



Wednesday, May 12, 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.

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Elizabeth Caputo

Seeking office:

Manhattan Borough President

In which primary

Democratic

Age

Education

Occupation/Employer

World Economic Forum

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Longest serving Chair and current member of Community Board 7

Website

elizabethcaputo.com

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/elizabethcaputo>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofElizabethCaputo>

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?

I will be a leader and a convener who can work across sectors and in all neighborhoods to get things done. That has been my career after 25 years of living and working in Manhattan, and being a bridge between the public and private sectors, the global and local, and within neighborhoods as a longtime Community Board Chair.

I understand what it takes to collaborate in New York City at the local level. I spent over a decade as a municipal infrastructure executive, building city roads, schools, and transit systems. I helped launch the Fund for Public Schools during the Bloomberg administration, to build partnerships for our city's 1.1 million schoolchildren. I ran Democratic Leadership for the 21st Century (DL21C), New York City's largest grassroots organization focused on locating, educating and activating a new generation of New Yorkers into civic life. I was elected three times as Chair of Manhattan's Community Board 7 on the Upper West Side, where I remain on Board leadership. I currently work at the World Economic Forum where I run our US engagement and bridge cities on issues ranging from emerging technologies to tackling climate change. I am extremely practiced in bringing together disparate groups to achieve mutually beneficial solutions and make progress. For too long, our current elected officials have failed to take leadership and have not brought the forward-thinking actionable ideas and vision that this City needs. I bring the executive leadership qualities that this position requires. Manhattan is the "core" of the Big Apple – it's the central business district and home to 1.6 million residents – plus millions more who work here every day. I want to work to keep people from all

backgrounds here. I want to keep and grow jobs here, and I want to be a bridge - from our arts and non-profit communities to our small businesses and industry – to convene and get things done. I will bring a fresh perspective rooted in 25 years of work in neighborhoods across Manhattan. Together, we can ensure our Borough emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic safer, cleaner, greener, and more equitable for all.

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?

With this new status, the Manhattan Borough President has a unique opportunity. I'd like to use it to expand civic engagement and arm Community Boards with the tools and technology they need to better deal with city agencies and the land use review process. As a longtime Community Board Chair, I've seen how important these tools can be for our neighborhoods.

A few more detailed plans are below:

- I'd establish an early warning system before ULURP is triggered, which would arm Community Boards with the tools they need to deal with city agencies and the land use process.

- I'd reinvigorate the 311 system to make sure local, neighborhood concerns are properly addressed – something I focused on while running CB7.

- I'd work on a reimbursement process for small businesses on their COVID-related expenses – including sanitizing supplies, air purifiers, and PPE – as well as future improvements restaurants have made to ensure safe indoor and outdoor dining. During the height of the pandemic last spring, I facilitated a donation of 100K PPE to Grant Houses in Harlem. I spent three months before getting nothing but inaction from our city elected officials. Then I went to the Borough President's office, who connected me with the tenants' association and leaders, and I was able to quickly get the much-needed donation done. This is how I will get things done for Manhattan.

- I'll establish a civic fund that would provide an emergency safety net for workers in the arts. I am

interested in creating a city-backed, opt-in 401k-style retirement program for freelance artists, which could serve as a pilot for a similar long term for gig workers and freelance workers. I plan on creating safeguards and resiliency programs, to give New Yorkers a safety net should a personal or global crisis strike again.

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 am a convener and a problem-solver. The City manages by district. I want to make sure we are taking a coordinated approach to service delivery and bringing up the questions that come through the CB District Cabinet meetings up to the Borough Service Cabinet – not top-down.

It's critical that the Borough President maintains strong relationships with city agencies, and that comes from taking a neighborhood approach and truly knowing local issues on the ground – being accessible and making sure the Borough President's office can be a resource for city agencies to truly understand the needs of a given block and neighborhood.

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?

As a former three-term Chair of Community Board 7, I introduced transparency and accessibility: I started our first Facebook and Twitter accounts (back in

2012), and was the first Board chair to live stream Community Board meetings. At the beginning of the pandemic, back in March 2020, I recommended a concept called “Zoom” to the Borough President’s office – we got it set up as a tool for online meetings thanks to the Borough President’s staff, Beta NYC, and a committed group of Board members who made it happen across all 12 Community Boards. As Borough President, I will work to ensure that all Community Boards leverage technology and social media to the fullest to reach our constituents in an equitable manner.

To make things transparent across Boards, here are some other ideas I would implement:

- Live-streaming all Community Board meetings even after we resume our meetings in-person
 - Making proposals under Community Board consideration available early, and online, and accessible for public debate and comment before meetings so that the public has ample opportunity to weigh in on planning decisions.
 - We need to bring better powers and responsiveness to 311. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we need to create custom tools that are transparent to Manhattan residents
 - I will base my office at the 125 Street location, and I will rotate our Borough Board meetings from each month at 1 Centre Street to a location in each of the 12 Community Board districts.
 - My staff and I will harness all forms of media to reach Manhattanites where they are, but we need to move away from the paper flyers and mailers that go out – I pledge to do things more digitally and in-person. I plan to do in-person and telephone town halls, and leverage social media and interactive online platforms to share the most up-to-date information with Manhattanites so they will have a direct line to share ideas and feedback.
- I commit to making the Borough President's office the most responsive in its history. All constituents will receive a response to queries within 24 hours of contacting my office.

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?

This ability is an important tool of the Borough President’s Office, and I would use it – but only would do it if we are maximizing community input

and talking to neighborhoods first, about what Manhattanites need.

Given the inaction by the City Council on many issues related to COVID recovery legislation, if Manhattanites agree I would also consider proposing legislation to bring our economy back: for instance, legislation that could advance development in midtown converting commercial property to residential use, or increasing our stock of affordable housing.

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?

Community Boards and the Borough President play a crucial role in land use decisions as the first and second points of review for projects in Manhattan. As a Board Chair, I presided over hearings related to the Jewish Home and Life Care and Riverside South proposals, among other development plans. My job was to be a convener. One thing I noticed while running these meetings was that often Community Boards and the public do not get the full plans to properly review in a timely manner. As Borough President, I will push to create a warning system that would alert Community Boards and the Borough President's office of upcoming projects so that they can adequately anticipate and prepare for reviewing them.

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 priorities are COVID-19 recovery, affordable housing, improving public schools, and climate resiliency. One initiative of mine that brings

together these issues is internet access. More than 800,000 New Yorkers live in households without internet access, including 38% of low-income households and 100,000 school-age children. An additional 12% of New Yorkers access the internet exclusively through mobile providers.

Access to fast and reliable internet is a necessity in today's economy, especially for children doing classwork online. A lack of internet access should not be a barrier to doing schoolwork, accessing services, or finding a job. I am the only candidate in the Borough President race who consistently has called for a schools reopening given science and data – since the fall of 2020 – and a big reason I care so much is because there are too many NYC school children who simply cannot remote learn because they don't have a device, or they lack Wifi, and it's a lost generation of New Yorkers if we don't do something about it.

I will devote capital funds to blanketing the Borough in WiFi, starting with all public housing (NYCHA) facilities. I will also work to create community WiFi hotspots throughout Manhattan where the public – especially students – can work comfortably and safely.

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?

We need to work in a more coordinated way. I will prioritize creating an early warning system that gives Community Boards advanced notice of upcoming projects in their district, so that Boards and residents have an adequate amount of time to properly review and provide feedback on the proposals. This system would allow the Community Boards independent review. The ability to do this requires someone who has actually run a Board.

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?

I joined Community Board 7 because I cared about my block and my neighborhood (I had a new puppy and cared about my local dog run, and was concerned about the trash on our street). I have loved my service exactly because it is – or should be - separate and distinct from politics.

I ran DL21C exactly because it was not a political club – it was a volunteer organization that did not endorse candidates, didn't raise money for candidates, and brought people together across all groups.

Appointments should not be politicized – they should be granted based on merit. I've heard from residents across the borough during my campaign, lamenting that the appointment process has been abused and used for elected officials' political motives. That will change in a Caputo administration.

Here are some things I'll do to make sure we recruit non-political, merit-based appointments:

- Host meetings in all neighborhoods around the Borough
- Promote diversity not just on the Board but make sure Board leadership reflects all neighborhoods and ideas within a Community board district

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.

Before I became Chair of Community Board 7, I ran Democratic Leadership for the 21st Century for a decade, where we located educated, and activated a new generation of New Yorkers. We did not endorse candidates or raise money, but instead brought people together and mobilized tens of thousands of New Yorkers to engage them in the political process.

As Chair of CB7, I negotiated hearings on Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, successfully implemented the Amsterdam Avenue bike lane, launched the City's first truly inclusive playground, carried out the multi-year review and approval of the American Museum of Natural History Gilder Center expansion, established the Board's first Public Housing task force, and brought Citi Bike to the Upper West Side. I also worked to make the Board more efficient and accessible to its constituents by implementing new processes and technologies – all while placing community, collaboration, and equity at the heart of my work.

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 reinvigorate and reform the Community Board system, creating an outreach program to increase diversity, while working to increase both the power and transparency of the Boards.

Second: I will reform the ULURP process – making sure it’s transparent and more inclusive and making sure MOUs are ironclad.

Third: I will work to bring our Manhattan economy back, especially with small businesses – and in local and marginalized communities - to reimburse them for expenses accrued as a result of COVID-19. I will work with the DOT to expand and make permanent the Open Streets program.

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

I have great respect for Gale Brewer, and hope to continue her legacy of outreach and neighborhood advocacy. I intend to bring the Borough President’s Office to more communities, hosting each Borough Board meeting in one of the 12 Community Board districts each month. I am the only candidate who has said publicly that I will have my main office on 125th Street in the heart of Harlem, a more central and accessible location for my constituents than on 1 Centre Street.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

I have called Manhattan my home for my entire adult life, bringing decades of experience to serving my neighborhood and the City. I have lived and worked in Manhattan through its toughest days – during 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, Hurricane Sandy, and now, amidst a global pandemic where New York City has been at the epicenter.

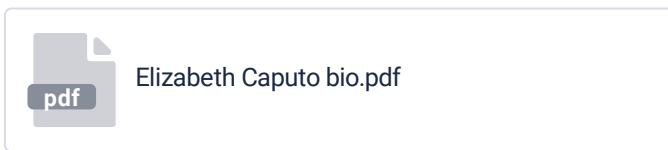
Throughout it all, I have brought together Manhattan communities and will bring that same commitment and energy as Borough President, as New York city recovers and rebuilds.

I am a problem-solver at heart, a convener who knows neighborhoods and people. I ran DL21C in the 2000s exactly because it was NOT a political club - it was a place to locate and activate New Yorkers – we didn’t raise money for candidates, we didn’t endorse, and we were seen as the “go-to” place for locating, educating, and activating a new generation of New Yorkers. I’ve lived and worked here long enough to know that we cannot elect the same

politicians to jobs and expect different results – it's time for qualified, new leadership to bring our City and Manhattan back.

The spirit of Citizens Union is the spirit in which I am running, and I look forward to working collaboratively with you in the days to come. Nobody is going to work harder and do more to bring Manhattan back. Thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to meeting with you later this week.

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.