Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee

NYC Public Advocate Election 2019

CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York City and our interest in reforming city and state government. **Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than August 16th.** Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for New York City Public Advocate, and to issue our preference for the Primary and endorsement for the General Election. Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. **Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed.** We plan to publish returned questionnaires on our website, in printed voters directory, and in other appropriate venues. Thank you very much for your response.

Biographical Information

Candidate Name: Devin Balkind	Candidate Cell Phone: 917.748.1048
Party Affiliation(s): Libertarian	Age: 33
Education: B.S. Communications, Northwestern University	
Office Sought: New York City Public Advocate	

Occupation/Employer:

President Sahana Software Foundation, Principal Sarapis,
Contractor for BetaNYC, Entrepreneur in Residence at Columbia
Tech Ventures

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Ran for Public Advocate in 2017, Chair of the Brooklyn Libertarian Party

(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.)

Campaign Contact Information

Campaign Manager Name: Ross Giattino	Additional Staff Contact:
Address: 761 Prospect Pl #4A, Brooklyn, NY 11216	
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Affirmations

Have you completed required campaign finance filings?	**YES** / NO
Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee?	**YES** / NO

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites of being considered for Citizens Union's endorsement.)

Signature of Candidate: _____   Date: 8/14/19

I. POLICY QUESTIONS

Please state whether you support or oppose the following reform measures, and feel free to elaborate in the space provided at the end or on additional paper.

CITIZEN UNION ISSUES

1. What is your position on instituting ranked choice voting in all elections for citywide office, including all special elections?	**Support** / Oppose
2. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?	**Support** / Oppose
3. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for: a. borough presidents? b. The Conflicts of Interest Board? c. The Public Advocate? d. community boards?	a. **Support**/Oppose b. **Support**/ Oppose c. **Support**/Oppose d. **Support**/Oppose

ISSUES OF CITYWIDE IMPORTANCE

4. How would you use the office of the Public Advocate to impact public policy to serve the broad public interest?

I'm concerned that the Public Advocate's office has become a venue for political provocation and propaganda, instead of what it was intended to be: a way to make government more transparent and accountable to New Yorkers.

Former Public Advocate, DiBlasio, James and Williams have all used the office to advance the narrow sets of interests of their political allies. In doing so, the office is now viewed as a partisan soap box catering to politically organized "progressives" and the special interests that support hegemonic Democratic political power in our city.

As such, the office has lost significant credibility among the general public, particularly moderates and conservatives who now routinely call for its dissolution.

Meanwhile, the original purpose of the office has never been more needed. With the nation's largest budget, and also one of its least competitive political systems, our great city needs a powerful ombudsperson capable of challenging entrenched power and revealing the corruption and inefficiency in city agencies. This is precisely what I would focus on.

As Public Advocate, I would turn the office in a non-partisan, public-interest technology organization that's laser focused on installing innovation into the heart of our City government -- saving taxpayers money and significantly improving our City's services and safety-net.

5. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as Public Advocate?

My legislative priorities are (1) representing city-wide interests in City Council, and (2) holding City Council accountable to present and vote on bills that are effective and efficient.

Since all city council-members, including the Speaker, are voted into office by a small constituency, it is up to the Mayor and Public Advocate to represent city-wide interests. The Public Advocate has a special role to interface with City Council and present bills. I will look to represent city-wide interests that are currently overlooked, such as removing legislative barriers to satisfying the city's need for new housing construction.

To hold City Council accountable for effectiveness and efficiency in their work, I will present an alternative bill for each major legislative goal in front of the Council that looks to pursue stated goals while considering the removal of obstacles using a non-political, straightforward approach. Too often legislation is passed rhetorically to address an issue, but is instead packed with political compromise and giveaways to special interests. My bills will force City Council to at least consider a better approach.

6. What do you consider to be the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?

Invest in the Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC)
Thanks to the city's innovative open data law, city agencies are publishing a tremendous amount of information to the city's open data portal, but finding the right information can get a little tricky. Professional researchers and large businesses have the resources needed to make sense of city data, but smaller business, journalists and the vast majority of residents often do not.

Fortunately, the city created the Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC) with a [chartered mandate](#) to "educate the public about the availability and potential usefulness of city produced or maintained information and assist the public in obtaining access to such information." Unfortunately, information on COPIC is hard to find. It seems to lack an [official website](#) or an [active Twitter](#). Go figure!

As Public Advocate, I will reconvene COPIC and will work with that body to create a unified interface for information about city agencies, such as their budgets, expenses, capital projects, social services, performance indicators, and more. In the words of the original OpenCongress.org web project, we'll build "the website [the city] should have made for itself."

With all the current controversies about technology, this Commission can and should be a useful tool for ensuring that NYC benefits from the rapid and powerful developments in the field of information technology.

Improve Capital Budget Transparency

The Public Advocate has the power to certify the capital budget. I will use that power to pressure the city to release additional information about each capital project. That information could include free and public copies of the RFP, information about the contractors that won the project, progress reports, and other official documentation of the project.

As Public Advocate, I will create a public database of all capital projects. That database will include features that allow the public to "crowd-source" information about the project - such as adding comments, multimedia and more.

Civic Engagement Oversight

As the voice of New Yorkers, the Public Advocate is the perfect position to provide oversight and help improve New York City government's civic participation programs.

In 2017 New Yorkers voted overwhelmingly to establish a "Civic Engagement Commission" (CEC) to "enhance civic participation." As an entity consisting exclusively of mayoral appointees, we need to make sure that the CEC advances the interests of the public, not the politicians.

As such, we will advocate for the development of high quality public participation processes and help city agencies implement them by doing the following:
- Create a directory of all the city's existing public participation processes and the agencies, division and staff involved with them.
- Maintain a website that analyzes these programs' characteristics, metrics and outcomes.
- Publish recommendations for how these programs can be improved.
- Offer trainings and resources to agencies and staff to improve their capacity to implement quality participation programs.
- Deliver information to the CEC to enhance their effectiveness.

7. **When she was Public Advocate, Letitia James used litigation extensively, with mixed results, at least with regard to the Public Advocate's standing to bring a lawsuit. What is your view on the Public Advocate's use of litigation to attempt to force policy changes?**

I do not believe it is appropriate for the Public Advocate to resort to litigation to pursue policy. The 1989 Charter Revision Commission chose to imbue the Public Advocate with limited powers and did not grant the Public Advocate standing in court, although they could have. The voters should have a true opportunity to reassess whether the position should be expanded, or, frankly, eliminated. In addition, litigation is wasteful and inefficient.

8. **What discrepancies, if any, do you see between services promised to New Yorkers and services rendered? For those listed please indicate your proposals for bringing policy closer to practice.**

Private sector innovations in information technologies are transforming virtually every industry, and the rate of change seems to be accelerating. In comparison, innovation in city agencies moves at a glacial pace, if at all.

The operations of many agencies appear frozen in time, and at worst, actually deteriorating before our very eyes. The city's beloved subway system is a case in point. As are its homeless shelters.

It doesn't have to be this way. Government agencies can leverage new tools, techniques and technologies to improve their effectiveness and deliver high quality services with reasonable costs, but doing so requires more than simply signing a fat contract with a vendor of high-tech wares. It requires government adopting the values of the "open source way": open exchange, participation, rapid prototyping, meritocracy, and community building.

The methodology for applying the open source way to government services is often called "digital transformation." This methodology was first developed in 2010 when the government of the United Kingdom began a website redesign project that turned into something much more: a rethinking of the very nature of government. Mike Bracken, co-founder of the U.K.'s Government Digital Services (GDS), articulated "government as a platform" in his 2014 PDF talk. GDS has gone on to become a vocal advocate of the open source way in government and is responsible for saving the UK Government over £1 billion a year since its inception in 2013.

Digital transformation changes government agencies in significant ways: including new roles, new skills, new trainings, new people, and new organizational structures. These changes often scare agency leaders who often view one of their primary roles as "protecting the agency and its workforce" as opposed to lowering costs and improving service quality.

The United States federal government began to take digital transformation more seriously in 2013 when the Obama administration realized that its hallmark legislative achievement, the Affordable Care Act, could be jeopardized by its inability to successfully launch the HealthCare.gov website by the time the legislation came into effect. Once it became clear that the project was massively mismanaged, the administration assembled a crack team of technologists from inside and outside government to get the website up and stable. To achieve this goal, the team used many open source and agile development methodologies popular in startup culture. Ultimately they got the site launched, and many of the people involved went on to create and lead high-tech units in the government such as the U.S. Digital Service in the White House, and "18F" within the General Services Administration.

18F's appraoch is very different than the "monolithic procurement" approach that usually happens within government where "large, complex, multi-year contracts" are drawn up between government agencies and large corporations. "According to the Standish Report from 2003-2012, 94 percent of government software projects over $10 million are either over budget, over time, or just don't work," via the 18F website.

Instead of monolithic procurement, 18F and other DSO advocate for in-house open source development and modular procurement, which is "a strategy that breaks up large, complex procurements into multiple, tightly-scoped projects to implement technology systems in successive, interoperable increments." By pairing this with open source software development and meticulous documentation, 18F can share the innovations they develop for one agency with others, reducing costs for everyone involved and allowing anyone in the world to use and contribute code to their projects.

This approach has been highly successful. In less than four years, 18F has grown to nearly 200 staff and completed hundreds of projects for over 25 federal agencies that range from building public websites (like

FEC.gov) to backend infrastructure (like Cloud.gov) and a myriad of products that help other government workers build faster, more accessible, and more secure technology products. They've been successful to the point where for-profit software industry groups lodged an official complaint that 18F was hurting their businesses because they were saving the federal government too much money.

There have been two efforts in city government over the last two years that have adopted the "digital transformation" methodology originally pioneered by GDS. One is New York City Department of City Planning's Planning Labs, which has been very successful, delivering a myriad of cuttign edge products including a zoning tool, facilities directory, tax lot viewer, and statistical mapping tool. Unfortunately, those successes weren't enough to keep the founder of Planning Labs, Chris Whong, from being pushed out of government by entrenched interests at City Planning. Another effort of note is Department of Homeless Services' StreetSmart project, which received a glowing write up from Wired magazine. It's importance belies the much broader effort led by Michael Jabbour formerly CIO of DHS and now assistant commissioner of the Department of Social Services to reorganize how those agencies use software following the Digital Transformation methodology.

In truth, we need all of our city's agencies to go through digital transformation like those led by Jabbour and Whong so we can deliver high quality services with lower costs.

some of this response was pulled from an article written by Devin Balkind for Gotham Gazette: https://gothamgazette.com/opinion/7572-for-government-it-s-dso-or-die

9. **How would you approach the responsibilities of the Public Advocate regarding access to public information in monitoring the implementation of the city's Freedom of Information Law and Open Data Law?**

The Public Advocate has a responsibility and duty to hold agencies accountable to the people they serve. Part and parcel of that accountability is transparency through fair and exhaustive FOIL responses. With growing desire by agencies to operate unwatched and the just removal of the state expert on FOIL due to sexual harassment of female journalists in the capital, I will look to include FOIL expertise on my staff. In appropriate cases, which I expect are more often than not, I will use the power of the office to communicate issues to agencies and act on patterns of intransigence.

10. **What specifically will you do as Public Advocate to ensure New York achieves a full and complete Census count in 2020?**

Thankfully, many city leaders, institutions, and activists are on board in keeping next year's census work accountable and effective. I would join in those efforts to some extent, particularly if we have data-tracking capabilities that may be of use. However, the office's resources are inherently limited and I would focus efforts on its charter-mandated goal, which is to serve the city's residents as against city government.

11. **How would you leverage the office of Public Advocate to address any of the following issues, if not discussed in answering previous questions:**
    a. **Affordable Housing**
    b. **Public Safety**

  c. **Public Transportation**
  d. **Health and Environment**
  e. **Economic Development**
  f. **Education**

Housing

Truly affordable housing only exists where there is an abundance of housing. Tokyo offers a great example. They simplified their zoning rules and let developers build relatively unencumbered and now they have some of the lowest rents among the world's global cities.

We should adopt Tokyo's model: make it easier to build throughout the city, particularly in the outer boroughs and core areas close to people's jobs and major mass transit junctions. If we don't do this, we're closing the city off to the next generation of New Yorkers.

To increase equitable housing options, we need to expand the capacity of community land trusts and encourage nonprofit developers to build more and larger projects. The growth of these community and nonprofit models must happen WHILE we're also building more units.

Fifty thousand new units per year would be a good start. Let's do it!

Public Safety

Repeal victimless crimes

Some people think the "Broken Window" Policy saved New York City; others think it destroyed it. What's indisputable is that New York City has draconian laws on the books and police choose whether or not to enforce them on a case-by-base basis.

As Public Advocate I'll maintain a list of "crimes" that our city's politicians should consider repealing so the police don't have to be the ones making a decision about whether or not to punish someone for a victimless crime.

Decriminalize sex work

Sex work is a risky activity that becomes only more dangerous and harmful to society when it's managed through law endorsement instead of public health. The fact that New York City continues to pursue a policy of prohibition against sex work, even in the face of widespread recognition by public health professionals and better practices implemented in other developed countries, is a shame on this city and creates real and lasting damage to our residents. Quite simply: it's time to decriminalize sex work.

Legalize Cannabis

The state legislature and the Governor should be ashamed for not legalizing recreational cannabis. We need simple and immediate decriminalization. People's lives are being ruined everyday because of these draconian laws. There's no time to waste.

With the same sense of urgency, we must also free anyone who was imprisoned for anything related to cannabis and expunge their record. Society owes them their immediate freedom and a sincere apology.

Abandon the Bans

Every year it seems like the politicians have decided to ban something else: large sugary drinks, vaping, fur, plastic bags — what's next?

These bans might seem good natured or relatively harmless, but they have real and detrimental impacts on people, the environment and our culture.

Every ban is enforced through violence or the threat of violence. And many of the proposed bans have unintended consequences. Banning large sugary drinks raises the cost of beverages for people who can least afford it. Vaping can help people quit cigarettes. Plastic bags take 6000 times less energy to produce than cotton ones. Banning fur will subject business owners to violence, either from the city or the black market. Our politicians should be focused on making our lives better, not on preventing us from spending our time and money however we see fit.

Opioids
Just like with alcohol prohibition of the early 20th century, we now know that prohibition of opioids is increasing, not decreasing, the harm of opioids on people and on our society.

We are not the first nation to experience an opioid epidemic. Portugal in the 1990s had a huge one. After trying many prohibitionist policies that failed to curb the problem, they decided to decriminalize the possession and use of the drug, enabling people to access it through medical professionals who are also trained in addiction treatment. This enabled them to cut opioid addiction by 75% and reduced the amount of people who contracted HIV from injecting drugs by 90%.

This change in policy has literally saved over a million lives in Portugal over the last 20 years.
If you care about this issue; if you, your friends and/or loved ones have been affected by it, please do the research, look at the Portuguese model and become part of the public health-based solution.

Close Rikers
There are many reasons to close Rikers: it's too expensive to reform and maintain; we don't need it's capacity; and there are better uses for the island. Close it.

Tackle Placard Abuse
Placard abuse is a practice whereby city officials illegally park their personal cars and then put unofficial and unauthorized placards on their dashboards that instruct traffic police not to ticket them. This practice is a danger to the public and gives the impression that there are two classes of people in this city: one class that has to obey the law and another that does not.

As Public Advocate, I will work with various stakeholder groups to build consensus around systems to accommodate the clear need for more parking for city workers, while confronting the issue of placard abuse head on.

Ensure implementation of bail and discovery reform
This past legislative session, the state legislature managed to pass much-needed reform that would limit use of bail to those accused of violent crimes, and would mandate early disclosure of police and prosecutorial records to criminal defendants, including before a plea.

Local district attorneys, however, have signaled their dissatisfaction with these new reforms and have contended that they may not be able to comply for reasons of cost or necessity. My office will monitor and ensure that these reforms are effectively implemented.

Public Transportation

Streets

Many of the world's global cities have realized that they can improve transit efficiency, resident safety and quality of life, as well as increase foot traffic for businesses, by implementing inexpensive street redesigns.

These redesigns would, in general, increase space for pedestrians and cyclists, increase tree coverage and enable us to accommodate dumpsters that will combat our rodent issues.

Street redesigns can achieve many of the goals of congestion pricing, but without increasing taxes and fees, without creating a street surveillance network, and most importantly, without giving control of our streets to New York State, which is exactly what the current congestion pricing plan does.

Mass Transit

New York City needs to develop more mechanisms that enable us to expert control over our own transit system. Too much of our city's critical transit infrastructure is controlled by New York state and other undemocratic entities like the MTA, Port Authority and Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. The Subway system, which exists entirely within New York City, should be controlled by New York City's government.

Other transit infrastructure that extends beyond NYC's borders should also be managed in a holistic manner that is more directly connected to democratic accountability structures. This is why I propose the development of a new, regional governance layer that I'm calling the New York Metropolitan Area (NYMETA), which could ultimately unify the 31-counties in the New York City Metropolitan Area together into an entity tasked with coordinating government actions and providing a mechanism whereby the 22+ million person metro-region can articulate it's desires for regional actions.

Beginning an explicit journey towards regional governance, while also pursuing aggressive digital transformation of the various transit agencies that are active in New York City, is the only solution-set powerful enough to deliver New York City residents the transit solutions they deserve.

Health and Environment

The average New Yorker uses around 30% as much energy as a suburbanite, so the single most environmentally friendly thing anyone in the USA can do is move to a dense city like New York and take public transit.

As New Yorkers, it's our job to welcome new comers so they, too, can adopt our environmentally friendly lifestyles. The best way for us to welcome New New Yorkers is by ensuring we're building enough housing. One of the least environmentally friendly things we can do is ban plastic bags.

Sorry, plastic bags might be icky and ugly and feel like pollution, but a Danish study shows that one of those "eco" cotton shopping bags take 10,000 times more energy to produce than a single plastic bag. That means you'd have to use a cotton bag everyday for over 20 years before it starts making ecological sense.

If you're worried about plastic bags in the ocean, don't be. Over 90% of ocean plastics come from 10 rivers in Asia and Africa where people don't have modern sanitation systems.

The plastic bag ban is the type of performative environmentalism that makes people feel good and results in even more pollution and waste. Don't be conned. Let's make a dense, awesome city with abundant housing so more people can live here, use less energy and take up less land.

Education

Our city's public education system has been in dire need of reform for decades. Despite spending more money per pupil than any other public schools system in the country, our city-managed schools often deliver worse results.

Why? Advocates for city-managed public schools have lots of ideas why problems exist, but the solutions are often more elusive.

I have a solution: digital transformation of the Department of Education and reorganization of the School Construction Authority.

While we tackle the massive project of reforming our public agencies and turn them into high-performance agencies, we also need to make sure parents have more choice and control over their childrens' fates.

We need to lift the cap on charters and begin to experiment with school vouchers. Allow parents to use a fraction of what we would otherwise spend to look for what works for their children and their communities. At the same time, give public schools more freedom to accommodate local needs and show that they can, in fact, provide a competitive option and a quality education.

Please use the space provided or a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the issues contained in the previous pages. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

I invite you to review my various articles on Gotham Gazette related to the 5 main solutions I propose in my campaign here: 5 Solutions the Public Advocate Should Deliver for New York City

1. Civic Engagement
    a. Madrid Demonstrates Successful Civic Engagement. Let's Pay Attention as We Launch New York City Commission
    b. Taiwan's Radical Participatory Democracy Training is Coming to New York
    c. *Related Project Work:* *https://sarapis.org/products/consul/*
2. Digital Transformation:
    a. For Government, It's DSO or Die
    b. New York City Shouldn't Regulate Ride-Hailing Apps - It Should Compete With Them
    c. The Battle for Urban Economic Sovereignty is Set to Begin

3. Regional Coordination:
   a. [As City and State Politics Fail Us, Time to Rethink New York Metropolitan Area](#)
   b. [Moving Toward a Metro-Regional Approach to Planning and Advocacy](#)
4. Searchable Safety Net:
   a. [Disaster Preparedness Requires a 211 System; New York City Still Doesn't Have One](#)
   b. Related Project Work: https://sarapis.org/products/open-referral-services-directory/
5. Open Government
   a. [A More Transparent City, with A Page for Every Capital Project](#)
   b. [SimCity Showed Us Brilliant Civic Tech Interfaces 30 Years Ago. We Should Build Them for Real Now](#)
   c. *Related Project Work: http://research.wegov.nyc*
   d. *Related Project Work: https://sarapis.org/mypb-wins-2-awards-from-nycs-mayor/*

Also: a vision for [Making the Libertarian Party Viable in New York City](#)

II. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS

What are the top five promises or goals you are making to voters during this campaign?

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient, and to affix additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements. We thank you very much for your response.

TOP FIVE 2019 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. Civic Engagement
As the voice of New Yorkers, the Public Advocate is the perfect position to provide oversight and help improve New York City government's civic participation programs.

In 2017 New Yorkers voted overwhelmingly to establish a "Civic Engagement Commission" (CEC) to "enhance civic participation." As an entity consisting exclusively of mayoral appointees, we need to make sure that the CEC advances the interests of the public, not the politicians.

As such, we will advocate for the development of high quality public participation processes and help city agencies implement them by doing the following:
- Create a directory of all the city's existing public participation processes and the agencies, division and staff involved with them.
- Maintain a website that analyzes these programs' characteristics, metrics and outcomes.
- Publish recommendations for how these programs can be improved.
- Offer trainings and resources to agencies and staff to improve their capacity to implement quality participation programs.
- Deliver information to the CEC to enhance their effectiveness.

More here:
http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/8380-madrid-demonstrates-successful-civic-engagement-let-s-pay-attention

2. Digital Transformation

New York City's bureaucracies were designed in an era of telegrams, switchboards and printed memos. They need an upgrade — and the best way to give them one is by helping city agencies build create their own Digital Service Organizations.

Digital Service Organizations (DSOs) are a new type of group organized within government agencies. These groups use open source technology and agile production techniques to bring government services, and the bureaucracies that provide them, into the modern era.

As Public Advocate, I will work to ensure that New Yorkers get faster, better and cheaper government services by advocating for the creation of DSOs within city agencies, and supporting them as they get up and running.

More here: http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7572-for-government-it-s-dso-or-die

3. Regional Coordination

New York City is the largest city in the USA with nearly 9 million people, but we're also the beating heart of the nation's largest "metropolitan area" with over 23 million people, extending north to Albany, south and west to include the five largest cities in New Jersey, north and east to include six of Connecticut's largest cities, Long Island and five counties in Pennsylvania.

Our city's ability to resolve some of our most important issues — housing, transit, energy costs, pollution and more — all require regional solutions. But coordinating between the 30+ counties and four states in the New York Metropolitian Area (NYMETA) isn't happening efficiently. Nonprofits, commissions and multi-government "authorities" made big decisions with little public input, and giant coordination gaps exist that make things like NYC subway construction exceedingly expensive and inefficient.

That's why, as Public Advocate, we will launch a metro-regional coordination project to document all the current ways our regional governments are coordinating, to recommend further coordination and to establish a small team who will help implement those recommendations.

More here:
http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7953-as-city-and-state-politics-fail-us-time-to-rethink-new-york-metropolitan-area

4. Searchable Safety-net

Almost every major city in the United States has a "211" system to organize nonprofit service information and make it available to the public. People can call 2-1-1 or go to the system's website and find a directory of all health, human and social services available in their area.

New York City doesn't have a 2-1-1- system and New Yorkers in need suffer needlessly everyday because of that. It's hard to believe but it's true: we literally can't see our own city's safety net.

As Public Advocate, I will create an open source directory of all available health, human and social services available in New York City, and make that information accessible on your computer, your phone and through partner organizations throughout the city.

More here:
http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7230-disaster-preparedness-requires-a-211-system-new-york-city-still-doesn-t-have-one

5. Open Government Interface

Thanks to the city's innovative open data law, city agencies are publishing a tremendous amount of information to the city's open data portal, but finding the right information can get a little tricky. Professional researchers and large businesses have the resources needed to make sense of city data, but smaller business, journalists and the vast majority of residents often do not.

Fortunately, the city created the Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC) with a chartered mandate to "educate the public about the availability and potential usefulness of city produced or maintained information and assist the public in obtaining access to such information." Unfortunately, information on COPIC is hard to find. It seems to lack an official website or an active Twitter. Go figure!

As Public Advocate, I will reconvene COPIC and will work with that body to create a unified interface for information about city agencies, such as their budgets, expenses, capital projects, social services, performance indicators, and more. In the words of the original OpenCongress.org web project, we'll build "the website [the city] should have made for itself."

More here:
https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7288-a-more-transparent-city-with-a-page-for-every-capital-project

III. ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF CONSTITUENTS

Citizens Union believes that all New Yorkers deserve to be represented by officials who work for the public interest and honor public trust. We seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that they will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and will always represent the public interest above all else.   Please give us your views on this aspect of holding elected office.

Unfortunately, the office of Public Advocate has been historically held by career politicians who look to use the office either as a place to remain relevant or as a jumping board for their ambitions. These motivations have hurt the office's reputation and effectiveness. However, as a professional technologist and political outsider, I have little interest in becoming a career politician. I'd prefer to be a government reformer who helps agencies go through the digital transformation they so desperately need if they want to deliver services efficiently to New Yorkers. As a passionate advocate for individual freedom and accountability for government, I have a singular focus and goal of serving the public interest and improving the City. And finally, having worked with City government leaders and teams, I have a demonstrated ability to work responsibly for those in a fiduciary role to the people.

…

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007; Via email to candidates@citizensunion.org or fax to 212-227-0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.