



Sunday, May 9, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Robert Elstein

Seeking office:

Brooklyn Borough President

In which primary

Democratic

Age

42

Education

BA, Sarah Lawrence College, 2000 & MA, Brooklyn College, 2008

Occupation/Employer

Teacher/NYC Department of Education

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Founder, Beautify Brooklyn

Website

www.visionaryprogress.com

Twitter

Robert Elstein

Facebook

@elstein1

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

Yes

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

No

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?

I will work with my fellow legislators in the City Council to find creative solutions to revitalize our schools to make our curriculums relevant and fun for all students. I would hope to inspire my colleagues in the City Council to lobby state lawmakers to end Mayoral control of schools and replace it with a system in which the community has a much larger influence in the direction of educational policy. One idea in this area that I think is extremely important is to facilitate a means for our teachers to collaborate across schools so that our city's most successful programs may be replicated in schools in every community. We also need to afford school staff members, parents, students and other community members the opportunity to help select school superintendents, principals and the next school chancellor.

I also seek to create the RSSC, or, Reimagined Schools and Safety Commission, to find innovative means toward the demilitarization of the police and the development of educational and neighborhood security practices that work for everyone.

Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that we initiate a Green New Deal for New York City that focuses on climate change-- protecting our city from storm surges and developing a manufacturing hub for the Green revolution right here in Kings County. We need to develop our sanitation infrastructure to enable us to create the cleanest and greatest city in the world. One way that we can move towards such an initiative is through the adoption of more than 1,000 solar powered trash compactors in the neighborhoods that need them the most.

Another way that we can create tremendous impact towards addressing climate change would be to reform ULURP. From an environmental aspect ULURP can be reformed in such a way to require developers to create carbon-neutral developments and to contribute to a community green fund that will allow vacant lots to be saved from other developers and turned into parks.

We also need to develop a series of new affordable housing laws which have not been updated since the 1960s.

Additionally I will seek collaboration in developing a cruelty free city by banning the sale of furs, horse carriages and by lobbying the District Attorney and NYPD toward cracking down on dog and cockfighting rings.

Additionally I will open the doors and coffers of Brooklyn Borough Hall toward mentorship programs for immigrants and youth. I will encourage my fellow Borough Presidents to do the same.

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?

My primary objective for Brooklyn's allotment of discretionary funds would be to develop specialized programs in every neighborhood school and to develop sunny green spaces, fully accessible playgrounds and community gardens for every member of the community. Furthermore, I would seek to fund more recreational opportunities and recreational areas, such as dedicated skating and bicycle parks as well as an increase in bicycle lanes on our streets to enrich the lives of all generations of New Yorkers. I am a firm believer in the restorative and healing qualities of nature and art and I aim to increase the number of public artworks in Brooklyn tremendously, so that Brooklyn may become the world's largest most beautiful public art gallery. We need to serve the neighborhoods that have the highest rates of poverty as well as a deficiency in natural features such as parks, first.

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?

I will engage with my fellow elected officials as well as all community board members to gain support for my reform initiatives. To recover from the COVID crisis we need to enlist all of the energy and spirit of common good within our community. The success of community cleanup groups such as Cleanup Crown Heights, the Clean Bushwick Initiative, OneBlock Brooklyn, Beautify Brooklyn and many others has shown us that the community can come together and address our most dire needs. The model of community involvement and mutual aid groups such as People In Need and the Pakistani American Youth Society and the energy developed from them that has sprung up during the pandemic must be maintained in post-pandemic New York City. Furthermore, we can make an enormous impact on the livelihood of New Yorkers through the development of long-term beautification projects such as neighborhood parks, murals and community composting centers and gardens.

My plan for reimagining the Community Boards could also prove valuable toward this initiative. Community Board Members should be given a larger role in the types of decisions made in New York City. Ultimately, members should be elected, not appointed, as they are currently, and they should be compensated, rather than voluntary. We need to empower the community through the community boards. The conversation can't be just between elected officials.

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 would immediately want to call attention to Ending Mayoral Control of Schools, because that is extremely important, but what is even more important is that the current system is replaced with one in which the community's role in making decisions for schools is greatly increased. We must desegregate our schools and alleviate overcrowding by redrawing the school district lines.

Desegregation can also be accomplished, in part, with the development of the Reimagined Schools and Safety Commission. We also need to bring back vocational training programs and develop programs for computer programming, green infrastructure, arts production and community development. We need to develop a curriculum that is fun and relevant for all students. For example, all students in NYC should have the opportunity to learn how to swim and ride a bicycle as part of the general physical education curriculum. We need to create a system in which teachers can collaborate across subjects and schools and create interdisciplinary classrooms.

Furthermore, To address the housing crisis we need new affordable housing laws which we have not had in over 50 years, since the late 1960s. We need to lobby state lawmakers to reform ULURP to assure that the definition of "affordable" housing is not attached to AMI and to assure that larger units are included in all developments to accommodate low-income families.

My plan for the restructuring and reimagining of NYC's Community Boards will assure that all community members are involved in the process of developing land in a way that is beneficial to each community. There's a major problem on our Community Boards in that each Board's land use committee is made up of members that are not necessarily members of the Community Board itself! All Community Board land use committees should have term limits and must be comprised entirely members who sit on the Community Board.

Furthermore, so much is needed to address the safety of our pedestrians, our drivers and our

cyclists. It is essential that we create a system in which penalty points be added when a driver is given a school zone speeding ticket. Furthermore, we can develop the infrastructure of our public transportation system to include light rail systems that would lessen the need for New Yorkers to travel via automobile. Additionally, we can create more and safer bicycle lanes to create an impetus for cyclists to travel around the city more often. Another possibility that would alleviate the amount of cars on the road would be to create a NYC car share service. We need to consider all of the options that are available to alleviate automobile traffic.

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?

Yes. One of the most important pieces of legislation I would introduce would be the creation of the Reimagined Schools and Safety Commission. I envision a radical re-formation of our city's safety and security procedures. Ultimately I aim to create a new entity, The Community Safety Corps, which will replace and phase out the NYPD over the course of 10 years.

Furthermore, my plan to empower the NYC Community Boards and restructure the schools post-Mayoral control would require amendments to the city charter.

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?

We need to use our authority on land use to build

parks and green spaces, not more buildings. There are enough vacant apartments in NYC for individuals and families who need homes. We do not need to build anything new, furthering to exacerbate Earth's climate crisis. ULURP can be reformed in such a way to require developers to create carbon-neutral developments and to contribute to a community green fund that will allow vacant lots to be saved from other developers and turned into parks.

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?

My primary objective for Brooklyn's allotment of discretionary funds would be to develop specialized programs in every neighborhood school and to develop sunny green spaces, fully accessible playgrounds and community gardens for every member of the community. Furthermore, I would seek to fund more recreational opportunities and recreational areas, such as dedicated skating and bicycle parks as well as an increase in bicycle lanes on our streets to enrich the lives of all generations of New Yorkers. I am a firm believer in the restorative and healing qualities of nature and art and I aim to increase the number of public artworks in Brooklyn tremendously, so that Brooklyn may become the world's largest most beautiful public art gallery. We need to serve the neighborhoods that have the highest rates of poverty as well as a deficiency in natural features such as parks, first.

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 be in constant contact with all Community Board members, as we will be developing a plan to restructure the role and responsibility of the Community Boards. The Community Boards are central to my vision for a functioning city government.

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?

Unfortunately, each borough president appoints only one member to the Panel for Educational Policy. The member I would select would be a visionary who has had a role in the Brooklyn public school community as both a student and adult. For all appointment positions I would seek candidates with integrity and a history of working with people from all backgrounds to find creative solutions to problems.

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.

As a high school theater and English teacher for the past 16 years in America's most diverse high school, Edward R. Murrow High School, in central Brooklyn, I've had the opportunity to see my students grow up from timid or loquacious 14-year-olds with incredible potential into actors and doctors and teachers and artists and activists and professionals in all fields. I've taken all of my experience working with my students to heart. I understand how to communicate with the panoply of Brooklyn in a way that none of my opponents can compare to, because that's been my job for the past 16 years and my life for the 26 years prior to my time in the classroom. None of my opponents has served as the director of nine large scale high school productions including "Les Miserables" with a cast of more than 90 students and 100 orchestra and crew members. I know how to inspire a team and there's no better team than the people of Brooklyn.

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: Save Our Schools

Second: Save Our Community

Third: Save Our Earth

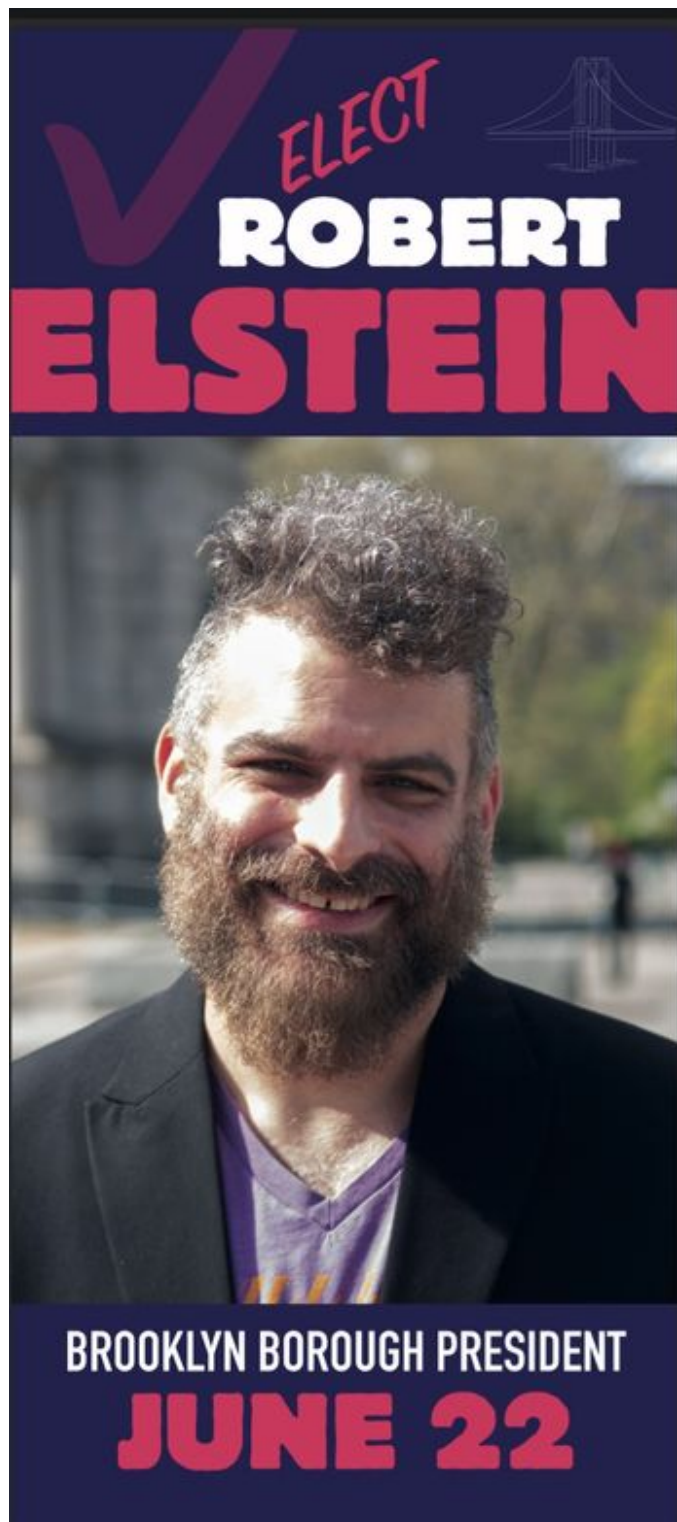
16. If you have not addressed this already, in what major ways would your priorities as borough president differ from the incumbent?

We will develop green spaces rather than luxury apartment complexes. We will open the doors of Borough Hall to mentorship programs for Immigrants and Youth rather than an inaccessible fortress. We will fund initiatives the community supports rather than real estate developers. We will celebrate the accomplishments of Brooklynite, rather than promoting the accomplishments of the Borough President. We will make noticeable longterm reforms to our security and schools. Everything will be quite incredibly radically different.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

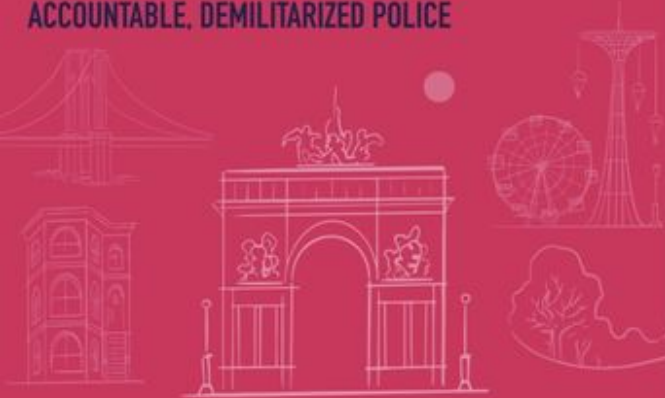
I'm a fifth-generation Brooklynite who has resided here all of my glorious 42 years! I'm an artist, a 16-year veteran public school teacher at Edward R. Murrow High School and father of two amazing children (sixth-generation Brooklynites, both attending public schools!)

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



ELSTEIN'S BROOKLYN

FUN & RELEVANT SCHOOLS • SUNLIT PLAYGROUNDS
GREENER COMMUNITIES • DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS
CLEAN NEIGHBORHOODS • EMPOWERED IMMIGRANTS
THRIVING FAMILY BUSINESSES • CARBON-NEUTRAL
EXPANDED QUALITY HEALTHCARE • COLLABORATION
NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING LAWS • PUBLIC TOILETS
MORE NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS • GREEN INDUSTRY
BOROUGH HALL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM • CREATIVITY
IMAGINATION • ART ON EVERY BLOCK • EQUITABILITY
ACCOUNTABLE, DEMILITARIZED POLICE



"I joined the race for borough president after getting involved in the fight against a damaging luxury real estate development in my neighborhood of Flatbush. That experience awakened me to the legal corruption that plagues our future."

"I'm 42-years-old, a veteran high school theater & English teacher, an artist, a director, a poet, a community organizer, an environmental activist, a fifth generation Brooklynite & a public school dad of two. I understand the melting pot of NYC & our ability to collaborate are our greatest attributes."

Robert Elstein

WWW.VISIONARYPROGRESS.COM @RADICAL_UNITY @ELSTEIN1

Photography: Amy Touchette | Flyer Design: justinwinslow.com

PAID FOR BY RADICAL UNITY • AUTHORIZED BY ROBERT ELSTEIN

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.