



Wednesday, April 28, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Gale A Brewer

Running for Council District number

6

In which primary

Democratic

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

Democrat

Age

69

Education

Bennington College/Columbia Univ BA: Kennedy Sch/Harvard U, MPA

Occupation/Employer

Manhattan Borough President/ City of NY

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

City Council Member (2002-2013); Board Member, Eleanor's Legacy; Staff, Telesis Corp (affordable housing); Director, NYC Non-Projects Project, CUNY Grad School; Deputy Public Advocate; Director, Mayor's Federal Office in NYC; Ex Dir., Commission of the Status of Women; COS, Council Member Ruth Messinger; Staff, Office of the Lt. Governor; Adjunct Professor, CUNY colleges and Barnard College; Chair, National Women's Political Caucus/NYS; Delegate to 2020 and 2016 Democratic Conventions; Delegate to NYS Electoral College Dec 2020; member of non-profit Boards; Committee Member, National League of Cities.

Campaign Contact Information**Website**

www.galebrewer.nyc

Twitter

@galebrewerNYC

Facebook

galebrewerNYC

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 Manhattan Borough President, I moved the Northern Manhattan Office from the Harlem State Office Building to an accessible storefront on 125 Street. Hundreds of people showed up at the opening 7 years ago and it has been a hub for constituent services, meetings such as for the African Immigration Task Force, and a venue for holiday parties for the 125th Street BID and other groups. As a Council Member, I found and operated a storefront office on a main avenue, and in Manhattan many elected officials serve constituents in hi-rise office buildings or on side streets because the cost of rent is so high. Constituent offices need to be open in the evenings and on weekends, and every complain must be

answered. I am known to have a high level of constituent service.

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

As Borough President, from March 2020-Sept 30, 2020, we worked with Fresh Direct 5 days a week to feed senior citizens living in NYCHA developments. We accompanied the truck every day of the pandemic from the Dyckman Houses in Inwood to Smith Houses on the Lower East Side. We also gave out PPE to NYCHA residents, small businesses, nursing homes, food pantries, and thousands of others by walking up and down the commercial strips. We found funding for local restaurants to cook meals for hospital workers, a win win for everyone. When the food program for those shut-in and those with no job and no money was not streamlined, we advocated for a program with culturally appropriate food, food at school hubs available to all, and more funding for food pantries. We organized testing sites in faith-based sites, community rooms, and on street corners with vans or tables. We trained staff to be testers. Recently we advocated for pop up and permanent sites for vaccines in communities hardest hurt by Covid; and we worked hard to get a vaccination program for the homebound. Every Tuesday at 3 pm, we bring together all Community Boards, school boards, business groups, health organizations, nonprofits, tech leaders, and government agencies on a zoom to share how we can get more Manhattanites vaccinated. We also meet to discuss with a variety of speakers how to assist the recovery of our borough. Our daily newsletter which has been published every day since March 2020 has been a lifeline for many constituents, and has brought praise to the staff members who write it. (I only edit it). I think these coordinating efforts - and others - have helped to bring Manhattan's positivity rate down. have

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

50 years

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

There are 25 government or semi-government agencies that operate in the streets, sidewalks, or

plazas, and there is very little coordination. I support legislation that would create a Public Realm Czar; with restaurants opening in the parking areas, new bike lanes, bus lanes, open streets, open space and vehicles of all kinds driving, delivering and parking, coordination is needed.

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 was chair of the Governmental Operations Committee, which has oversight over BOE, and I was unable to make many substantive changes to BOE. What should happen includes the following: 1. The Members of the Board of the Board of Elections must meet a set of defined qualifying criteria that reflect a professional knowledge and long commitment to the reform and improvement of government operations. Qualifications could include a knowledge of the latest technology, modern management procedures, and a legal background. A model is the professional appointments to the Landmarks Preservation Commission where members must be architects, preservationists, urban planners etc. 2. Some of the staff members of the BOE are well qualified but others are appointed by District Leaders and lack the requisite qualifications. A strong independent Board could mandate better hires and a reorganization of the agency. 3. I know that some people want the BOE to be a mayoral agency but it is a state agency now and untangling it might be difficult. 4. At present, the BOE faces serious operational challenges that impair the opportunity to vote and create problems for other agencies such as DOE. For example, BOE must be able to identify sites for early voting as well as Primary and Election Day voting, and these sites now require multiple days to be open. And for this reason it is not practical for the sites to be located in schools where students need their gym and cafeteria. NYC EDC and other agencies must mandate that new buildings and developments with tax breaks include space for voting. Currently, finding such space in Manhattan is difficult; even senior centers are not eligible because their ADA ramps are not up to the BOE standards! We need to

allocate funding to upgrade many ADA ramps so they are up to current ADA standards so that the venue can be used by the BOE. In its Land Use oversight authority, the Council, working with the Dept of City Planning, could require space for polling places, and could allocate funding to upgrade the ramps.

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 was the prime sponsor of the original RCV bill. I hand out leaflets about RCV, participate in press conferences, media outlets, and forums on the topic, organize discussions at community boards on zoom about RCV, and defend it in debates. It is noteworthy that groups that endorse candidates are using the system to rank and promote their candidates! A potential benefit of RCV is that in city-wide races, which cost \$15 million, can be avoided; an outcome that is predictable this year.

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 have been through a census and redistricting process before. The Commission members must be chosen in a transparent process and be representative of people in the 5 boroughs. What is difficult is figuring out the boundaries. Staff will produce the data, but how to make a district the right sized population without a cookie cutter approach is the challenge. The Commission has to be aware that it is a bad idea to divide a NYCHA development in half, with different representatives, for instance; and it is important to look at the ethnic composition of a neighborhood so as to be thoughtful about how they should be represented. The goals should include a strict avoidance of traditional gerrymandering, and to create rationale City Council districts whose boundaries closely reflect the communities to be represented.

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 believe it is beneficial that the current system requires candidates to self identify politically. At present, our political parties are deeply polarized around basic constitutional issues, such as the right to vote. An Open Primary would enable candidates to mask their political beliefs. A second issue is that a high percentage of voters remain uninformed about the candidates, inviting efforts to confuse and mislead them.

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

During the 2019 Charter Revision, which I initiated in a Council bill, I testified for the appointment of the Police Commissioner subject to the advice and consent of the City Council. However, the Charter Commission members declined to support it. The continuing struggle over the role of the NYPD and reform of the Department strongly suggest that my proposal was far-sighted; I would continue to advocate for Council oversight.

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 final disciplinary authority in its cases. In Maryland, every county in the state must create administrative charging committees made up of civilians whose disciplinary recommendations for police officers cannot be downgraded by police chiefs. The CCRB's adjudicated cases are now following the disciplinary matrix agreed upon by the Mayor and the CCRB; and officers can have their cases reconsidered or ask for an Article 78 if they are not happy with the outcome. The matrix lays out the penalties.

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

I believe that the IG could be incorporated into the investigative arm of the CCRB; and the Mayor's Commission could be incorporated into the policy arm of the CCRB.

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

All relevant information must be given to the CCRB. Because these kinds of adjudications will be contested, rules of evidence must respect the rights of all parties. If the rulings of the CCRB are to be final, we must ensure that its authority to decide is made statutory.

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.

As Manhattan Borough President, in 2014, my office published a comprehensive report on the state of police community relations historically and in the aftermath of the killing of Mr. Garner. We held many police - community roundtables including youth, communities of color, rank and file officers and then Chief of Department Jimmy O'Neill. More recently, my office published a Police Reform Toolkit, a compilation of all past efforts at police reform.

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?

No

Comments

This is a complicated issue. I know it first-hand. There should be a mechanism for bills to be heard when there is great support from members, but the Speaker must set the agenda. Some bills acquire sponsors because they embody good ideas. But sometimes they raise legal issues and it is the role of the institution, led by the Speaker, to address those legal or other issues before the item goes to the floor.

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

No

Comments

NYC operates at a budgetary scale larger all states except comparable to California. It is true that some committee members fail to attend an entire meeting. There are several possible solutions. Members should be expected to participate more fully and diligently in the committee process. Committee size and responsibility could be structured differently. The way that the work of the committee conveyed to the public through all electronic media should be re-thought and enlivened. The complexity of the issues that are brought to the Council for study and resolution make the hearing process challenging for members, stakeholders, and the public. A large number of committees are needed to deal with these 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

As Chair of the Government Operations Committee, I worked to reform the Lobbying Commission and reporting any lobbying should be included, especially as it pertains to the choice of speaker.

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 Council Speaker must have constant dialogue with members, and not just those who support him/her. Members need assistance with their constituent services process, and making that a highly responsive system with the best technology would be one way to communicate support for individuals and for the institution. The old mechanism for keeping control by stripping members of chairmanships of committees and cutting budgets as "punishment" is not appropriate now. However, the Speaker needs to have tools available not to punish but to maintain unity and

build coalitions and promote important legislation. A primary goal is to keep 51 members coordinated as a cohesive body as a counter to the Mayor and the Administration.

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?

In fact, the pandemic has not simply isolated legislators and the public but has often increased participation because more people can be home and meet remotely, advocate, and educate themselves and their communities about the legislative process. However, the impact of the digital divide on underserved communities remains to be addressed. In the future, we need to amend the open meetings law to permit hybrid meetings that allow in person and remote participation.

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?

The path should begin with a focus on a return to work, including supporting initiatives to increase child care, to fully fund home health aides to care for aging and ill, and to provide a wide range of after-school programs. The City must work closely with the MTA to fully restore mass transit, provide adequate security throughout the system, and maintain a high level of cleanliness and reliability. Other components of a recovery include a continued program of mass vaccination and other public health measures to control the virus, and address the growing mental health crisis. The path to a recovery runs through the schools, re-populating of vacant storefronts, and a housing solutions that address affordability, evictions, and the need for supportive housing. Up near the top of

any recovery plan is the revitalization of the arts which are vital to both New York's fiscal health and its soul. The arts bring tourists.

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 Chair of Government Operations, I had oversight over the Board of Elections and the Lobbying Commission. Regarding the BOE, we mandated that the voting machines include a paper, traceable ballot and not the ATM machine that could not trace a ballot. Regarding the Lobbying Commission, we added professionals such as engineers and architects to those who have to register as lobbyists as they are often involved in land use lobbying. They lobbied not to be included! As Chair of the Technology Committee, I passed, in 2012, the Open Data Law which mandated that all public data be made available on a single web portal by 2018. That date seemed far away! At the time it was the most far reaching municipal data law in the US. Today, as Borough President, we have a nonprofit in our office that focuses on this data, and teaches community board members and other local, civic organizations how to use the data so as to plan for the neighborhood and the services that are needed. As Borough President, I initiated a very transparent process for selecting community board members; we do massive outreach, including outreach forums at labor unions, the American Institute of Architects, and the Hospitality Alliance; and once appointed we schedule training seminars for CB members and the 1000 people whom we appoint (SWAB, CEC, Cultural, etc.) on land use, budgets, open data, resolution writing, ethics, parliamentary procedure, oral history (with the Borough Historian) and other topics. We were the first office of the borough presidents to publish the demographics of the community and how that compared to the demographics of the community board membership.

As the sponsor of the 2019 Charter Revision Commission (the only one that included Mayoral and non-Mayoral appointments) I testified in support of expanding the powers of the CCRB and to institute Ranked Choice Voting. Those initiatives passed in the November election. I also testified in

support of pre-planning before ULURPs were started, for advice and consent by the Council of any Police Commissioner, and for units of appropriation in the budget process but they were not supported by a majority of the Charter Commission members. As Borough President, I have written to the State of NY to update the open meetings law to reflect what will be the "new Norm" at community board and other official meetings; in the future, members will be meeting in person but the public might want to testify remotely and even members might want to on occasion. When the Executive Order is no longer in effect, resolutions will have to be passed when everyone is in the room and no one can vote from home. The open meetings law needs to be discussed and then voted on with updates to reflect the reality of a hybrid meeting system. Also while Borough President, I convened a series of face-to-face roundtable encounters between community members and police officers to find common ground on which to build respect and trust.

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: Increase public safety

Second: Fund and develop affordable housing

Third: Create incentives and supports to enable local businesses to re-open vacant storefronts, rent vacant storefronts, and hire and re-hire employees. This effort should be coupled with advocacy for good jobs.

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?

After 40 years in public service I remain devoted to the well-being, prosperity, and good governance of the city and its people. I am running for City Council to lend my vast expertise, hands-on experience, and political wisdom to that task.

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.