

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](#).

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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.

You can also download a blank questionnaire [here](#) and email it to us.

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Candidate info

Name	Inez E Dickens
Running for Council District number	<input type="text" value="9"/>
In which primary	<input type="text" value="Democratic"/>
Age	73
Education	Attended NYU & Howard University
Occupation	Real Estate Management
Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement	

Served in the City Council, District 9, 2006-2016
NYS Assembly, 70th AD, 2017-present
Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce
Harlem Business Alliance
Greater Harlem Real Estate Board

Website <https://www.inezedickens.com/>
Twitter <https://twitter.com/DickensforNY>
Facebook <https://twitter.com/DickensforNY>

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

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

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

Local legislators have small staffs to cover large districts. What I have found most effective is making everyone in the office a constituent services person irrespective of their title or formal duties. I would also have specific constituent walk-in days and then certain days by only by appointment which then allow staff the time to work on constituent issues. Among the most pressing issues are sanitation, rodents and housing repairs.

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?

I would like to craft legislation to address affordable housing. The best way to address affordable housing is through increasing the housing stock. We need developers to build more INCOME TARGETED housing. Government doesn't build anything, but it can incentivize development just like it did through the Mitchell-Iama program.
New York is in desperate need of more work-force housing.

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.

In 2020, I was part of the effort to pass a package of 11 police reform bills in the wake of the death of George Floyd, especially the bill that changed state law to allow the release of police disciplinary records. We believed this would make it easier weed out bad cops.
In 2021, I was also proud to co-sponsor A.4448 which automatically restored voting rights to people on parole, as well as provides notice to individuals of their voting rights and a process for voter

registration upon their release from prison. I was very happy that this bill became law because I believe that once someone has served their sentence, they should be able to participate in our democracy again.

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.

First: Affordable Housing

Second: Education

Third: Small Business

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?

The City Council has a very arm's length relationship with the BOE when as a city agency there should be more oversight.

I would use my power to require that commissioners and executive staff complete election law and administration trainings and improve rank-and-file trainings.

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.

6. 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 would be open to considering this change because we really have to find a way to increase voter turnout in local elections. The numbers over the last few cycles have been poor. At the same time, I have questions about voter's abilities to focus on the various candidates with all of the political communication that will be aimed at them.

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 was not a supporter of ranked choice voting. I found it confusing at first and I've found that many voters in my community are still confused about how it works. Also, contrary to the reasons given to support it, my community ended up with a Councilmember that was the first choice of a minority of voters and only emerged victorious after 13 rounds of redistributing votes.

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. Political parties are almost as old as our republic and choose their nominees through primaries. It's the most important decision a party can make—and a party's most important decisions should be made by members of that party. Joining a political party is not hard, it's a pretty simple thing to do. You just check a box. Also, we can see how open primaries have been used to screw around with a party's most important decision. By allowing every voter to select a party's nominees, you open the door to screwing around with primaries. It's a good way to destroy a party and its meaning.

*** 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.**

As I said before, I'm prepared to continue pushing to professionalize the BOE more through better training of Commissioners and staff. I've already successfully worked to restore voting rights to the formerly incarcerated.

I'd like to work on instituting "no-excuse" absentee voting.

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've enjoyed labor support in the past and they've run IE's that I became aware of, but there has also been IE's that were run against me as well.

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'd be open to that, yes. I have no one who has bundled for me.

*** 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.**

I'll continue to focus on raising small dollar donations from my local supporters as opposed to focusing on institutional finds as I've done in the past.

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.

In my past and present experience, one of the best ways to perform this function is to pay close attention when agencies come in for budget hearings. I attend many of those hearings, especially for those agencies that heavily impact my community like police, fire, sanitation, etc.

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](#).

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

During my previous service as a member of the Council, I was a member of the Ethics Committee. It is important for us to take allegations of un-ethical behavior seriously, see to it that full investigations take place and take disciplinary action where warranted.

*** 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.**

I will continue to support investigations and disciplinary actions where warranted.

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 think that the final say should remain with the Police Commissioner, but to build confidence in the process overall we should institute transparency, so that both police officers and the community know what discipline to expect when an officer breaks the rules. We must also be consistent, so similar actions are treated similarly, and there is greater concurrence between the CCRB recommendations and NYPD decisions on penalties.

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)?

I'd like to see where these bodies are less separate. I'd like to see a new model/structure where these three bodies work more collaboratively.

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?

It was a step in the right direction, but it's not enough to fully address what is happening in communities. I'd like to see a different structure for community policing established. I'd like to see a model where the police meet on a regular basis and work collaboratively with community residents, clergy, neighborhood associations and local non-profit service providers.

This has been shown to improve police/community relations and reduce crime and violence in 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.**

I'd like to try to implement a pilot program of the model described above.

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'd like to see more involvement by members in the actual drafting of bills and if a bill has majority support, the pace to passage should be quicker.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)? That is still being calculated.

What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals? I've raised \$18K with an overall goal of \$22K.

How many individual donors do you have? N/A

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

I've been endorsed by the New Majority NYC, over a dozen local clergy members, Former Governor David Paterson, A half-dozen NYCHA Tenant Leaders, Retired Congressman Charles Rangel and Congressman Adriano Espaillat (lists available upon request).

ADDITIONAL INFO

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



INEZ 2023 WalkPRINT.pdf

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

I made the decision to run because members of the community approached me and asked me to run. They believe that the district is currently not being adequately represented. Their argument was that the community is missing out on desperately needed resources and also that public safety was not being addressed due to a hostile relationship between local law enforcement and the incumbent.

Please review your answers by clicking PREVIEW ANSWERS below.

At the bottom of the preview page, you can

- **get a copy of your answers by clicking PRINT, and**
- **submit the questionnaire by clicking SUBMIT.**

IF YOU DO NOT CLICK SUBMIT, WE WON'T RECEIVE YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE.

Once you click SUBMIT, you will receive a confirmation email. *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