



Tuesday, May 11, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Mark Levine

Seeking office:

Manhattan Borough President

In which primary

Democratic

Age

52

Education

Haverford College (BA) Harvard University (MA)

Occupation/Employer

NYC Council

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

2007: Democratic District Leader in the 71st
Assembly District, Part A

Since 2014: City Council Member representing the
7th District

Website

<http://votemarklevine.com/>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/MarkLevineNYC>

<https://twitter.com/TeamLevineNYC>

Facebook

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

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?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted longstanding challenges that we must confront head-on during our recovery: an affordable housing and homelessness crisis; a public transit system in decline; small business struggling to pay the rent and compete with e-commerce behemoths; poor access to affordable healthcare; an inequitable and increasingly segregated, underfunded and crowded public school system; the grips of a budgetary shortfall that is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has worsened nearly all of these issues. I am running because I believe that we can recover from this pandemic stronger, more equitably, and more just than we were before. The Office of Borough President needs a creative leader who can use the substantial powers of the Office--land use, community board oversight, budgetary, legislative, and the bully pulpit--to act as an organizer of advocacy. This person needs to have experience in the classroom, experience working with small businesses, experience working to find creative solutions to solve problems, and someone who speaks Spanish fluently. As Borough President, I want to:

-- Re-invigorate the legislative powers of the office, pushing for legislative priorities that will help make lives better, including creating a public bank, expanding the Right-to-Counsel to more tenants and small businesses, addressing the NYCHA waitlist of 180,000 New Yorkers through the ULURP process, pushing towards a more sustainable and resilient future, and more.

–Budget for change by using the Borough President’s capital allocations to fund projects that reflect our priorities of equity and inclusion, as well as the needs of our communities. This will mean funding organizations and agencies with robust M/WBE goals, supporting our public schools, and funding local healthcare non-profits so that every New Yorker has local access to primary care, among other priorities.

–Use the bully pulpit to stand up for our values, centering the needs of workers, immigrants, and New Yorkers of color while holding the City accountable.

–Use ULURP to support our communities, creating truly affordable housing, protecting community healthcare centers, and addressing the priorities that our communities identify are needed, from transit upgrades to open space, new schools, and more.

–Raise the bar for our community boards by taking a bold approach to ensuring they reflect the diversity of our neighborhoods. I’ll work hard to ensure that we appoint Boards with racial and ethnic diversity, more union members, more individuals with disabilities, teenagers and elderly residents, NYCHA residents, and small business owners—a true representation of our city.

I’m running because I believe that I have the experience, vision, and energy to make lives better. I spent more than seven years in the New York City Council fighting for the communities and neighborhoods I love, and I want to build upon that work in the Office of Borough President.

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?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the broad scope of our borough’s challenges, and the Borough President’s office must be equipped and ready to address them. I’ve committed to creating a division of the COVID-19 recovery czar, a deputy borough president that will work with me to ensure that our recovery is equitable and addresses the needs of every industry. We need to put more resources into

supporting community boards so that they are diverse and have access to urban planners and legal counsel. We absolutely need to have staff dedicated to supporting HDFCs and other affordable homeowners and tenants, experts in policy areas such as land-use, housing, energy, and the green economy, healthcare, and the arts, as well as resources and staff able to support small businesses, immigrant communities, and labor. We must emphasize language and ability accessibility, and be creative in our work to involve more New Yorkers in government decision-making.

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 have focused intently on building relationships with City agencies during my years in the Council, to deliver for my constituents. I will interface directly with commissioners as borough president and will use the borough service cabinet to ensure accountability and transparency for agencies.

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 Chair of the Council’s Committee on Health, I’ve brought a fact-based approach to educating the public and holding the City accountable. I’ve shown that by holding public hearings, using the bully pulpit, and passing legislation, you can push the City to be more transparent and to do a better job

of focusing on equity, inclusion, and accessibility. As Borough President, I'll bring this same fact-based approach to elevating public complaints and issues to the City, so that we can make city government better understand and prioritize city needs.

Some of the issues I'm interested in elevating specifically regarding agency performance will include ensuring M/WBEs are getting their fair share of government contracts; streamlining permitting processes at DOHMH, DCWP, and DOT for small businesses; streamlining capital funding applications, especially capital upgrades and repairs at NYCHA; ensuring better communication and collaboration between EDC, DDC, DOT, DEP, and Con Edison for repair and improvement of our waterfronts and infrastructure; push NYC Transit, DOT and the MTA to make our transit system more efficient and accessible; work with DoITT to better centralize the City's online footprint to allow for better public engagement and service delivery; and working with DHS and HRA to ensure that our shelters are safe, clean and provide access to essential services like WiFi, workforce development and healthcare.

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 have been an active legislator in the City Council, have passed over 40 bills, and will continue this work as borough president. I think this is an important part of the Borough President's power, and one that I would revitalize.

With this power, I'd work to expand the Right-to-Counsel, which has already had a transformative impact on tenants by providing a right to a lawyer in housing court. I would also work to create a public bank, which I believe will be an important part of helping small businesses in need of micro-loans and access to financing, as well as residents who are struggling to get access to capital. I would also continue to work to lower emissions and push for a renewable energy future and push for a racial impact statement as part of ULURP, among other priorities.

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?

First and foremost, I believe that it should be harder for DCP to overrule the Borough President when certifying a ULURP application (I would support a charter amendment requiring at least a 75% majority for DCP to overrule a BP). Secondly, I believe that there is a world in which we can involve communities in ULURP decisions without forever stalling needed development by flipping the ULURP conversation and understanding what communities need and what each community prioritizes. With a strong understanding of community needs at the outset, we can have developers respond to those needs in their applications, rather than the other way around. We saw this work in my district, where the community of Morningside Heights helped lead a community rezoning process. Choosing between community input and local development is a false choice. Let's do better than that.

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?

The pandemic has shown that we need to make serious improvements to our public space, our schools, our shelter system, and our public health system. This includes tech upgrades in every school, protecting and expanding public space that has long been underfunded; ensuring we have WiFi and safe shelters and that they aren't overcrowded; and protecting community-based health centers so that every New Yorker has access to primary care in their own community. Additionally, the climate

change crisis must be addressed aggressively and head-on, and we must continue to make serious improvements to our waterfronts and to sustainable energy infrastructure. Lastly, the NYCHA capital shortfall is catastrophic and we must identify new and substantial funding streams for it, in addition to pushing the Feds and State to adequately fund public housing.

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?

It is important that community boards both reflect the diversity of our neighborhoods and have the training and expertise they need to make important decisions that will impact their communities. As Borough President, I'll implement a robust training program for Community Board members (Board Chairs and Committee Chairs will be required to participate), and will fund access to urban planners and legal counsel for every board. Land use decisions are complicated and essential to the future of our communities, and we must take every step possible to ensure Community Boards are positioned to succeed.

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?

Too often, Community Boards don't reflect the makeup of the communities they are supposed to represent, nor do they always have the expertise or resources they may need to make important decisions that influence the future of their communities. We need to take a serious look at the manner in which community boards are being filled, and as Borough President, I'll work hard to improve the appointment process. We need standardized applications, we need to end auto-reappointment policies, and we need to help actively recruit new members that have diverse experiences and expertise. We need racial and ethnic diversity, more union members, individuals with disabilities, teenagers, NYCHA residents, and small business owners--a true representation of our city. Let's involve community boards in member recruitment by requiring that every board has a new member and public engagement committee tasked with identifying board shortcomings and focusing on addressing them. That will make the recruitment process proactive, not a passive or reactive collection of applications sent to an online portal.

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.

Good government and transparency are extremely important to me, and are key to a well-functioning government that is trusted by the people. As a Council Member, I have prioritized transparent and fact-based communication with the public throughout the pandemic, believing that it's essential for New Yorkers to trust what they are told, and believe that they have the information they need to stay healthy. I have called on the City time and again for data transparency, and pushed to hold the City accountable for poor rollouts of testing and then vaccine availability in communities hardest hit by the pandemic.

Other issues that I have worked hard on include election reform, including as an early supporter of ranked choice vote; supporting and encouraging transparency in budgeting, including in the Parks capital process and in participatory budgeting; sponsoring legislation to encourage NYPD transparency, including LL 130/2016; among other issues.

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: Our first priority, and the priority that will influence every other priority in office, is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger, more equitable, and more just than we were before. Manhattan faces a multi-front crisis of affordability, unemployment, and underemployment, small businesses struggling, climate change, underfunded public schools, inequitable access to healthcare, among others. Our recovery must address every one of these issues with a lens of equity if we are to put this difficult time behind us. To do this, I've committed to creating a COVID-19 Recovery Czar, a deputy borough president-level position that will work directly with me to ensure our recovery prioritizes advancing health equity, supporting small businesses, creating well-paid jobs in labor, and preparing for the next pandemic.

Second: As part of our recovery agenda, we must boldly address our affordability crisis. Whether you are a tenant in a rental unit in Inwood, or a small business owner in Chelsea or the Lower East Side, New York City is an increasingly unaffordable place to live, work and raise a family. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this crisis by increasing unemployment, decimating entire industries, and putting incredible psychological, economic, and health strain on New Yorkers everywhere. Meanwhile, the pressures of real estate continue to press upon the backs of families. The rent is still due at the end of the month. As Council Member, I introduced and passed the first-in-the-nation Right to Counsel legislation, paving the way to provide every New Yorker who cannot afford a lawyer with access to an attorney in housing court. As Manhattan borough president, I'll work hard to address our affordability crisis by expanding the right to counsel to more New Yorkers, and by taking a four-pronged approach (ULURP, job creation, tenant protection, creation of a public bank) focused on equity and opportunity.

Third: Addressing climate change and reducing emissions in Manhattan: Climate change is the crisis of this generation and must be addressed boldly and quickly before it's too late. We must work to reduce emissions, lower our reliance on fossil fuels, and make our waterfront communities -- many of which are communities of color -- more resilient. This will require efforts on every front, from reducing congestion on our streets and reducing reliance on private car use, to solarizing every government building and pushing new developments to be electrified. As a member of the City Council, I am proud to have been a co-sponsor of landmark legislation, known as the Climate Mobilization Act, which will mandate dramatic reductions in fossil fuel consumption by large buildings in New York City. As borough president, I will continue to support aggressive policies to rein in greenhouse gas emissions and build greater resiliency in neighborhoods across our borough, all the while creating green jobs for people in low-income communities.

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

Borough President Brewer will be leaving extremely large shoes that I can only hope I will be able to fill. Her tireless energy and relentless dedication to the job were felt all across the Borough. Her work in education and supporting small businesses has been exemplary, and I will do everything I can to continue that legacy.

However, as a result of the pandemic, the next Borough President's priorities must naturally be

different than Gale's. I will be focused on equity in all my work, ensuring that communities of color are not asked to bear an unfair burden to address our affordability crisis or our environmental crisis. I'll also push hard to ensure that we are building truly affordable housing, again with an equity lens, that meets the needs of our neighborhoods and which provides an opportunity not only for truly affordable housing, but which will help get some of the 180,000 New Yorkers on the NYCHA waitlist into homes they can afford. I'll continue my work to reduce carbon emissions, both by solarizing large buildings but also by reducing congestion, getting private cars off the street by creating bike lanes, streamlining delivery systems, and investing in a more efficient public transit system. Additionally, as Chair of the Committee on Health, I've seen first-hand how vital community-based healthcare providers are in our neighborhoods. They must be protected, and we must help them flourish so that every New Yorker has access to affordable primary care right in their community. Lastly, I deeply believe in the power and importance of the labor movement and believe that the strength of our economic recovery will largely depend on the strength of our unions.

These will be some of my priorities, all of which we must address in our recovery so that we can recover stronger, more equitable, and more just than we were before. I am running for Borough President because I love Manhattan, I love my neighbors, and I believe this is a vision we can achieve. I hope to earn the support of Citizens Union.

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.