



Saturday, April 24, 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](#).

**

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.

**

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Erik Bottcher

Running for Council District number

3

In which primary

Democratic

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

democrat

Age

41

Education

bachelors

Occupation/Employer

District Office Chief of Staff, City Council Speaker
Corey Johnson

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

LGBTQ/Manhattan Liason, Governor Cuomo.
LGBTQ/AIDS Liason, Speaker Christine Quinn

Campaign Contact Information**Website**

erikbottcher.com

Twitter

ebottcher

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/ErikBottcher2021>

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.

I have the benefit of 11 years of experience in constituent services in both city and state government. Serving constituents is a vital function of an elected official's office, and I've learned the processes that work best to respond to a high-volume of calls and emails and help each constituent. I will have a Constituent Services Director who will oversee intake, progression, and resolution of constituent cases. We will work to respond to questions and concerns within 24 hours. There will be a dedicated staff member to work on constituent issues in each Community Board so that constituents are able to connect with someone who is familiar with the specific part of the district that they live in. These are just a few examples of why our office will be the most responsive office in the city.

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

When the pandemic hit, I was serving as Chief of Staff to New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson. I organized nearly 100 volunteers to place wellness calls to over 6,000 seniors every week, to

ensure they had food, medicine and care. I obtained donations from local companies to purchase pantry boxes from FreshDirect and Trader Joe's and organized volunteers to distribute over 50,000 pantry boxes to local seniors and families experiencing food insecurity. Some neighbors and I created a GoFundMe that raised \$35,000 to provide hot meals to EMS Station 7 during the darkest weeks of the pandemic. After the city's sanitation budget was cut due to budget shortfalls, I organized weekly neighborhood community clean-ups that we continue to have every Sunday. When the vaccine was released, I created a volunteer corp to help seniors get vaccine appointments, and we're about to assist our 400th resident in getting an appointment. These are just some of the actions I've been taking during this difficult time.

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

6 years

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

I will introduce legislation to create universal organic waste recycling in New York City.

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?

I favor the dissolution of the current BOE and its replacement with a non-partisan agency with merit based hiring. This vital agency has consistently shown a need for reform, and with fresh calls to make access to the ballot easier by improving our election systems, this is a moment that cannot be squandered.

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 support Ranked Choice Voting and will push back on efforts to eliminate it. I will also use my platform to educate voters on RCV via multiple forms of communication.

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?

Any appointments should be made with consideration to both diversity in gender, gender expression and identity, race, socioeconomic factors and other factors. District lines should not be drawn with political considerations in mind. Rather, they should be decided in the sole interest of the public good. Additionally, the recommendations of groups like Citizens Union of New York should be taken into consideration to ensure a transparent process that is beyond reproach.

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?

The CCRB should have the power to issue binding rulings on disciplinary actions and I would support legislation to make this a reality. Currently, when the CCRB investigates allegations of wrongdoing and issues disciplinary recommendations, the Police Commissioner can choose to ignore those recommendations. In truth, the CCRB's disciplinary recommendations for police misconduct were ignored 70% of the time over the past two decades. Only one police officer was dismissed between 2014 and 2020. I will fight for a better funded, stronger and truly independent Civilian Complaint Review Board. I support a disciplinary penalty matrix to outline the presumptive penalties for police misconduct.

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?

Yes

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.

We need to re-imagine what public safety means in order to achieve a city where all New Yorkers are safe. I will fight to allocate funding to programs that address the root causes of crime, such as

educational inequities, substance use, poverty, systemic racism, youth truancy and untreated mental illness. The police are currently asked to respond to incidents, such as mental health emergencies, that are best addressed by civilian entities. I will fight for funding for rapid response teams with crisis workers and medical professionals who are on the ground in our community.

I will also fight for a residency requirement for new NYPD hires. Currently, the NYPD's civilian employees are required to live in New York City, but the NYPD's uniformed officers are not. In fact, a majority of uniformed NYPD officers do not live in New York City. Residency fosters a deeper connection to and understanding of the communities that police officers serve.

Additional reforms I support include reducing the power of the police unions in disciplinary and transparency matters. Police should also be required to document the use of force.

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?

Yes

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?

Control and order can be established by achieving consensus in the budget negotiation team, the Speaker's leadership team, and through the Democratic conference. There is rarely unanimity in the Council and healthy dissent is a hallmark of democracy, but Speakers can maintain order without using retaliation.

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?

The COVID-19 crisis forced city government to embrace 21st century technology which has opened up new possibilities for access, however it has also presented new barriers for those disadvantaged by the digital divide. The Council should adopt a hybrid system that allows for both in person and virtual participation. Additionally, every effort must be made to close the digital divide so that every New Yorker has the opportunity to participate in the way that works best for them.

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?

One of my top priorities will be helping New York City achieve a strong and just recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. This begins with ensuring universal access to the vaccine, particularly for the communities most affected by the virus. New revenue and funding from the federal government should be used to restore vital services, including subway service and sanitation. This is crucial to retaining residents and business and attracting new residents, businesses and tourists. Funding must also go directly to small businesses and cultural institutions that have been damaged by the pandemic.

Many renters are months behind on rent due to the pandemic. The moratorium on evictions needs to be extended, and rent relief needs to be provided. Allowing people to be evicted after they have been prohibited from working is unconscionable. The NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development's Housing Choice Voucher and the State Department of Homes & Community Renewal's COVID Rent Relief Program needs to be expanded to assist more New Yorkers who need rental assistance.

I also have a plan to establish a West Side Employment Network to ensure that the companies relocating to Council District 3 are hiring residents of our district, particularly those who are near or below the poverty line and residents of public housing. We have immense talent in our community, and I will create the infrastructure to match job openings with jobseekers, and prepare them with the skills necessary to get those jobs and thrive in those jobs. I will obtain funding for this program and partner with local organizations like Hudson Guild to ensure that economic growth in our district works for all of our residents, not against them.

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.

As a member of the LGBTQ Advisory Committee to the NYPD, I advocated for reforms with

Commissioners Kelly, Bratton, and O'Neill. Specifically, we pushed for changes to the NYPD patrol guide to prevent discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming new yorkers. I participated in meetings with the Police Commissioners Council and advocates such as Andrea Ritchie, in which we negotiated the patrol guide language. This is just one example of the work I've done in my career in these areas.

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: COVID Recovery

Second: Homelessness and Affordable Housing

Third: Universal Employment

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?

When I was a freshman in college in the late nineties, I wrote a letter to my hometown school district, the Lake Placid Central School district, about the anti-LGBTQ bullying I had experienced there. I had always kept this bottled up inside, and felt I had to speak up for other young people coming up behind me. The letter was read aloud at the next meeting of the school board. So, I simultaneously came out as a gay man to the town, and came out about my experiences in high school. Soon after, I learned that the school district made changes, including adding sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination policy of the schools. This taught me a powerful lesson that I carry with me today. Each of us has immense ability to create change.

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.