



Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee

Queens Borough President Election 2020

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing Queens Borough and our interest in reforming city and state government. **Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than February 19th.** Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for the Queens Borough President special election, 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.

We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues.

We thank you very much for your response.

Biographical Information

Candidate Name: Donovan Richards

Party Affiliation(s): Democratic Party Age: 36

Education: Aviation Management from Vaughn College of Aeronautics.

Office Sought: Queensborough President

Occupation/Employer: New York City Council

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

I have been the NY City Council representative for District 31 since March 2013. I am a member of the Black, Latino/a, and Asian Caucus as well as the Progressive Caucus. In the City Council I have been chair of Zoning and Franchises, Committee on Environmental Protection, and currently serve as chair of the Public Safety Committee.

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

Campaign Contact Information

Campaign Manager Name: Jesse Conrad Additional Staff Contact:

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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 endorsements.)

11. How would you use the office of the borough president to impact city policies affecting the borough/what is the vision of your office?

I will use the office of Borough President to diversify community boards, expand public transit options in transportation deserts, conduct participatory budgeting, ensure property tax fairness, and manage equitable economic growth for Queens. The office of the Borough President needs to support development projects that create family-sustaining, union pathways, and careers, while also stopping low-road development.

12. If elected to the position, you will fill a vacancy for a 9-month period. The U.S. Census will be held during that time, and you would be sworn-in right in the middle of it. How would you work to ensure a complete and accurate count for the Borough of Queens?

The Borough President can be instrumental in increasing participation in the 2020 Census by being a vocal advocate encouraging and reassuring the community of the benefits that census participation affords to them. The Office will be vital in community outreach and I have personally already begun to hold Townhalls enumerating the importance of being counted, I hope to continue and expand such work to assist in a complete Census count in Queens.

13. Developers argue ULURP should be streamlined while community groups and advocates believe more opportunities for input should be provided or that voting thresholds should be changed for application approval. Others note that the ULURP process does not integrate the need to plan for post 9/11 security issues in development. What reforms to ULURP do you support?

As Borough President I will ensure that the community is included in the conversation during critical land use decisions. Additionally, as chair of the Zoning committee, I always helped to negotiate a stronger, more inclusive affordable housing plan for all new development projects. Recently I just helped to negotiate back Bartlett Dairy to open up a factory in my district, which is bringing 400 jobs. In fact the Rockaway revitalization project that I secured millions in funds for, is responsible for not only rapid commercial development but also transformations due to expansive affordable housing developments, a new public library, new businesses and storm resilient infrastructure. I pushed developers to accommodate organized labor, allowing workers to organize on the site and guaranteeing them a prevailing wage. Job creation, worker protections, and equitable growth are principles that have guided me, and I will continue to uphold.

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14. Queens has increasingly become a destination for new development projects, which has both economic potential and risks, like gentrification and rising cost of living. As the city explores rezoning plans across Queens, the Borough President has a key role in assessing and advising on such projects. What neighborhoods do you think should or should not be re-zoned? How would you balance the various demands around re-zoning plans?

As Queens grows, I believe that we should look comprehensively and strategically at the needs of how each neighborhood should be handled. To get out of the housing crisis, we need to develop more, but this should be studied properly. While we look at real opportunities at affordable housing and economic development, we should not be afraid to make the appropriate steps based on the communities that we seek to help. I spearheaded the rezoned downtown Far Rockaway, in which I was able to secure nearly 6,000 units of real affordable housing, a \$40 million dollar library development, \$139 million in infrastructure funding, \$29 million in school capital money, and \$20 million in parks funding, all while not pushing out local residents.

15. The borough presidents make recommendations to the mayor on capital projects as part of the budget process. All of the boroughs combined additionally receive 5 percent of the appropriations in the mayor's capital budget divided between the boroughs based on formulas related to land size and population. What would be your priorities for capital projects in the borough?

I would prioritize capital projects that are both affordable and of benefit to the residents of the communities. Projects that are built safely and equitably, and that developments built in Queens are utilizing the borough's talented workforce. We've already brought 400 good paying, union jobs with Bartlett Dairy back to Queens, we must continue to pursue developments in the same vein, that are mutually beneficial.

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16. The Amazon deal faced intense criticism from people and organizations both for and against it. What are your feelings around the Amazon deal and if you had been Queens Borough president when it was announced, how would you have responded?

I was and still am undoubtedly in favor of the Amazon deal that was to be constructed in Queens County. Let's start with the fact that 25,000 jobs are gone. These are jobs that could have enabled public housing residents, could have enabled people to have an opportunity in an emerging sector. These are 25,000 jobs that would've directly benefited the Queens borough communities in bettering livelihoods and increasing tax revenues. Tax revenues for building our schools, improving our transit infrastructure and bolstering the opportunity of real affordable housing. Had I been Queens Borough President at the time that the deal was announced, I would have allowed Amazon to invest in Queens, so that in turn, we are able to invest in ourselves.

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17. Borough presidents are charged with establishing a planning office that, among other functions, provides training and technical assistance to community boards on land use issues. The recently formed civic engagement commission is also tasked with providing professional assistance to community boards, in consultation and coordination with borough presidents. How would you use the office to help community boards fulfill their charter mandated responsibilities in providing feedback on land use proposals?

I have always placed a large value in community input, and will continue to seek opportunities to gain insight from and collaborate with community boards in regards to land use proposals. It is paramount that new developments are first and foremost beneficial to the community where they are located, and having community boards to consult during land-use decisions would ensure that resources are reinvested into benefiting the neighborhood.

18. Borough presidents are charged with making hundreds of appointments. What criteria would you use for appointments to positions appointed by the borough president (the Panel on Educational Policy, City Planning Commission, community boards, etc.)? What processes would you put in place for advertising open positions and recruiting qualified candidates that represent the diversity of New York City?
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I have always emphasized the diversification of community boards as a priority and believe it is especially crucial that the diversity of New York residents are properly represented by appointed and elected officials. I will push for diversity to be included and a point of emphasis in all discussions regarding appointments.

19. More specifically, Queens is the most diverse county in the United States, but recent data published by the Borough President's office (as mandated by the Charter) shows significant disparities between the borough's community boards and the demographics of the districts they represent. How would you address this issue to ensure community boards are reflecting their communities?
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I am a proponent of democratizing the process by promoting transparency, term limits and looking at ways to make it easier for people to join and stay cognizant of Community Board activity. Encouraging diversity in membership as well as diversity of thought is crucial to ensuring that community boards are most effective in representing the concerns of the community.

20. Borough presidents can hold hearings on any matter of public interest and are charged with establishing a borough-wide complaint program to report public complaints to better service delivery by agencies. How would you use these powers and the position of the office to amplify the concerns of borough residents? What issues might you focus on to improve agency performance or draw public attention to?

As Chair of the Council's Public Safety Committee I have a demonstrated history of using hearings to bring forth issues that matter most to constituents, and providing a platform to host and respond to the concerns of residents. I look forward to extending a similar type of courtesy and outreach to the entire Borough of Queens, and will use the office of BP in order to ensure that public hearings are accessible and effective in both drawing public attention to as well as dealing with issues.

21. The borough presidents have the authority to introduce legislation yet few borough presidents in recent years have exercised this authority. Would you utilize this power, and, if so, what legislation would you introduce?

I would use this authority to help build on the criminal justice reform work that we have started in the Council. I have introduced numerous bills from curtailing the NYPD's "Gang Database," voting to close Rikers, and creating the Hate Crimes Unit to help create a better criminal justice system. This was just the start, and I am committed to continuing this work in the Borough President's office.

I. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS

What are your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position?

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.

TOP FIVE 2020 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. Improving Affordable Housing, putting an end to practices that enable displacement and ensuring NYCHA cleans up its act to improve our collapsing infrastructure.

2. Sustainable and Equitable Job Creation, that puts our residents and local businesses in the best possible position to succeed.

3. Reform our broken criminal justice system.

4. Protecting and Expanding Immigrant Rights. Ensure that funding continues to provide legal services to undocumented immigrants and to rally against measures from the federal government that discourage immigrants from going to our courthouses.

5. Fixing Public Transportation, I promise to hold the MTA accountable and ensure that investments are in our infrastructure.

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.