



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: **Costa Constantinides**

Party Affiliation(s): **Democratic/TransformQueens** Age: **45**

Education: **Queens College, Bachelor’s Degree; Cardozo School of Law, Juris Doctorate**

Office Sought: **Queens Borough President**

Occupation/Employer:

**I served as a New York City Council Member, representing District 22, since 2014.**

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

**I have been a District Leader for Assembly District 36, Part A, since January 2009.**

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

**Campaign Contact Information**

Campaign Manager Name: **Patrick Jordan** Additional Staff Contact:

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Website: **Votecosta.com** Email: **costa@costa4queens.com**

Twitter: **@Costa4NY** Facebook: **Facebook.com/costa4ny**

**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?

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The Borough President's Office has the potential to be a policy powerhouse -- especially when it comes to protecting Queens against climate change. We must revisit the three pillars of the office -- land use, budget, and advocacy -- to use this position to enact real policies that improve the lives of our borough's 2.3 million residents. We will set an aggressive land use policy early on that demands 100% affordability on City land as well as sustainability and labor components. Our budget should invest in STEM curriculum so every Queens student is prepared for a job in the new green economy. And I want to continue my success as a legislator by requesting bills, make our community boards represent their neighborhoods, and create a boroughwide transportation plan.

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 next Borough President's will indeed spend their first year as Chief Census Officer. My priority is to continue the great work Melinda Katz did in her last year related to the Census, but also to expand it. Within the first few days, I want to be at train stations, civic meetings, and green markets to remind Queens residents how important this count is. On a grander scale, I want to realign the Borough President's existing employees to create an Office of Diversity & Outreach to run a proactive Census campaign by expanding language services, opening satellite offices, and empowering community-based organizations.

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

The recent disputes over the Flushing waterfront development illustrates the many problems with our current ULURP process. We first must make sure Community Boards reflect the neighborhoods they serve. There should be a proactive, transparent appointment process that guarantees there are real community advocates on the board who are smart and thoughtful. The Borough President's Office must also make sure our land use chairs have as many tools as we can provide to help them represent the community's needs. They should be able to understand and fight for affordability, sustainability, and security based on the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

Last, I agree with Citizens Union’s support for Question 5 on the Charter Revision that allowed all voting stakeholders more time to review an application. I also agree the measure could have gone further.

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 a general practice, we must rezone Queens neighborhoods to save both our small businesses and struggling families who cannot find quality housing at an affordable rate. My Borough President’s Office would study what foundering commercial strips -- such as Steinway Street -- could be potentially upzoned to create more housing. At the same time, we do not want to do sweeping rezonings that overtax a neighborhood’s infrastructure the way we saw with the 2001 Long Island City rezoning. Since the historic 2014 Astoria Cove rezoning, I have always listened to every stakeholder in a land use decision, weighed the merits of their arguments, and found creative solutions to reach a decision that most benefits the community. That’s what I’ll bring as Borough President.

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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?

Making Queens more resilient and sustainable are my top priorities. Along with the Borough President’s capital budget of up to \$70 million, I plan to fight for more investments that solarize any City building in Queens that’s ready to support panels. My plans also call for replacing every classroom trailer in Queens with state-of-the-art, energy efficient buildings. We must also invest in adaptive resiliency measures to ensure our historic coastal communities aren’t washed away rising tides. Last, we need to invest in making our parks and streets greener by securing more investments like the \$30 million renovation of Astoria Park that I got from the Mayor’s Office in 2016.

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 I would have reacted with the same frustration that the deal circumvented ULURP, because this is exactly why this procedure exists. I am never against creating good jobs in Queens, but I would have pressed for a stronger hiring guarantee at the Queensbridge Houses beyond the six promised job fairs and resume workshops.

I also would have pushed Amazon to invest in a school-to-job pipeline by partnering with the DOE on coding programs, as well as remain neutral in unionization efforts at its warehouses. Amazon made it clear, however, that it wanted to dictate its own terms instead of having a conversation.

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?

We need to better equip community board members, who are there to serve the public. Especially on land use, representatives need to know the latest trends, needs, and options when it comes to securing deep affordability. They should understand why new projects must be sustainable, because buildings are New York's greatest source of carbon emissions. And they must have the skills to de-escalate what can often be tense hearings on land use. The Borough President must lead in this realm by holding regular workshops with the civic engagement commission for board members to be prepared for offering constructive feedback. These should explore the issues above, as well as help board members to tune out the noise in many land use decisions to focus purely on their merits.

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?

Just as I have for recommending community board members, I want to appoint people who are transparent, forward-thinking, solution oriented, and represent the diversity of our borough both in background and in thought. Our institutions need voices who have struggled to find affordable housing, who know the troubles of riding the subway every day, and who have experienced the difficulties of public spaces that aren't 100% accessible. That's why I called on a major MTA board reform that gives Borough Presidents an appointment, which is what counties outside of New York City are afforded. For all appointments -- especially community boards -- my Office of Diversity & Outreach will run a proactive campaign to let people know when a spot becomes available, walk them through how to apply, and be transparent throughout the interview process. We need boards with dedicated members; these should not serve as patronage system of who knows whom.

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?

This is something I've worked on in western Queens over the last six years. When I started in the Council, no one from the Astoria Houses, located in a formerly red-lined district, served on Community Board 1. I'm proud to say two residents now serve on the board and bring their necessary perspective to decision making. Every board that represents public housing should have residents serve on the body, which I've pledged to do as Borough President. As mentioned above, the Office of Diversity & Outreach will play a crucial role

by informing Queens residents who might otherwise feel powerless know they have the ability to serve their community. Staff will work with community-based organizations to find new voices who want to improve their neighborhoods.

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?

The MTA's recent draft redesign, which vastly made assumptions instead of proactively taking community feedback, underscores how badly Queens residents need a centralized outlet to voice their concerns about mass transit. We need to get people out of their cars, bring access to transit deserts, and make taking the train and bus affordable for low-income New Yorkers. I'm committed to holding hearings on transit issues, which we should then be able then bring to an MTA member the Borough President appoints. Queens also bears severe burdens when it comes to our air quality, especially in the northwest and the southeast sections of the borough, because of our aging infrastructure. I want to hold hearings on why we must close our dirty power plants and waste stations, as well as whether a vacated Rikers Island can replace these facilities that overwhelmingly make black and brown communities sick.

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 have always believed Borough Presidents should exercise the ability to request more legislation. I'm proud to have passed approximately 30 bills to make New York City stronger in fighting the climate crisis, and will continue to request bills that promote renewable energy, resiliency, and better schools in Queens. We are also in a time when deep-pocketed interests want to undermine the labor movement, so I've announced plans to request legislation to create a City office that investigates workplace harassment. I'll also request more bills to make Queens streets safer and create a holistic transit network that makes it as easy for pedestrians and cyclists to get around as it does for cars.

## 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. Appoint a Deputy Borough President for Sustainability, who will make sure our ambitious goals for Queens are actually met. I want a leading expert who understands the demands this borough faces, can find creative solutions, and help create new green jobs for our residents.
2. Begin to secure funding for solar panels on schools and any other City building with a roof new enough to support renewable energy infrastructure.
3. Realign staff to create an Office of Diversity and Outreach that will take the Queens Borough President's Office off of Queens Boulevard. That includes starting to open satellite offices in key parts of the borough to bring our services into our neighborhoods.
4. Get Queens an accurate Census count by running a proactive, ambitious outreach campaign. We want to make sure neighborhoods that have seen an uptick in residents continue to get the services they deserve.
5. Push the MTA to deliver a better bus redesign network that actually takes neighborhood needs into consideration. I will continue to lobby Albany for MTA board reforms that gives the boroughs a voice at the table.

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007  
Via email to [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org) or fax to 212.227.0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.