alliance. Recipient of Nomi Network Founder's Award of Outstanding Service (2018); Recipient of Homecrest Community Services, Inc. Award for Outstanding Community Service and Leadership (2022) and named Crain's New York Business Notable Asian Leaders (2022).

### Campaign contact information

**Website** [susanleenyc.com](http://susanleenyc.com)

**Twitter** @susanleenyc

**Facebook** @susanleenyc

### Affirmations

**Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?\*** Yes, I have completed the required campaign filings.

**Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?\*** Yes, my campaign is qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB.

**Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?\*** Yes, I would love to interview with Citizens Union's Local Candidate Committee.

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

## SERVING CONSTITUENTS

**1. For most New Yorkers, the most important thing their Council Members do is provide constituent services. How have you run your office (or for non-incumbents, how would you run your office) to serve your community's needs? Please give specific examples. What are the major problems in your district that require constituent services?**

Access to appropriate materials in our constituents' native language has been challenging. When elected, my office will provide full language access, which is desperately needed. I will also be present for constituent office hours at least two days a week to address community concerns. I will hire a community liaison (from the community) that understands the needs of our very diverse district.

With the rise in hate crimes in our community, my office will work closely with the local precincts to ensure cases are reported and recorded. My outreach team will work with neighborhood organizations to educate and inform the community why it is important to address the rise in hate crime in our district.

**2. For incumbents: Which bill did you introduce, and most want to see passed? Why is that your top priority? For non-incumbents: If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce in the new year? Why is that your top priority?**

For the first time last year, the Department of Education allowed a new entry into the gifted and talented program, and students could test into the program in third grade. I would expand it by adding 500 seats in third grade, making it 1500 seats in total. Child development research has shown that identifying gifted behaviors in later grades may provide a more accurate assessment of gifted ability. As a product of New York City public schools, I know first-hand how these programs are a ticket to success for children of low-income and working-class families. I will also mandate mental health professionals at each school in that legislation. Education and mental health are my top priorities because I want our students to succeed in this ever-changing world.

**3. 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.**

I was on the host committee for a “Final Five Voting NYC” event in January. I helped promote the event where Andrew Yang, Sal Albanese, and Maria Danzilo presented two innovative election reforms: 1) a single non-partisan open primary in which all candidates and voters, regardless of their political party registration, and 2) a Ranked Choice Voting general election among up to the top five of the open primary. My passion for this initiative started during my petitioning process in 2021 when I first ran for City Council District 1. Many residents couldn't sign my petition because they were registered with another party. And when it came to the primary election, these individuals were excluded from the process. There are over 1.2 million voters in New York City in major party primaries, nearly 25% of all eligible voters.

**4. What are your top three campaign promises or goals? Feel free to reference an answer to another question on this form rather than restate it.**

1. Take on rising crime and end hate crimes against Asians, Jewish Americans, and the LGBTQ+ community by creating safer and more equitable policing, raising sentencing guidelines for hate crimes, and advocating for criminal justice reform.
2. Expand education opportunities by maintaining the SHSAT for fair admission, expanding the gifted and talented program, investing in underserved schools, and funding student social and mental health services.
3. Support the construction of more affordable housing to ensure communities are liveable and rent is affordable for all New Yorkers.

## **ELECTIONS AND VOTING**

**5. How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use (or have you used) your power as a Council Member to improve the operations of the NYC BOE?**

Currently, the Board of Elections needs a lot of improvement. The City Council needs to exercise its oversight functions. I will work with BOE to implement methods to reach voters and encourage voter participation. I will work with BOE to reduce lines on election days and inform voters of the ability to vote via absentee ballot, early voting, and poll site locations.

**6. Citizens Union recently [published a report](#) about moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, so they would align with presidential or gubernatorial elections, showing this change could boost voter turnout, diversify the electorate, and save money.**

**What is your position on that proposal to move New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years and on the overall concept?**

I fully support moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, boosting voter turnout, diversifying the electorate, and saving money. Moving elections to even-numbered years, aligning with presidential or gubernatorial elections, is the easiest way to increase voter turnout.

In my election, we estimate a very low turnout due to the lack of any high-profile city or statewide races. Turnout could be as low as 7000 votes, a historic low that has only been matched a few times previously.

**7. Are you a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? If so, how will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works? If not, please elaborate on your position.**

I am a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting. From my experience with the previous election, many are uninformed or do not understand how RCV works. I will use my office to maintain this system and to educate voters on how it works by hosting seminars and flyers that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

**8. New York City is one of few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the election that typically decides who gets elected to office. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in the primary?**

Yes, I support open primaries. Currently, there are 1.2 million voters excluded from the primary—meaning that 25% of the voters in New York City are disenfranchised. Many are unaware that as a registered Independent, they cannot vote in either the Democratic or the Republican Primary.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve elections and voting or increase competition in New York City's political system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

## CAMPAIGN FINANCE

**9. If you ran for office before, to what extent have Independent Expenditure entities ("Super-PACs") spent money in your race? Was it done in your favor or opposition of your candidacy?**

No, Independent Expenditure entities did not spend money on my 2021 race.

**10. Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by "bundling" donations from other people, a loophole that can give insiders greater access to officeholders. Do you support banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?**

Yes, I fully support banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to strengthen New York City’s campaign finance system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

## **OVERSIGHT OF CITY HALL**

**11. For incumbents: Oversight of the administration is one of the most important roles of the City Council. Please describe how you used your position to ensure City agencies and City government are accountable to the people of New York.**

N/A

**12. In the last year, media reports have exposed potential ethical issues within City Hall concerning [conflicts of interest](#) among [top officials](#), [the use of public resources for private matters](#), [appointments](#) of friends and relatives, and [loosening transparency measures](#).**

**How do you see your role as a Council Member in ensuring high ethical behavior standards and effective ethics oversight and enforcement?**

When in office, I aim to improve oversight of City Hall and end the pay-to-play scheme. I would propose legislation to audit contracts with various service providers to ensure that our city funds are used efficiently and effectively to tackle social issues in our society. I will continue to support lobbying disclosures by requiring lobbyists to specify support or opposition to government action and to report their contributions and fundraising activity. Additionally, I will advocate for reinstating lobbying activity reporting with “Lobbyist Meetings Disclosure.”

I strongly leverage the City Council’s oversight power through the Oversight and Investigations Committee to hold the Mayor’s Office and all City agencies accountable. We will work closely with the Conflicts of Interest Board to curtail any abuse in government.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics in New York City government. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

## **POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM**

**13. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? How would you ensure that penalties imposed on police officers are commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?**

To restore public trust in law enforcement, I recommend strengthening the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB). I fully support a transparent and accountable police force that will swiftly and fairly

investigate complaints of misconduct. I believe that recommendations from CCRB should be the final determination. Additionally, the CCRB should have the power to receive, investigate, make findings, and recommend action upon complaints initiated by the agency against officers that allege misconduct without first receiving a civilian complaint. Since the goal of CCRB is to combat cases of police misconduct, we should equip it with the tools necessary to carry forth its mandates. By implementing the above procedures, it will relieve some of the bureaucratic burdens that arise under the current process.

**14. What changes should be made to the independent oversight bodies to ensure they can effectively hold police officers who commit wrongdoing accountable (the Civilian Complaint Review Board, Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD, the Commission to Combat Police Corruption)?**

In addition to the recommendations above regarding the CCRB, I would support the recommendations made by the New York City Department of Investigation that the three oversight agencies: CCRB, the Inspector General of the NYPD, and the Commission to Combat Police Corruption consolidated into one agency. This will eliminate redundancy and create a streamlined process that will be more efficient and transparent.

**15. Under the 2021 police reform plan, the City committed to expanding programs that effectively shift responsibilities from the NYPD to other agencies in areas like mental health, homelessness outreach, school, and youth, while investing in alternative models for community-driven public safety, such as Cure Violence programs. What do you think about the progress of these efforts? How would you improve policing in the City's various communities?**

I am a strong proponent of community policing, where police officers are in the community engaging with residents. I am also an advocate for providing additional training to cadets and veterans of the force, so they better understand the needs of the communities they serve. Not only do we need to increase the diversity of uniformed officers, but especially in leadership positions. I object wholeheartedly to military-style behavior and the use of military-style weapons against civilians. The premise around community policing is to increase community engagement through local advisory councils and other community engagement. With the increase in gun violence in and around our schools, I support the NYPD deployment of police officers around schools during the start of school and dismissal times.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve police accountability, oversight of the NYPD, and police-community relations. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

# CITY COUNCIL RULES

**16. In December 2022, Speaker Adams proposed changes to the Rules of the City Council that would have potentially rolled back positive reforms related to bill drafting services and the power of members and committee chairpersons, among other issues. Although this proposal has been pulled, additional work is needed to make the Council a more democratic, effective, and open legislative body. What reforms would you like to see in the Rules of the City Council?**

New York City Council is a space for collaboration that is efficient, transparent, and accountable to all stakeholders. I have attended numerous committee hearings where I had to wait almost 3 hours before I provided testimony. Oftentimes, when it is my turn to speak, only one of two CMs are left. This is very discouraging and effectively disenfranchises citizens from engaging with elected officials. Additionally, most New Yorkers do not have the liberty to take off from work to testify in-person or remotely but are offered the chance to submit their written testimony online; however, I question rather or not those are read and taken into consideration just like when I am speaking to an emptied room at the Chambers of the Council. I did not support Speaker Adams' proposed changes.

## PATH TO VICTORY

**What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)?**

This will be a very low turnout election due to the lack of top-of-the-ballot races driving turnout, meaning the turnout may be as low as 7000 votes, a turnout nadir only reached in the 2003 September Primary and 2019 Special elections, and not more than 10,000. Voters who turnout will be older, more long-term residents of the district who value experience and results. Voters who want to stay in this district to raise a family or run their small business. I believe my path to victory is clear. This district has shown a clear preference in local elections for both Asian candidates and women candidates, but also for common sense liberal candidates against hard-left radicals with empty promises. And I believe I am the candidate that best represents these values and a neighborhood that has been my home since childhood. To win the primary, I will need 5600 votes.

**What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals?**

\$27,883 raised as of March 13, 2023. Our average contribution is \$91. Our fundraising goal is \$32,000 (\$23,000 of which would be eligible for the CFB's matching fund). Once awarded matching funds, I will have raised north of 150k.

**How many individual donors do you have?**

Approximately 300

**Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable (you can also share a link to a list of endorsements)**

I have received the support of both the United Democratic Organization and the Lee Family Association, who hold great sway in the Asian community in my district.



# ADDITIONAL INFO

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

**Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?**

I am a common sense liberal who understands that there is nothing progressive about a public official who continues to employ a top aide who has levied abusive, sexist rhetoric against a female journalist and downplayed the importance of Anti-Asian hate crimes. My opponent, Council Member Chris Marte, has an employee that did just that, and it was covered in the New York Daily News. Despite complaints from community leaders and the local community board, Chris Marte says he intends to take no action toward the said employee. Although I am his opponent, I believe Citizens Union would highly disapprove of these actions