



Thursday, April 29, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Briget Anne Rein

Running for Council District number

39

In which primary

Democratic

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

Democrat

Age

53

Education

Hunter College, undergraduate degree; College of Staten Island, graduate degree

Occupation/Employer

Assistant to the Staff Director, United Federation of Teachers

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Teacher, PS 104; Teacher, PS 109; Lobbyist, United Federation of Teachers; Manhattan Political Action Coordinator; Deputy Political Director, United Federation of Teachers

Community Board 6 member, Voice of Gowanus; Friends of Carroll Park

Campaign Contact Information**Website**

<https://www.brigetrein.com/>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/briget4brooklyn>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/briget4brooklyn/>

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce R.", is written on a white background.

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 have a social worker on staff to aid with navigating the city bureaucracy in getting access to social services. And, once it is safe to do so, I will regularly set up a simple table on street corners and parks with folding chairs and allow constituents to sit down without an appointment to tell me what is on their minds, what issues are impacting them, and what they would like me to do.

To that point, I have already been trying to do constituent services in my capacity as a private citizen (and a member of Community Board 6). I have written letters on behalf of the NY Harbor School for building a pool so students can be certified divers; I wrote to HPD on behalf of the residents of 70 Prospect Park West who are being evicted from their homes for no reason; and I wrote to NYCHA about allowing the Wyckoff Gardens Resident Association to use an adjacent community room for continuing education courses and programming for young residents.

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 would create a dedicated relief fund for the families of victims with young families and those who died in nursing homes to help with paying bills. Additionally, I will work with and match public (state and city) hospitals and schools to fund ongoing research into the long-term impacts of COVID-19 (both medical and psychological); I held a press conference about this topic with Sen. Brad Hoylman and wrote a joint op-ed in Gotham Gazette about this very topic.

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

20 years

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

Create a COVID registry and compensation fund that will help victims and their families and provide funding for treating long-term effects of COVID for

those who were previously sick.

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 would describe it as the Council wanting to reform the operations and provide financial incentives for them to improve operations (e.g. opening more early voting sites) but not being able to due to limitations in state law and the state constitution.

I would sign onto a home rule message and a resolution calling on the State Legislature to pass measures to professionalize the NYC BOE. Last year, countless friends and neighbors told me about absentee ballots not arriving in time, receiving the wrong ballot, ballots not being counted, and, of course, long lines. If the City had more control over how the BOE operates, we could fix these issues ourselves by having employees accountable to the City government - not party bosses.

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 have been working to educate voters on it by telling people in my district who tell me they have already committed to another candidate that they can rank me as their second choice. Luckily, many people are very receptive to this news.

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 look for appointees who have experience with understanding the different socioeconomic landscapes of the various communities in New York City so that communities are not broken up and/or given too much influence over a single

district. The people best suited for that are probably people with backgrounds in sociology and political science.

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

It will force candidates to speak to the entire electorate - not just the "prime" voters who are usually the most polarized party members

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

All commissioners should be subjected to the advice and consent of the City Council so we know that the people running our agencies are qualified for those positions.

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?

Civilian Complaint Review Board because it is an independent body made up of appointees from the City Council, Mayor, and Police Commissioner and are not subjected to political or staff pressures that the others are. When it comes to creating penalties commensurate with wrongdoing, the CCRB should create something akin to sentencing guidelines

that can give a framework for the punishment for each act. Of course, the CCRB should not be forced to stick to the punishment guidelines for each infraction because of likely extenuating circumstances for each officer (e.g. proof of real remorse, history of violating policy).

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

Each group reports to different bodies, each with their own constituencies to which they have to report

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

By having a broader picture of each officer's conduct, the CCRB, after it is empowered to make disciplinary decisions, a better punishment (if warranted) can be decided upon

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 am happy that the City Council has passed eight different police reform pieces of legislation that will end qualified immunity, have DOT investigate crashes, have the CCRB investigate histories of racial profiling, and end the NYPD issuing press passes. When I am in the Council, I look forward to working to expand on these measures however I can.

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

If the overwhelming majority of the body wants a piece of legislation brought to a vote, it should happen. Plain and simple.

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

No

Comments

By having committees that focus on more narrow issues, members can be better educated on the minutiae of certain issues

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

I support more transparency in our City government

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 would try to change the rules so that there is an equal allocation of funds for each member and if members find projects they wish to help fund over their allotment, I would like to have an independent committee that will vote the funding up or down.

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 work to allow people to not have to appear in person to testify and allow for Zooming-in or calling in, allow for written testimonies, allow for pre-recorded video testimonies, and for hearings to happen outside regular business hours so people who are working can testify.

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?

I plan to provide rent and food security compensation for those who face financial hardships, fund and create more community health clinics, create tax incentives for businesses to reopen (especially by passing commercial rent control) and hire local, and provide grants to help cultural institutions to reopen sooner.

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 was the UFT's observer to the most recent Charter Revision Commission and helped shape policy statements that were given as testimony to the Commission by UFT President Michael Mulgrew.

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: Build more high schools in my district by working with the School Construction Authority and DOE to find adequate locations and then provide the necessary funds for the construction

Second: If the Gowanus rezoning has not been completed by the time I take office, hold hearings with the developers, the EPA, DEC, and the Mayor's Office to ensure no one will be sickened by the pollutants in the Gowanus Canal and that we have the infrastructure in place to handle the influx of people

Third: Build a dog park in the district by carving out a small section of Carroll Park for dogs to run around and play

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 a teacher and then, for 17 years, I worked within City Hall as a lobbyist for the United Federation of Teachers. I was in the room for countless budget and contract negotiations. If you want to have someone in the City Council that can help reform it, I should be elected. I know the duties and day-to-day operations of the position and know where and how things can be reformed in city government. People always talk about electing political outsiders because they are immune from corruption. But, historically, it has always been the insiders who shook up the system - from Theodore Roosevelt to Lyndon Baines Johnson to, now, Joe Biden.

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.