



Friday, May 14, 2021

## Citizens Union 2021 Candidate Questionnaire - City Council

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for New York City Council!

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 five short sections: serving constituent, elections and voting, police accountability, council rules and procedures, and miscellaneous.

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](#).

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**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 need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. Given time constraints and the limited capacity of a member-based organization, we may not be able to evaluate all contests or candidates in this election cycle.

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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 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

We thank you very much for your response.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Your Info

**Name**

Steven Raga

**Running for Council District number**

26

**In which primary**

Democratic

**If elected, which legislative conference will you join (e.g., Democrat, Republican, other)?**

Democrat

**Age**

37

**Education**

I am currently enrolled at Cornell University S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management's and Weill Cornell Medicine's Dual MBA/MS Healthcare Leadership program. I have an MPA from the Baruch School of Public Affairs via the National Urban Fellow Program, a Masters in Public Policy & B.A. in Political Science from Stony Brook University. I am a Jay Kriegel Fellow for Public Service Leadership at the CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance and an Emerging Markets Fellow at the Cornell S.C. Johnson College of Business. I also completed the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government's Senior Executives in State and Local Government program. I also hold a Graduate Diploma in International Human Rights Law from the American University in Cairo.

**Occupation/Employer**

Currently, I am the Northeast Regional Manager for Policy & Advocacy for the Komen Foundation.

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

Previously, I was Assemblymember Brian Barnwell's Chief of Staff and was the campaign manager for his 2018 re-election campaign. I am a board member of Queens Community Board 2, Queens Pride, and Woodside on the Move. I am also a NY State Advisory Committee Member for the US Federal Commission on Civil Rights appointed under President Obama.

# Campaign Contact Information

## Website

[www.ragaforqueens.com](http://www.ragaforqueens.com)

## Twitter

@ragaforqueens

## Facebook

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

# 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



# SERVING CONSTITUENTS

**1. For most New Yorkers, the most important thing that their council members do is provide constituent services. How would you run your office to serve your community needs? Please give specific examples.**

As the former Chief of Staff for New York State Assemblyman Brian Barnwell, one of my most important jobs was making sure that our office was incredibly responsive and thorough in managing our constituent services. This was critical during the beginning of the pandemic, and will continue to be important as the NYC government works with local

citizens to get them back on their feet. If elected, I would ensure that there are multiple channels for constituents to get in contact with my office in order to ask questions or bring up concerns. I would work with my staff to clearly designate responsibilities and to design a system to ensure that all constituent cases are being actively resolved. If constituents come to our office in need of help, they should always be able to receive that help.

This would include hosting regularly scheduled town halls where I could interact with constituents, field their questions, and act on their needs. This will also include our Neighborhood Advisory Councils where residents will have opportunities to discuss issues related to their neighborhoods while also providing recommendations and suggestions on programs and legislation they would like to see enacted.

**2. If you served as an elected official, what did you do to help your constituents during the Covid-19 pandemic? Please be specific.**

N/A

**3. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running for office?**

16 years

**4. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce?**

If elected, my first piece of legislation would be to enact widespread relief to New York City tenants. With a looming eviction crisis, we need to do all that we can to keep our neighbors housed and safe. This is why I would work to create a subsidy program for tenants who are behind on rent.

## **VOTING AND ELECTIONS**

**5. How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use your power as a council member to improve the operations of the NYC BOE?**

It is clear that the New York City Board of Elections is not properly invested in. Even now, as we are a little over a month away from the June primary, the Board of Elections does not have the proper

software in order to count the ranked choice ballots. That's poor planning and oversight, as well as a lack of investment and care. Our Board of Elections needs to be fully operational and functional so that our elections run smoothly but also so that our New Yorkers have full faith and confidence in our elections.

We need to make sure that the Board of Elections has the right software needed in order for elections to run without issue. We should continue utilizing remote and early voting methods, so going forward we need to make sure that these methods of voting are planned and run seamlessly. The BOE should continuously provide trainings, workshops, and info-sessions to voters so that they are better aware of the City's voting process.

**6. Do you consider yourself a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? How will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works?**

I am a big supporter of Ranked Choice Voting! It's important to give our residents the opportunity to support multiple candidates that align with their political views.

Since Ranked Choice is fairly new, it's imperative that we educate voters in ways that are accessible and also help them embrace the new voting system rather than making it more confusing. Some examples of how we can provide accessible educational opportunities include

- Providing video tutorials with voter registration confirmation.
- Including a QR code on voter cards that lead to trainings or materials about ranked-choice voting.
- Hosting voting workshops and trainings in public high schools for juniors and seniors.
- Utilizing public libraries for community workshops.
- Working with CBOs to focus on voter registration and RCV tutorials in culturally competent ways.

This requires funding and dedication to our voter system, which I will gladly support and lead with.

**7. The next City Council will appoint members to the city's redistricting commission and decide whether to approve or reject the commission's districting plans. In doing so, future council members will be responsible for shaping a fair**

**political map for the coming decade. If elected, what would your approach be in proposing or voting to appoint commission members, and in considering proposed district maps?**

It's important that our redistricting process runs fairly and without corruption or influence of entities who have high interest in the redistricting process for financial gain. Each appointed member should have to publicly state any prior lobbying experience and respond to questions on that experience. We should also limit who is allowed on the commission; there should be no members who are within the real estate field or the fossil fuel industry. If members of the commission are from any type of corporation or private entity, there must be a time limit barring that entity from submitting a ULURP application for a reasonable amount of time -- potentially 2-3 years. Lastly, the commission needs to be reflective of New York City, so the commission should be diverse in terms of gender makeup, racial and ethnic makeup, religion, and sexual orientation.

**8. Now that New York City has implemented Ranked Choice Voting, do you support moving to an Open Primary system (eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system)?**

Yes

**Comments**

## **POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Citizens Union has been studying police accountability and performance in New York City for more than a decade. In our reports and advocacy efforts we have urged city government to strengthen the accountability of the New York Police Department to the public and create a more cohesive system of police oversight. Previous reports include: [2016 issue brief](#), [2013 position brief on Stop and Frisk](#), [2012 report on the CCRB](#), [2008 policy statement on police misconduct](#). Citizens Union's 2021 agenda for police reform, [published as a report](#) in March, calls for establishing a Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, allowing the CCRB to appeal the Police Commissioner's decisions, making the appointment of Police Commissioner subject to advice and consent of the City Council, consolidating agencies with oversight authority, ending qualified immunity, and more.

**9. Do you support making the appointment of the Police Commissioner subject to the advice and consent of the City Council?**

Yes

**Comments**

**10. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the police department? How would you ensure penalties are imposed on police officers that commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?**

Any NYPD officer discipline should have oversight from the city council, but ultimately our goal is to give as much power as we can back to the people. This means allowing the CCRB to hire and fire the commissioner, and to regularly schedule meetings to discuss disciplinary action. The CCRB needs binding power in order to carry out its recommendations, and while officers deserve due process in any investigation, the CCRB's decisions should be implemented. Without binding power, the CCRB is simply an advocacy agency, rather than one that forces accountability. New York City voters recently voted to give the CCRB more power, and would likely not object to more authority that allows police misconduct to be properly punished. Without any incentive for the commissioner or other superior officers to enact discipline, it is difficult to see how the cops of the NYPD will change their behavior, or avoid illegal activity.

**11. Do you support consolidating the three bodies that exercise oversight of the NYPD: the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), the Inspector General for the Police Department, the Mayor's Commission to Combat Police Corruption?**

No

**Comments**

**12. Do you support giving the CCRB prompt and full access to footage from body-worn cameras, police officers' employment history and disciplinary records and all other document and materials in the possession of the NYPD relevant to its investigations?**

Yes

**Comments**

**13. Feel free to add any other policy proposals you support in regards to police accountability, misconduct, and oversight, or to effective**

**policing including functions, training, and community relations.**

One of our main goals for policing would be to reclaim at least \$2 billion from the NYPD and reallocate those funds to invest in additional social workers, trained mental health professionals, expanding our cash assistance and food security programs, as well as building additional public and social housing. We will work to dissolve the NYPD Vice Squad; it is an institution of harassment, violence, and corruption, and serves no place in our city. I also want to make sure that NYPD officers live in the 5 boroughs. Lastly, we need to prioritize the demilitarization of the NYPD. There is absolutely no reason why the NYPD has military-grade equipment to use against NYC residents. We need to set budget caps on what the NYPD is allowed to use for procurement of equipment and limit the type of items that can be bought.

## **HOW CITY COUNCIL WORKS**

One of the first items on the next City Council’s agenda will be adopting its rules of proceedings. Those rules will have a substantial effect on the ability of lawmakers to advance their goals, and can send a signal to New Yorkers about elected officials’ commitment to making the Council more representative, deliberative, accountable, and efficient. In the last decade, the Council took important steps to reform its rules, including a 2014 overhaul by then-Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and a 2018 administrative change by Speaker Corey Johnson. These reforms have made the body more democratic, given members a more meaningful role in the legislative process, ensured greater equity in the allocation of discretionary funding, and made drafting procedures more transparent. Still, more work is needed enable members to function more effectively and independently of the speaker, and to increase public participation.

**14. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?**

Yes

**Comments**

**15. Do you support reducing the overall number of committees so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?**

No

**Comments**



**16. Do you support making all actions designed to influence any City Council outcome, including the choice of speaker, reportable as a lobbying expense?**

Yes

## Comments

**17. The Council Speaker controls the allocation of a large share of the Council's overall discretionary spending, and in 2020 it was reported that the Speaker used this power to "punish" council members who opposed the 2021 budget. How would you balance control and order in the council with reasonable dissent?**

I think we need to focus on increasing transparency and public reporting to show which council members received the Speaker's support for their expense and capital priorities. This will not only create a stronger line of accountability, disincentivize politically motivated funding action, but also help New Yorkers better understand how City funding is distributed district to district. It's a tool that will educate and empower the public to advocate for equity for all New York City neighborhoods, including those that have not received adequate funding or attention in the City budget process.

**18. The ability of citizens and advocates to make their voices heard in City Hall has been severely curtailed since the council and city government shifted to work remotely. How would you propose to improve community engagement and public participation while using remote technology (in public hearings, meetings, etc.), particularly to ensure equity in participation?**

It's imperative that we continue to invest and utilize remote technologies for continued public participation and engagement in City Council affairs, even past the pandemic. Not only does it allow for more widespread participation, but is also an accessible way for our disabled, working-class, and non-mobile New Yorkers to participate in our government. With that, we must continue to invest in remote infrastructure that New York city residents already have access to. This means

making sure that our residents can utilize call-in functions and video call functions. We need to streamline the way written testimonies can be provided and also making sure the public is aware in advance of public hearings and meeting schedules so that they can prepare themselves and their schedule in advance.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **19. New York City has suffered an immensurable loss from the pandemic and its effects and the city's economy, social life, and culture. What is your path to recovery from this crisis?**

In order for New York City to recover from COVID-19, we must place equity at the forefront. COVID-19 has exacerbated the disparities that have continuously harmed low-income New Yorkers and New Yorkers of color. We need to aim for new New York City, a better New York City where we establish equity and justice for every New Yorker. and we cannot leave any of our neighbors behind as we move out of COVID.

We need to begin with providing economic aid and relief to our tenants, small business owners, and homeowners. We have to keep our New Yorkers housed first and foremost. So our first actions need to be providing economic aid to tenants, small businesses, and homeowners who are behind on their rent or mortgage payments. We also need to provide economic subsidies for residents and small businesses who are behind on utility bills. Having access to water, heat, and electricity should not be determined by their economic realities. Additionally, we need to provide some type of aid to small business owners and homeowners on the front of property taxes.

We also need to focus on housing our unhoused New Yorkers by investing in additional public and social housing, legalizing basement apartments, and reforming AMI standards within the ULURP process so that rent prices are set at levels accurate to the neighborhoods the buildings are located in.

We have to expand our assistance programming by expanding our cash assistance programs, our food security programs, and any other public assistance

programs. We need to make sure that New Yorkers have access to the basic necessities they need in order to live a dignified life.

COVID-19 has shown us that it's imperative that we expand our medical infrastructure in NYC. Queens has an average one bed per 1000 patients. We need to immediately begin building additional public medical facilities so New Yorkers can access high-quality treatment in the neighborhoods they live in while also lessening the strain on our hospitals. We also have to invest and expand in NYC's public healthcare option so that no New Yorker is without healthcare. We also know that this will actively decrease the number of New Yorkers that go to the emergency room for health issues that can be treated by non-emergency doctors and medical facilities.

It's also that we invest in job training and vocational programs. We need to begin training our next workforce so that they can gain the skills and experience needed to work in jobs that will emerge throughout the next two decades, like jobs in tech, in STEM, and jobs in green technology and infrastructure.

This also means that we need to invest in social and cultural programming across NYC. We have to make sure that CBO's and cultural centers can reopen without issue and go back to providing the services and the programming that they were offering prior to COVID. We also have to invest in our arts and culture sector by creating partnerships with the City of New York and artists, performers, and musicians so that they have performance and rehearsal or studio spaces. Our recovery should aim to make New York City more vibrant and colorful than ever before.

There are multiple issues that need to be addressed in order for NYC to experience a true recovery. We need to ensure that every resident has access to quality housing, healthcare, and resources.

**20. 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.**

While with the US Federal Commission on Civil Rights, I conducted an investigation and hearings on accountability for broken windows policing. I worked on issues relating to government transparency through the US Filipinos for Good Governance, for government oversight both in the US and the Philippines. I also worked on issues relating to voting and elections through the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) and the Filipino American Democratic Club of NY.

**21. 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: Providing economic relief and recovery for tenants, small business owners, and homeowners.

Second: Establishing a living wage of \$22 for all New York City residents.

Third: Revitalizing New York City's transportation system so that is reliable and accessible to all transit users, cyclists, and pedestrians.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

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



### **What else would you like us to know about yourself?**

**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 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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org).