



Wednesday, May 5, 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.

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Marni Halasa

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

55

Education

JD University of Pittsburgh, MS in Journalism, Columbia Univ Graduate School of Journalism and Carnegie Mellon University BS in Applied History

Occupation/Employer

Figure Skating Instructor at Chelsea Piers

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement**Campaign Contact Information****Website**

www.marniforcitycouncil.com

Twitter

@marni4council

Facebook

Marni Halasa for NYC City Council 2021

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 would appoint designated staff people to head up the priorities in District 3, creation of 100% deeply affordable housing, saving small businesses and the jobs they create, solving homeless crisis by repurposing empty buildings in the District as well as equity in education.

I am also very concerned with the gentrification that luxury development brings to the area, which often uses demolition of existing structures to build, as well as creates unstoppable secondary gentrification that makes are neighborhoods and city more unaffordable.

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

I have not been elected, but I helped constituents get services from appropriate city agencies, such as connecting the elderly with food drop offs, my own colleagues with unemployment, and right now, trying to get a disabled senior NYCHA tenants get a motorized wheelchairs. I have consistently sought to putting them in touch with city agencies and non profit groups that can find such vehicles. I have

even helped homeless neighbors in the shelter hotels in Midtown West find clothing, healthcare services, even their stimulus checks to help them, which was very difficult since many do not fully know how to operate their cell phones and most are unbanked.

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

27 years

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

Reintroduce the Small Business Jobs Survival Act

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?

The BOE at the moment lacks meaningful accountability and transparency, and greater oversight by the City Council is needed to ensure our elections are run in a fashion which enfranchises all our citizens. Greater funding is also needed to preserve democracy in New York.

I would push to make all internal BOE meetings and communication accessible to the public wherever possible in the interests of transparency. I would also push for a new City Council Committee for Democracy which regularly checked-in with the BOE and voters to ensure our elections processes are taking place with maximum accountability to members of the public, and to ensure that voters face no barriers in participating in the democratic process. At the moment, the only City Council committee to discuss elections discusses only those of the City Council itself, which reflects the limited interest the City Council has had until recently on the democratic process of the city as a whole.

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?

Yes, I am a supporter--it gives campaigns like mine

a fighting change by eliminating spoiler effects. I am educating EVERY voter that I speak to about this system so there is no confusion, including NYCHA tenants, seniors, the disabled and the unhoused population in my district.

I do believe, however, that candidates need to differentiate themselves and need to state how they would decide issues differently than other candidates – which I do not consider 'negative.'

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?

Redistricting commission members should be non-partisan, and districts should be drawn by a fair + transparent rule where possible. Our districts are currently drawn by those looking for the homogeneous districts which make machine politics possible, whereas our approach should be districts that themselves reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of the city as a whole.

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

Ranked choice voting obviates the need for primaries (to reduce spoiler effects).

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

Yes, we need the City Council to act as a check on who is appointed, and we need a commissioner that represents the values and goals of our city.

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?

I believe in the ECRB but strengthening it. Historically, there are so many problems with the CCRB because often their recommendations are advisory not binding. I do believe in many of the reforms people proposed: Taking it out of the hands of the police commissioner so he/she will not have final say, expanding the jurisdiction of cases to be heard, compelling officers to testify, compelling body cam evidence – all that. But reform has taken so long, has been so undemocratic, that honestly I don't always trust this process.

In addition to a strengthened ECRB, I would propose this: An Independent Public Commission to Investigate NYPD Misconduct and Corruption: I'm very interested in having an independent public commission that has expanded powers to hold the police to account: it would be able to make arrests, subpoena its own witnesses, compel testimony, and prosecute its own cases.

That way, officer misconduct would immediately be given to this commission to investigate and prosecute. This has never been done before. But if we had a commission with expanded powers, we wouldn't have another Daniel Pantaleo, or the police officer who drove into peaceful protesters. If evidence shows that one can establish probable cause (such as a video), the arrest can be immediately issued. If the police refuse to give body cam evidence, the commission can hold that officer in contempt.

I also believe in a 3 strikes and you are fired kind of

consequence. If there are 3 substantiated complaints against an officer, that officer should be fired. Ideas like these are important because genuine reform has not happened.

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

I reserve my judgement for this. I would only support this given that the independent board is truly independent, and is not appointed by the Mayor or the Commissioner. This is extremely important for who gets appointed to the board, we need genuine reformers and activists also at the table, and not rigged so there are more pro-NYPD decision makers. However, I support unbundling the NYPD.

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

Yes, the CCRB should have full access to all pertinent records, including but not limited to these.

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.

I support unbundling the NYPD into distinct agencies for public safety, and addressing those problems best met with, e.g., on-call social workers. See my website for more on this.

Also – defund the corrupt Vice Squad that targets innocent sex workers who are low income people of color and rely on sex work to survive, and also

targets gay men at bookstores. No data collection of protesters and unauthorized use of databases vs protesters. And no 'collars for dollars' scam as written about in Pro Publica to inflate overtime.

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

Yes I do. Speaker Corey Johnson has refused to bring the Small Business Jobs Survival Act to a full floor vote with a majority of support of the Council, stalling it for the past 7 years while small businesses have suffered. Again, this is allowing the Speaker (or the Mayor in other cases) to have too much power.

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

Yes

Comments

Committees currently serve as undemocratic clubs that allow backroom dealing by concealing lobbying and power

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

This is just common sense. Lobbying takes many forms, including influencing internal City Council politics.

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?

The Speaker should not be able to control the allocation of discretionary spending. Why give one person so much power, which he used in a retaliatory way, which is in my opinion is unethical and an abuse of power, with no accountability. But the system is set up like this. The City Council and the Mayor's Office needs to reconfigure its decision-making so things are more democratic, and not so designed to foster top-down decision-making -- which is ultimately done by the corruptive power of real estate interests that influence the Mayor, City Council and other elected offices.

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?

We do not truly get genuine democratic participation with Zoom hearings. Many people, like seniors and NYCHA tenants, do not have Wifi or Zoom technology, or even phones that can accommodate sophisticated apps. There have been numerous lawsuits claiming this very thing especially in the communities with various rezonings across the city, affecting low income people of color who do not have access, and I support this position.

If it was actually possible to get complete community engagement with Zoom, perhaps I would feel differently, but with so many unable to

participate, I do not believe that this is proper democratic. Because this is not democratic, public hearings should be put on pause, until people can come in person to hearings, so they can have meaningful input.

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?

Economic and cultural diversity is at the heart of the city, and recovery starts with restoring small businesses & cultural spaces, and making rents affordable to people of all different backgrounds again.

My plan to save businesses involves substantial rent relief, the SBJSA, and a long-term plan to provide differentiated rents for local businesses owned by socioeconomically disadvantaged folks from our communities, versus for transnational corporations.

If we do not save small businesses and jobs, we will not have economic recovery, nor a city to live in. I have also floated a 1% corporate income tax on the top 25 to 50 large corporations doing business in NYC, a data tax on Google, Facebook and tech giants doing business in NYC, refunding the stock transfer tax, and reallocating money from the NYPD (including not building the 4 new jails).

I also have a plan for a new revenue instrument which doesn't require Albany approval: my plan to end private air rights sales between landowners & developers, & instead replace the existing market with a system where the city auctions FAR credits, a certain amount of credit revenue goes back to the community, & the community gets final say over development.

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.

I founded Community Control of Land Use, which sought to make undemocratic development processes directly accountable to the citizens who live in our neighborhoods.

I was an integral part of a movement to stop the demolition of 2 of the Fulton Houses Buildings, working with activists and organizing public housing tenants for the past 2 years with direct action and protests against elected officials, Community Board 4 and the Mayor's NYCHA Working Group. Our strategy stopped the demolition, and gave a voice to the tenants who are against privatization.

Our efforts also helped to change public opinion, so much so that now, Senator Schumer is supporting Nydia Velasquez's bill to fully-fund NYCHA and public housing nationwide with \$70 Billion dollars, and Senator Schumer is asking President Biden for even more money. So if this is possible, why is privatization still happening?

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: Reintroduce the Small Business Survival Act

Second: Rebuild NYCHA & expand mixed-income city-owned housing with h

Third: A meaningful reduction in homeless through long-term city-owned housing

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?

I was one of the candidates that got a top grade of A from Humanscale.

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.