



Monday, May 10, 2021

Citizens Union 2021 Candidate Questionnaire - Borough President

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for the office of borough president! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serve the public.

In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform issues and your plans for office. The form includes sections on functions of the borough president office, planning and capital budget, and community boards and appointments.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for city offices, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by April 17 and no later than 48 before your interview.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process.

**

If you cannot complete the questionnaire in one sitting, you can click Save and Continue Later at the bottom of every page.

Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. Citizens Union will not be able to 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Your Info

Name

Khari Edwards

Seeking office:

Brooklyn Borough President

In which primary

Democratic

Age

47

Education

Midwood HS/Thomas Edison University

Occupation/Employer

Former VP at Brookdale Hospital

**Previous Offices, Campaigns and
Community/Civic Involvement**

Brooklyn Council President for Make-A-Wish New York, Creator of It Starts Here - a program to address gun violence throughout Brooklyn

Website

khariedwards.com

Twitter

KhariOEdwards

Facebook

KhariOEdwards

Affirmations**Have you completed the required campaign
finance filings?**

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union's endorsements)

Signature



THE OFFICE OF THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT

1. The role of borough presidents often changes depending on the office holder. How would you use the office of the borough president to impact city policies affecting the borough? What is the vision of your office?

Borough Presidents should be the most outspoken advocate for the entire Borough, and the myriad of issues each neighborhood faces. As Borough President I would utilize my powers to introduce legislation in the city council and while I would not be able to vote on that legislation, I would work with my colleagues in the Council and the new Speaker to ensure these bills are brought to the floor for votes. My vision is that the office of the Borough President is a connector of communities who provides constituent services at locations throughout the borough (not just at Borough Hall), distributes discretionary and capital funding to organizations and initiatives that support the neediest Brooklynites, and is an advocate fighting on the front lines for what is right.

2. The city charter was recently amended to establish an independent, minimum budget for borough presidents. If elected, how will you utilize this new protected status to better serve your borough?

I would use this budget to expand the infrastructure dedicated to providing policy and budgetary analysis relevant to appointments, discretionary funding usage, and district management. I would also use this funding to expand community engagement infrastructure to ensure our office is not only providing information, but engaging communities regularly to guarantee we are meeting their needs.

3. The charter requires borough presidents to directly engage with city agencies through a borough service cabinet to coordinate service delivery and issues. Yet the nature, level, and quality of collaboration with agencies varies.

How will you work with city agencies to ensure meaningful engagement?

Each city agency has commissioners, deputy commissioners and intergovernmental affairs staffers. My staff and I will know each of these individuals across city government agencies - including in each of the Mayor's offices (i.e. MOIA, MOME, etc.) so that we can bring issues, concerns, and recommendations directly to agencies and so that we can take information from agencies and distribute it to the public. Additionally, I am committed to holding hearings and supporting any other elected official who would like to hold a hearing to investigate the delivery of city services.

4. Do you support empowering borough presidents to require the appearance of borough commissioner of city agencies for the monthly interagency "cabinet" meetings led by the borough presidents?

Yes

5. 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?

I believe that the Borough President's bully pulpit is an integral part of the Borough President's method of advocating for resident needs. With so many issues impacting our Borough today (high unemployment, unaffordable housing, ineffective rent supports, failing infrastructure, lack of resiliency measures, food insecurity, healthcare disparities, etc), I would use the visibility of the position as a way to not only provide information to the public, but generate conversations in a way that prompts community involvement, engagement, and reaction. With the bully pulpit, I would also hope to create greater complaint filings reflecting the attitudes of our neighbors so as to more accurately provide some recourse, resources, and policy solutions to our lawmakers. I have every intention of creating and making public application data and trends for the Community Boards, and CEC's so as

to ensure transparency and generate community focused conversation regarding diversity and greater representativeness on our most integral administrative and decision making bodies. Beyond this, I would use our office to raise the regional issues related to the ULURP process, affordable housing, and the economic investments in our communities. With the Borough becoming increasingly unaffordable (even without Covid), the development process, and public investment are serious political and policy issues that need to be addressed quickly. These issues are additionally wrapped up in our Borough's resiliency in the face of global warming, and our Borough's shift towards more resilient, environmentally sustainable methods of housing development, waste management, food production, energy production and storage, and job growth. I will use my visible position to connect these issues and leverage community input to shape regional policies and focuses to meet the needs of the community.

6. 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?

Absolutely, I would commit to introducing legislation and working with the Council whose members would actually vote on said legislation . I would introduce legislation to make all resiliency building guidelines mandatory rather than simply advisory. I would also introduce legislation that requires all developers to commit to a community benefits agreement in all projects as a means to ensure regular and meaningful promotion of community-preferred projects. I would build on existing legislation that would require not only environmental impact studies in all development projects, but racial displacement impact studies as well, and increase community board access to planning officials, and environmental scientists. In regards to community boards, I would push for legislation that involves a community planning organization in Community board deliberations (members of this organization would be selected in a method similar to jury duty, with the distinction that participation is voluntary, and used as an advisory subcommittee). I would also push for legislation that requires AMI threshold to be based on the Borough and community specific AMI's

rather than the NYC Metropolitan AMI as a means to ensure actual affordable housing. I would also push for legislation that removes the allocation of funding from SOTA housing vouchers and for greater funding of CityFHEPS and FHEPS vouchers, as well as the creation of a Rapid Emergency Voucher to support the potentially precarious positions of our residents. Of course, so much of this depends upon the political courage of many of our elected lawmakers, and it is because of this that I would also introduce legislation to give Borough Presidents voting power on budgetary decisions. I would also push for legislation that reduces the number of PEP members appointed by the Mayor, and instead provide two positions appointed by teacher organizations and Unions.

PLANNING AND CAPITAL BUDGET

7. 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. The pandemic has cast further disruption to the process. What reforms to ULURP do you support?

The ULURP process has effectively reduced the community-focused power of the community boards. I support requiring community board deliberation prior to ULURP application certification, as well as the involvement of a community composed subcommittee in the discussions between the community board and developer. I also support giving the community board a binding up-down vote on ULURP applications. In the application itself, I believe developers must include environmental impact and racial impact studies for any developments. I would also support the inclusion of a community benefits agreement in ULURP applications which would generate community specific, community-preferred investment beyond the development itself.

8. 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?

Increasing investment in housing, economic development, and climate resiliency. Without investment in the economic fabric of the community, the long term issues our Borough faces can't be overcome. I would focus on using my capital budget funds to promote green job training, increasing educational outcomes and preparatory programs that guarantee greater trade worker pipelines as well as university attendance (both of which are needed to address the labor gap in technical industries). I would also dedicate funds that promote the repair and replace of infrastructure to increase our green energy production and consumption capacities. Whether it is making NYCHA more environmentally sustainable in terms of energy production, or removing peaker plants from our communities of color, or providing more green spaces in our upzoned communities, investing in a greener infrastructure would provide economic opportunities, and health benefits throughout the Borough.

9. If elected, would you post on your website all applications received by your office for capital and expense discretionary funds, as well as groups which ultimately received funding?

Yes

COMMUNITY BOARDS AND APPOINTMENTS

10. 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. Using the planning resources available, how would you use the office to help community boards fulfill their charter mandated responsibilities to provide feedback on land use proposals, while enabling the boards to make

decisions independent of the borough president's office?

I would Appoint a Director of Community Boards to support and coordinate information and resources among the District Managers. While the Civic Engagement Commission is a valued addition in local governing, I would look to expand on Intro 0732-2015 to connect Community Boards to Planning Specialists, Environmental Specialists, and other relevant experts to support the best possible input and voting on issues. I would also support incoming board members with policy training as well as panels with former community board members as a means to ensure continuity in understanding.

11. 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, and how would you assure that appointments represent the diversity of the borough's neighborhoods?

In order to make sure my appointments are not only the most qualified but also the most representative of the community and relevant stakeholders, I would create a Screening Committee within my office tasked with objectively vetting applicants (and reevaluating board members who wish to reapply at the end of each term). For community boards and CEC's specifically, I would build individualized outreach plans with individual city council members that include a detailed and comprehensive list of community organizations, clergy, associations, groups, and schools contacted. These plans and outreach lists will be made public and open to constituent comment through a visible and easily accessible digital portal. As the application process continues, I would create criteria regarding the geographic and demographic diversity of the community to ensure my appointments (especially on community level boards) are more reflective. I would task my office to track demographic application trends and publish a comprehensive report for community

evaluation. On Community boards specifically, I would increase youth representation by allocating two seats for members under the age of 18, and two seats specifically for members between the ages of 18-24.

12. Do you support granting the borough presidents the ability to make an additional appointment to the Board of Standards and Appeals, who would only vote on matters affecting that borough?

Yes

13. Do you support establishing independent budgeting for community boards?

Yes

MISCELLANEOUS

14. 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.

I am proud of the work I did at One Brooklyn Health System to increase 2020 Census engagement in areas of Central and North Brooklyn, some of the most under-counted neighborhoods in an already severely under-counted city. While serving as Brookdale Hospital's Director of External Affairs, my team and I ensured that census information was displayed in health centers and hospital lobbies, supported employees handing out information packets to hospital visitors, coordinated the hospital IT department offering dedicated computers for residents to fill out their census forms online, and coordinated with the New York City Department of Health, local unions, and a number of local elected officials to hold rallies to get the word out.

15. What are the top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected? Feel free to reference an answer above rather than restate it.

First: I will take serious steps to reform community boards and the ULURP process to increase affordable, community-preferred housing.

Second: I will push for greater investment in our students' education through the use of capital budget funds, and appointment powers on the PEP and CEC's

Third: I would also focus on reinvigorating our small business community through supporting trade labor pipelines, supporting MWBE's, and providing support to Section 3 residents and businesses.

16. If you have not addressed this already, in what major ways would your priorities as borough president differ from the incumbent?

I am not a career politician but I am a lifelong Brooklyn and community advocate with over 20 years of experience in government and healthcare. During that time, I have a long history of helping people get things done and that will be one of the main focuses of my office. Whether it is helping someone get a pothole fixed, apply for SCRIE, or stop tenant harassment, my office will have a physical presence across Brooklyn with satellite offices in a number of neighborhoods so my staff and I can help the people we serve.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

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

Please review your answers by clicking PREVIEW ANSWERS below. You can submit the questionnaire at the bottom of the preview page by clicking SUBMIT.

Once you click SUBMIT, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. 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.