

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Running for Council District number: 09

In which primary: June

Age:65

Education: Lehman College BA, Masters Divinity Nyack College

Occupation: Assemblymember 71st District

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Campaign contact information

Website: AITaylor.org

Twitter

Facebook

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 an Assemblymember, I've always been proud to have an open and accessible office that is deeply and directly engaged with the community every day. We are committed to serving our people both in the halls of power and the streets of the neighborhood.

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?

Housing is my top priority. Harlem needs homes. We need to strengthen our community with deeply affordable homes, good union jobs, and opportunities to grow. The truck stop that is there now hurts us all and adds danger and pollution to an already oversaturated neighborhood. There is an opportunity here to forge a new path that puts our people first, that creates deeply affordable housing where our working families can put down their roots and build up our futures, and which enhances instead of hurts our neighborhood communities. I want to see that space used in a way that uplifts the existing community, that gives back to the neighborhood, and that creates safe, dignified, and deeply affordable housing for our working families and guarantees union jobs for our laborers and I am willing and ready to sit down at the table with all of the stakeholders - developers, workers, and community leaders - to make it happen.

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.

Good government and government reform is a key part of why I want to be in office and all that I have worked to achieve. I was proud to help pass public financing for Assembly elections, pushing for oversight of policing and expanding parole, enacting bail reform, and more.

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.

Below are my three policy goals

Affordable Housing - truly affordable, for our working families. We need to build more homes that are safe, dignified, and built to grow our community instead of pushing us out of our neighborhoods.

Economic and Educational Opportunity- We need to build up our schools, our libraries, our educational programming. We need summer activities and summer jobs for our youths. We need support for our small businesses that have been hit so hard by the pandemic. We need to strengthen small businesses by investing in MWBE incubators, cutting back on fines and fees, and fighting to make sure large corporations are kept accountable and pay their fair share. And we need second, third, and fourth chances for each and every member of our community to get back on their feet with support from the city and from the community.

Public Safety-Above all else, I want our communities to be safe for everyone - safe homes, safe streets, safe schools, and safe subways. I support reinvesting in our communities and in community-based interventions, trained mental health interventions, and many other kinds of non-police interventions that will help keep us safe. I believe terms like “defund the police” are too loaded, lack nuance, and are not productive of the kinds of thoughtful, intentional conversations that our communities in Harlem need. I want to reduce bloat and overspending in the NYPD and to move our city towards decarceral policies - which is why I support bail reform, parole reform, and creating non-police emergency response.

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 the former New York City Board of Election Deputy Chief Clerk, I believe that the reforms achieved through Ranked Choice Voting and Public Matching have been monumental in making our city elections more equitable and more democratic. I believe that our city can be an example for cities and municipalities all across America for instituting election reforms that give more power back to the people and decrease the influence of wealth on politics. That being said, all too often our elections are plagued with inefficiencies, inaccuracies, and a slog of bureaucratic problems that often drag on for years. We are too often the laughingstock of the

nation when it comes to election administration. We must do more to make our elections operations better and in so doing make ourselves a greater example for change and reform.

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 believe that such a change could be beneficial to the city and make our elections more equitable and accessible. However, I do not know all of the details and would want to make sure that we do not accidentally disenfranchise voters or reinforce the power of money over elections: would the goals of campaign finance reform be hampered by interaction with the other elections that do not have finance reforms, such as congressional and gubernatorial elections? What about the election workers who rely upon the yearly elections cycle as a key part of their income? Does having odd-year elections enable city council candidates to be heard more clearly without the outside influence of larger campaigns thus aligning better with voters? Ultimately, I want to make sure that our elections serve our city in the best way possible and would be willing to support a move if it gives our voters the best voice and the best choice.

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.

Yes, I support RCV. We still need to push for more education about how it works but ultimately, I believe that RCV allows voters to express their will more clearly and equitably.

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 do not currently see the reasoning for having "open primaries" but I am willing to listen and learn.

*** 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 do not believe that Super-PACs have been involved to any real degree in my elections.

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 - people “Doing Business” with the city should not be allowed to bundle contributions.

* 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.

Government must work for the people and must be accountable to the people at all times. One of the greatest powers of the city council is to bring forth members of the government into public hearings to shine a light into every corner. I fully intend to use my position to make sure that our city is doing what is right for us and is doing right by us, rooting out bias, waste, corruption, and inefficiency.

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?

Government officials, elected and otherwise, and truly anyone who is granted power and authority by our laws - such as law enforcement officers, agency officials, and more - must be held to the highest standards. We cannot allow public funds to be used for personal gain or allow authority to be abused in any way. All appointees should have clearly defined roles and duties and be assigned to their position by virtue of their skills and abilities, not their

relationships. Bidding, contracting, and procurement with public monies should always be fully transparent and accountable.

* 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?

I believe that the NYPD and all law enforcement must ultimately come under the oversight and authority of civilian government outside of the NYPD itself. There must be clear metrics and rubrics for severity and deviations should be thoroughly justified. Officers who break the law must be subject to civil and criminal penalties. The civilian oversight must be fully empowered to investigate cases, subpoena records, have complete access to all original and unredacted documentation, and furthermore be able to fire officers whose misconduct merits dismissal.

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)?

Any oversight body must be fully empowered to investigate wrongdoing - with independent investigators, subpoena power, unhindered access to original and unredacted records, and an investigative framework that allows them to either refer cases out for appropriate criminal and civil action or the power to bring that action themselves. This includes creating a realistic timeframe for investigation and adjudication that take into account criminal and civil law procedural requirements. The body must also be empowered to adjudicate appropriate punishments, up to and including firing officers. There should be a published rubric of punishments and acceptable mitigations. These punishments must not be subject to modification by the Commissioner. I introduced a bill, A10002, that was signed into law in June 2020 that created the Law Enforcement Investigative Office.

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 applaud and support these efforts to make our city safer through investing in communities and compassion. I believe that it is important to narrow the focus of the NYPD and develop better,

comprehensive, and appropriate programs for quality of life, homelessness, and youth issues. One area that can use improvement is making sure that the programs that the city is investing in are run well, meeting key goals, and using the public money to really enhance community safety effectively and efficiently. Improving policing is a much larger discussion where we must balance true concerns about safety with effective oversight and accountability for law enforcement officers. In 2008, I founded an initiative called Man Up in Harlem!, which worked to reduce gun violence in the community. This program was replicated in several communities across NYC and Chicago due to its success.

*** 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?

I would support reforms to make the bill drafting system more open and member driven so that good ideas that are well supported can more easily be advanced. I would also support the creation of a fast-track system for bills that are clearly supported by a strong majority of the council, reducing logjams and democratizing the process by which bills come up for a vote.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)? Approximately 8500

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

\$19,398

How many individual donors do you have?

225

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

I am proud to be endorsed by NYC District Council of Carpenters, Senator Cordell Cleare and Assemblymember Eddie Gibbs.

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?