



Tuesday, April 27, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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**

Curtis Michael Harris

**Running for Council District number**

35

**In which primary**

Democratic

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

Democrat

**Age**

62

**Education**

Masters of Public Affairs Bernard Baruch College,  
BS Accounting Medgar Evers College (CUNY)

**Occupation/Employer**

Retired Accountant & Executive Director of 501 C (3)  
Performing Arts Organization

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

Community Board 8 member, Elected Kings County  
Committee 57th AD, Member New Kings & Shirley  
Chisholm & Rosa Parks Democratic Clubs

**Campaign Contact Information****Website**

[www.curtisharris2021.com](http://www.curtisharris2021.com)

**Twitter**

@CHarris2021

**Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/CurtisHarris2021>

**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 Executive Director of Green Earth Poets Cafe I am no stranger to leadership. Also as a financial professional supervising Accountant I understand the importance of delegation and follow up. There must be clearly defined division of labor and responsibility. Communication with staff at periodic meeting will be a requirement in my office. I must know what issues constituents are dealing with and how we are meeting their needs and if its being done in a timely and compassionate manner.

**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 am a candidate however I have served constituents by volunteering weekly at a food pantry, volunteering the clean various district parks, as well as produce weekly poetry writing workshops with seniors in the district. Once per week I would visit the seniors bringing them a continental breakfast that gave me the opportunity to visit and briefly speak to them to monitor their health. The poetry writing workshop was conducted via conference call.

**3. How long have you lived in the district in**

**which you are running for office?**

over 15 years

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

Covid-19 relief and support services, food, healthcare, 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 BOE must be a transparent organization that serves the democratic needs of people. I will use any influence to make sure people's voices are heard.

**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 do consider myself a supporter of rank choice voting. It was democratically voted on by a majority of voters. I am in the top three of eleven candidates and believe RCV will be to my advantage. I have given zoom conferences and teachings about RCV and the new system of voting. It will avoid costly runoff elections. I have published information on social media including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook concerning rank choice voting.

**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?**

If elected my approach in proposing or voting to appoint commission members would be what the City Charter recommends. I think it is fair and all encompassing. If it changes there should be a process of deliberation that is open to the public and transparent.

**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

## 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?**

I think the people should have the final say on discipline in the police department. Police must be held accountable for their acts.

**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.**

I think we must give police something to lose. To change negative behavior they must be willing to lose something of value, e.g., pension, free college education for their children, etc.

## **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?**

Using discretionary spending to punish a Councilmember is reprehensible and should be illegal. Every Councilmember is representing their constituents to the best of their ability. Their constituents include not for profit organizations. There should be a uniform formula which distributes discretionary spending to Council members.

**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?**

I would hold committee meetings outdoors when possible. Increase computer technology and access at libraries, schools, and coffee shops.

## 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?**

Like FDR did during the great depression, we must spend directly with small business, grant commercial rent reductions, encourage building our economy back better. We must be bold and

intentional about this endeavor. We had no choice getting into the pandemic, yet we must all participate in the recovery.

**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 have voted since age 18, been a community board member and participated in demonstrations when the need was there.

**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-19 relief

Second: Real Affordable Housing

Third: Affordable healthcare

## 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 am a father of six children, executive director of a poetry cafe and poetry theater. I retired accountant (4/30/20) after 40 years. Community board 8 member 7 years.

**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).