



2023 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

THIS IS A BLANK QUESTIONNAIRE – YOU CAN SEND IT WITH YOUR RESPONSES TO CANDIDATES@CITIZENSUNION.ORG OR SUBMIT IT ONLINE [HERE](#)

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](#).

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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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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

Candidate info

Name Ethan Felder

Running for Council District number 29

In which primary Democrat

Age

Education Degree in Government from Cornell University and Law from Washington University in Saint Louis

Occupation Professional career as a union-side Labor Lawyer

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

I have a professional career as a labor lawyer representing Unions in their fight for workers' rights. I have dedicated my career to giving the most vulnerable workers access to justice, including cleaners, transit workers, firefighters, and construction workers. I also fought for the mental health and rights of essential workers such as nurses, security guards, school safety agents, police, and correction officers, prioritizing support for those who need it most, including women, youth, and immigrants.

As a member of Community Board 6, I became a fierce advocate for voting rights and inclusive democracy. In 2017, I challenged a voting rights case in Lefrack. When the removal of the long-standing poll site of 6,000 majority Black and Hispanic tenants was proposed just a month before an election, I represented this community in court. As a result of his representation, the poll site was returned to the people of Lefrak City, where it remains today.

I have also been a long-standing community leader for District 29. As an elected Democracy Party District Leader, I organized and presided over monthly meetings to address community concerns alongside elected officials and candidates for city-wide elected offices. When Kew Gardens experienced rising crime and violence, I organized a rally on the steps of Borough Hall, which led to City Hall closing the Umbrella hotel. When school safety became a concern for parents, I won a commitment from the local police precinct to add school crossing guards.

Campaign contact information

Website ethanfornyc.com

Twitter @ethanforthecity

Facebook facebook.com/ethan.felder

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?* Yes/No

Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?* Yes/No/I did not join the program/Other [please detail]

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?* Yes/No

(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?

As Councilmember, running my office in an effective, inclusive, professional, and responsive manner will be my core priority. **Firstly**, staff will be selected based on competencies, diversity criteria, and qualifications rather than political connections. **Secondly**, I intend to develop a plan of action in consultation with community members with clear deliverables articulated in the campaign. The status of the implementation of this plan will be made available to all constituents, so they can access the performance of my office vis-à-vis my campaign promises regularly. **Thirdly**, my office will be responsive to community needs. My office will have a dedicated phone line, WhatsApp, and e-mail for community members to bring their concerns to our attention. Every concern will be responded to and addressed in a timely manner. **Four**, my office will be accessible and have an open-door policy, so community members are welcome to visit, convene meetings, engage, and bring their concerns. The community will be able to check my schedule online and easily schedule visits, meetings, and coffees and also see my daily agenda. We will also ensure that people with disabilities have access to our office. **Fifth**, my office will be transparent in the use of resources, including by making public our expenses and financial support receive. This also means that information on events, key issues, and challenges will be made available to the community in our main page. Finally, my office will be consultative, inclusive, and evidence-based. Decisions will not be made behind closed doors. Consultations will take place with community members, government entities, and experts on a regular basis, to inform my decision-making. Based on consultation with community member, the major issues that require at this moment services are:

- Quality Education by reversing budgets cuts to our schools, reducing class sizes, enhancing gun safety, and increasing after-school programs.

- Climate Action by advancing our commitments to net-zero emissions by 2050 through community-wide sustainability programs, reducing carbon emissions from our public buildings and schools with a transformative investment in climate jobs.
- Affordable Housing for our senior citizens, middle income families and the formerly unhoused.
- Public Safety through both preventive and responsive measures that address root causes of rising crime, while protecting all of our communities. This also includes pedestrian safety
- Inclusive democracy: organizing townhalls with the community, as community members have raised increased concerns with the lack of response and inclusion of the community in decision-making by our representatives.
- Equality as a cross-cutting priority, we aim to address structural inequalities of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability in our society.

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?

My top priority is inclusive democracy, including addressing the lack of inclusion of the community in political decision-making and dismantling barriers to community participation in politics. Without a strong, inclusive, and responsive democracy, we can't address others' concerns on education, climate action, affordable housing, public safety, transportation, and health.

To reform and democratize our politics my first legislation would be to amend the City Charter to reduce the required number of petition signatures to 250 from 450 and increased the ratio of public matching funds to 10:1 from the current level of 8:1.

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 have experience serving our community as a local leader, including but not limited in Community Board 6 and as elected District Leader. Throughout my community engagement became an advocate for ethics, government transparency, and oversight. This includes responding to community concerns and engaging with government authorities to pressure for action. Examples of how my advocacy and engagement led to reforms in the government and community include (i) When Kew Gardens experienced rising crime and violence, I organized a rally on the steps of Borough Hall, which led to City Hall closing the Umbrella hotel. (ii) When school safety became a concern for parents, I won a commitment from the local police precinct to add school crossing guards. As an elected Democracy Party District Leader, I organized and presided over monthly meetings to address community concerns alongside elected officials and candidates for city-wide elected offices. As a lawyer, I have been a fierce advocate for voting rights and inclusive democracy In 2017, when the Queens political machine attempted to suppress voting rights by changing the long-standing poll site of 6,000 majority Black and Hispanic tenants just a month before an election, I represented them pro-bono in court. As a result of his representation, the poll site was returned to the people of Lefrak City, where it remains today. As a candidate for city council, I participate in training on campaign finance and my engagement in local politics also provided me access to the process of voting.

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.

As mentioned above, my top three priorities, to be implemented within an inclusive and responsive democratic process, are

- Quality Education by reversing budgets cuts to our schools, reducing class sizes, enhancing gun safety, and increasing after-school programs.
- Climate Action by advancing our commitments to net-zero emissions by 2050 through community-wide sustainability programs, reducing carbon emissions from our public buildings and schools with a transformative investment in climate jobs.
- Public Safety through both preventive and responsive measures that address root causes of rising crime, while protecting all of our communities. This also includes pedestrian safety

cross-cutting to all these priorities is the issue of inclusive democracy and equality, which aim to address structural inequalities of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability in our society.

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?

As mentioned above, my core legislative priority will be to make democracy and elections more inclusive. This includes addressing the NYCBOE dysfunctionalities and the permanence of patronage and political appointees by working to ensure that law and policies are in place to (i) remove control of political parties over election administration, repealing the need for equal bipartisan representation including administration staff and implementing criteria for the selection of professional staff, training and their retention at all levels. The NYCBOE should also (ii) enhance its effectiveness by adopting a management system for the board offices and election administration, modernizing its data system for election results and performance indicators for the election boards, and facilitating the recruitment of qualified poll workers and volunteers.

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 support moving our City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, as promoted by Citizens Union. We know that voter support rises in gubernatorial and presidential elections. We know that there are difficulties in voters being able to get to the polls and participate in our democracy. This proposal of amending the constitution and corresponding state

law makes sense from an administrative side of bringing lower fiscal costs to the election administration, **as well as to achieve results in increasing voters participation. 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 do support Ranked Choice Voting. Elections must be fair and democratic. Providing voters with the opportunity to rank their preferences of elected officials gives more voice to them on who will be elected to represent their communities. As Councilmember, I will advocate and support schools, radios, newspapers, social media on their efforts to raise awareness on voter rights including on ranked-choice voting. I will also insist that accessible and short manuals, videos and posters are made available to the voters educating them on how to vote by ranking.

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?

I am a firm believer on open primaries. All registered voters should be able to choose who would be best able to represent them, regardless of party lines. Open primaries provide equal opportunities to all candidates and promote acceptance across partisan lines.

*** 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?

I have not accepted in the past, and continue to not accept for this race, contributions from real estate interests, developers, corporate PACs, lobbyists, or the fossil fuel industry. The Ethan Felder for City Council Campaign is a grassroots, democratic campaign for change, relying only on public contributions thanks to NYC residents.

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?

I am in support of the Citizens United priority of banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City Database. Democracy relies on fair campaign financing. This is a key platform of my campaign and will be a key platform of my time as Councilmember. I am in support of reforms to strengthen campaign finance laws and ensure fair elections, such as this proposal. I know from experience how hard it is to run against an incumbent who is supported by lobbyists and big companies,

and, therefore, has easy access to resources. This makes the democratic competition unequal and exclusive to those either in power or with connection to political and lobbyists networks.

*** 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?

A healthy local democracy gives voice to and proactively engages the people of our district. Today our politics remain dominated by entrenched elected officials beholden to unhealthy machine politics.

As Councilmember, as noted above (question 1 on serving constituents), my role is to lead by example. I will ensure that my office is effective, accountable, transparent and bounded to high ethical behavioral standards. The use and source of our financial resources will be transparent to every voter, and the selection of staff will be based on competency criteria and will not include personal relatives. Voters will have access to information pertaining to the management decisions of my office including on the use of resources and recruitment. office team and staff will be held accountable for violating ethical standards.

*** 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?

The final say for disciplinary measures involving accusations on the way police officers engaged with community members should be with an independent civilian body. The New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board should receive, investigate and recommend action on complaints against police

officers to the police commissioner, and should also have the right to appeal the commissioner final decision to the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety. Disciplinary hearings involving police officers from the NYPD should also be handled by the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings.

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)?

First and foremost, the independent oversight bodies must be fully funded to ensure they can effectively hold perpetrators accountable. Civilian Complaint Review Board should also have greater access to information to perform its investigative functions, such as footage, police officers' history and disciplinary records that could be supportive of its investigations. The Board should also have the mandate to oversee all employees of NYPD, including traffic and school safety agents. CU has also recommended the merging of the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD and the Commission to Combat Police Corruption into the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which it seems to enhance the effectiveness of the oversight mechanisms over the police.

**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 supporter of addressing all root causes of violence for prevention. I know that this is only possible by identifying the root causes of rising criminality and ensuring measures are in place to prevent them. Funding for education, expanding economic opportunities, offering anti-violence programs for at-risk youth, and ensuring mental health access are central to building a safer community. Community-driven public safety is central to these efforts to prevent and respond to the systems that promote violence within our communities.

As Councilmember, I will also work to ensure that capacities are in place for our police to respond effectively to our communities' most immediate security needs. It will be critical to rebuild trust between our community and our police officers, including by ensuring the delivery of accountable and responsive security services to all that protect human rights. Further, police officers must have access to training and capacities that allow them to respond effectively when they provide services to our communities. This also means ensuring that full and meaningful community participation drives decisions concerning our public safety, including on issues related to our security spending. How, for what, and when our public resources on security are used and managed needs to be discussed at a community level. As Councilmember, I will address funding for NYPD that compliments and expands on community-driven public safety efforts to ensure effective and safe prevention and response to safety in our communities.

*** 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?

The City Council needs to be more effective and transparent including in the distribution of fundings among members, open data on the use of Council resources and in the open voice of all members to propose amendments to legislations during meetings. The council need also to enhance access of information on laws being discussed and enable citizes to more effectively contribute to its discussions.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)? 3,000 votes based on last voter turnout

What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals? We have raised around 140,000 thousand and need more 60,000.

How many individual donors do you have? We have around 300 donors

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

Our campaign is undergoing endorsement processes with Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) Action Fund, the Forest Hills Green Team (FHGT), the New York League of Conservation Voters, and Open New York. We have completed interviews with both PPGNY Action Fund and the FHGT.

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?

Thank you for your consideration of my campaign for endorsement with Citizens Union.