



Friday, April 30, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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**

Lincoln Restler

**Running for Council District number**

33

**In which primary**

Democratic

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

Democrat

**Age**

37

**Education**

BA from Brown University

**Occupation/Employer**

Most recently St Nicks Alliance. Resigned to run full time.

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

I am a founding member of New Kings Democrats, which is a leading reform political organization in Brooklyn. I work at St. Nicks Alliance, which is the largest nonprofit in Williamsburg and provides senior and youth services and tenant advocacy among other programs.

I served on the Board of the Brooklyn Public Library and have been active in the Friends of Greenpoint Library and Friends of Brooklyn Heights libraries for years. I formerly served on the board of directors for five years of Pratt Area Community Council, which is a leading community development corporation and tenant advocacy organization in Downtown and Central Brooklyn.

I served as secretary of the local Community Board for approximately four years. I volunteer regularly with various Parks groups and mutual aid organizations.

No candidate in the 33rd Council District has deeper roots in this community, stronger relationships with their neighbors, or a comparable record of results.

I was elected as District Leader for the 50th Assembly District (Greenpoint and Williamsburg) in 2010 against the Brooklyn Democratic machine. Unfortunately, I lost my reelection campaign by 19 votes out of over 12,000 cast.

## Campaign Contact Information

### Website

lincolnforcouncil.com

### Twitter

twitter.com/lincolnrestler

### Facebook

facebook.com/lincolnrestlerforcitycouncil

## 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.**

If elected, providing excellent constituent services

will be a top priority for my office. I want to be the first person my constituents call, text, or email when there's an issue. Council Members should have a meaningful presence in the district they represent. Part of being an elected official is being a booster for your community and bringing attention, resources and positive energy. It is vital to show up. My objective is to always be everywhere in the district, so that my community knows I am their 24/7/365 problem solver.

Because every constituent has different needs and preferences, I would ensure that I am reaching out in a number of ways: making myself and my staff available at local events, hosting micro town halls in every subregion of every neighborhood multiple times per year, distributing paper mailings and e-newsletters, engaging with different parts of the community on hyperlocal issues, and running robust and proactive constituent services, including a district office located in a NYCHA community space.

I will run a tight ship in my district office to make sure that every inquiry gets answered and every problem gets solved. Fundamentally, the job is about addressing the needs of the people in our community. Through effective case management software, rigorous tracking of issues, and consistent management from myself and the chief of staff, we will make sure that issues get the attention they deserve.

Many constituents of the 33rd District already know how to get a hold of me directly (I have given my cell to thousands of people), and if I'm elected, I look forward to expanding that universe!

**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 was not serving as an elected official, but I set up weekly food distributions at multiple local NYCHA developments in my community from the onset of the pandemic to the present in order to ensure struggling residents have had consistent access to food.

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

My entire life (approx. 37 years)!

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

Affordability is one of the central pillars of our campaign. More than a quarter of tenants in our district pay a majority of their income in rent. Every year, it gets harder and harder for more and more tenants to afford to live here. We need to tackle the affordability crisis by taking power from real estate and giving it to tenants in order to generate the truly affordable housing we so desperately need. We must stop the tax breaks for “affordable” housing that is totally unaffordable and invest those resources into truly affordable housing. I would sponsor legislation to repeal Option C of the 421a program, which gives extensive, lucrative tax breaks for developers who build a modest percentage of “affordable” housing in new developments at 130% Area Median Income, which is more than \$2800 per month for a one bedroom apartment. After this is successfully repealed, developers who utilized the flawed 421a program will have to at least build some actually affordable housing.

**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 antiquated NYC BOE must be professionalized and the partisan system must be eradicated. The integrity and competent management of our elections is paramount for democracy. I strongly support dismantling the BOE structure and replacing it with a nonpartisan Board and adopting civil service examination requirements for all employees to eliminate this patronage mill. As the founder of a reform Democratic club, New Kings Democrats, I am deeply committed to the comprehensive overhaul of the Board of Elections to enhance competency and to inspire greater confidence in our election operations. The Council is responsible for appointing commissioners, and I would demand we have competent appointees with integrity and relevant experience. While the BOE is largely a creature of the State, I am committed to working with my State colleagues and continuing to be a forceful advocate for BOE reform. Although the incentive reform package offered by the de Blasio administration was ignored by the BOE, I think this

approach has merit and should continue to be pursued.

**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?**

Ranked Choice Voting gives voters more choice and more voice in selecting our leaders. I worked hard to pass the RCV referendum and have continued to be hugely supportive of the RCV system. As a campaign, we have already begun educating voters about the system through regular training opportunities. RCV guidance must be integrated into existing civic education efforts, and as a Council Member, I would work to continue and expand educational efforts.

**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?**

I would prioritize ensuring that New Yorkers of unimpeachable integrity and diverse backgrounds are represented on the redistricting commission. Commission members should be reflective of New York City in age, race, gender, occupation, income level, and ability. Ideal district maps should have close to equal populations, should break down as neatly as possible along organic neighborhood lines, and be coterminous with existing district maps for city services.

I believe that we should explicitly bar the commission from considering the political interests of incumbents. This has historically led to oddly shaped districts, including the 33rd, that are not cohesive sets of neighborhoods. The primary outcome I hope to see in the redistricting process is that our Council districts citywide better reflect the diversity of our city and more effectively elevate minority communities. In the 33rd, which will continue to be drawn around adjacent districts that are plurality people of color, I hope to advocate for borders more logically along neighborhood boundaries. Since we have experienced more

population growth over last decade (~30K+) than any other district, we will be experiencing some notable shrinkage.

**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)?**

No

**Comments**

I think we should allow unaffiliated (independent) voters to participate in Democratic primaries in New York City, but I think the members of the Democratic Party generally should select a nominee who represents the values of the party without outside interference from conservatives or voters of different ideological persuasions.

## **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**

I do believe that the Police Commissioner should be subject to the City Council advice and consent process. If elected to the Council, I would generally be inclined to approve the Mayor's nominee for Police Commissioner unless there are major red flags, but I do believe that a public hearing and rigorous scrutiny of such a critical nominee is appropriate. The City Council has only scratched the surface of its broad legislative authority over the NYPD's policies and budget. If the Police Commissioner's appointment required Council approval - we could set a different tone for the Police Department respecting the role and authority

of the City Council.

**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's recommendations should be binding. It makes no sense to empower the Police Commissioner to overturn penalties issued for substantiated misconduct. To create a culture of accountability and consequences at the NYPD, there needs to be an independent oversight agency with full investigative powers and binding authority to mete out justice.

**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 would recommend keeping the IG and CCRB separate. I think consolidating the Mayor's Commission to Combat Police Corruption into the IG office would be sensible.

**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.**

I would eliminate the NYPD internal tribunal process, which is distinct from every other agency in the City of New York, and collapse these



functions into the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. This would provide further independent oversight of the NYPD officers allegedly responsible for misconduct and would end the NYPD's internal kangaroo court.

Overpolicing is an issue that impacts every district in our city and particularly Black and Brown communities. We need to demilitarize and reduce the scale and scope of the NYPD by removing cops from schools, social services, homeless shelters, traffic investigations, and elections. I would like to sponsor legislation to create a new public safety agency composed of mental health professionals and social workers and Cure Violence organizations (peer workers) that can respond in real time to diffuse situations.

I believe the zeitgeist of the next City Council will focus on making critical changes to the NYPD and I would love to be a part of it.

## 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**

I enthusiastically support this.

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

Yes

#### **Comments**

The long list of committees and subcommittees (~40!) corresponds to the wide-ranging issues affecting New Yorkers every day, but it often feels like the Speaker wants every member to be a chair of something rather than crafting a sensible structure for the chamber. I'm supportive of a review of existing committees to determine whether we can consolidate and combine committee functions.

**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**

The process for selecting a Speaker, which is the second most powerful role in City government, is far too opaque. I would want to make sure reporting requirements are not overly burdensome, but advocacy by an organization or institution or private interest on behalf of a given candidate for the Speakership is inherently lobbying and should be reported as such.

**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?**

We're all in this business to make life better for New Yorkers. While I understand the need for order within the body, vindictive behavior at the expense of our constituents should never happen. If I am lucky enough to be elected to the Council, I will cast my vote for a Speaker I can trust will not hold critical resources hostage from New Yorkers.

We need to further reduce the discretion of the Speaker to prevent vindictive behavior. We should set Council rules to ensure that a greater ratio of Council funding is determined by the members relative to the Speaker and that an equity informed formula is utilized to inform how much money each Council Member is responsible for disbursing in their community.

**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?**

While I am hopeful that we can return to in-person operations very soon, we still have much work to do to ensure that we enhance community engagement and public participation. We need to move towards digital equity to ensure that everyone has access to reliable internet connection. We should also ensure that meetings are held at times to accommodate working people, and that they are recorded in order for folks to be able to watch when they can. In the longer term, the pandemic has shown that we will need to maintain a combination of remote and in-person options for engagement to make it accessible for New Yorkers and their busy schedules.

## **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?**

My priorities for a just recovery include supporting people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs start small businesses and activate our commercial corridors. Montague Street has over 20 storefront vacancies and more than 100 small businesses have shuttered their doors in Williamsburg and Greenpoint. We need to enhance access to capital, streamline bureaucratic approvals for new businesses, and help attract businesses that effectively meet the commercial needs of neighbors.

Secondly, we need to connect struggling New Yorkers to quality training and jobs. My background is in workforce development having formerly served as the Executive Director of the New York City Employment and Training Coalition, which is the leading coalition of 200 community based organizations, union training funds, and community

colleges. We must prioritize sectoral training opportunities for low and moderate New Yorkers in areas of the economy that have been resilient despite COVID.

Thirdly, we need to expand access to mental health services to support all of us who have been through such a traumatic period. I would like to support Health+Hospitals and other Federally Qualified Health Centers to expand outpatient mental health services and increase available mental health services in our schools and at our community based organizations. I would like to launch a campaign to persuade more psychologists to accept health insurance and advocate for regulatory reforms at the NYS Department of Financial Services. We need to do real work destigmatizing mental health services and I would like to build a ground up community campaign across D33 to increase connectivity to these supports.

**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.**

In 2008, when machine politics in Brooklyn was at its zenith, I helped found New Kings Democrats. I am profoundly proud to have helped craft a County Committee strategy to build power block by block, election district by election district, to form a new grassroots organizing approach to transform Brooklyn. I was the first candidate to successfully seek the position of District Leader under the mantle of the Brooklyn reform movement and helped elevate our vision for a progressive, reform-oriented Democratic Party. I have advocated unwaveringly for every major good government reform in the intervening years from campaign finance to ethics. I will always be an ally in the effort to advance transparency, accountability, and integrity in our local government.

**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: More than a quarter of tenants in our district pay a majority of their income in rent. Every year, it gets harder and harder for more and more tenants to afford to live here. We need to tackle the affordability crisis by taking power from real estate and giving it to tenants in order to generate the truly affordable housing we so desperately need. I have proposed a plan called Lower NYC Rent to do just that; it would drive down rents of apartments that have been vacant for extended periods of time. This would require City and State legislation and Senator Salazar and Assembly Member Gallagher have agreed to sponsor it in Albany.

Second: When it comes to the climate crisis, we live in a waterfront district that could be significantly underwater when the next big storm hits. My vision is to help realize the 33rd as a carbon neutral district and a model for the city and beyond. We must act now to mitigate the effects of climate change and build resiliency. We have released a 53 point plan to make it happen that combines City legislation and reimagines our Council office as an organizing hub to share actionable information with our community. In this fight, we need to prioritize the constituents who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of structural inequities and systemic racism. The 33rd District has been subject to decades of industrial activity and pollution that have led to widespread contamination and high asthma rates. We need to continue to defend our neighborhoods from environmental injustice, like problematic pipelines, and promote a Green New Deal for NYCHA. If elected, I will be working diligently to realize my roadmap to carbon neutrality in District 33.

Third: I have spent my career in the government and nonprofit sectors working to advance opportunities for all New Yorkers to access quality employment and to have the benefits and the security they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives. As a Council Member, I would support legislation that protects whistleblowers who call out unsafe working conditions. I would support protections for all essential workers to be spared from termination without “just cause.” This way every worker would feel more confident that they have recourse and protections to demand safe working conditions during a pandemic without being fired. I would also expand enforcement efforts by the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to swiftly investigate any and all allegations of unsafe working conditions to help protect the well-being of workers.

## **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?**

My approach to policy-making and politics is guided by my identity as a reformer. We need elected officials who have strong reform values because real reform delivers better outcomes. When we instill transparency and accountability in our policies, we more effectively serve New Yorkers.

I'd also like to share a link to my roadmap to carbon

neutrality in District 33:

<https://lincolnrestler.medium.com/roadmap-to-carbon-neutrality-in-the-33rd-district-white-paper-57fe255430d6>

**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).