



Saturday, April 24, 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.

**

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Daniel Marks Cohen

Running for Council District number

7

In which primary

Democratic

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

Democrat

Age

50

Education

MBA, NYU Stern School of Business; BA, UMass/Amherst

Occupation/Employer

Housing Partnership

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Democratic State Committeeman, 69th AD, 2010 - present; Three Parks Democrats, board member 1992-present; Community Board 7, 1997-2003; Community Board 9, 2014-present; Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground, founder and president, 2015-present; Valley Restoration LDC, president, 2015-present; Friends of Morningside Park, 2017-present; Mt Sinai Hospital Community Advisory Board, 2018-present; Columbus Amsterdam BID, 2018-present

Campaign Contact Information**Website**

<https://www.cohen2021.com/>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/DanCohenNYC>

Facebook

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

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.

Affordable housing is the number one issue for the district, providing assistance to tenants and confronting landlords who violate the law has driven me to consider hiring a housing issues expert on staff, and to either strengthen or re-establish relationships with nonprofits in the tenant law field or with law firms that will provide pro bono counsel. Considering that a significant fraction of the district is primarily Spanish language dominant I would require the majority of my staff to be English/Spanish bilingual. I have also pledged to make my office accessible to any resident with any disability, so having either trained staff or access to staff and resources to provide someone with the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choosing will also be important. And a portion of the district is undocumented, so having an expert on immigration issues will be critical to serve the

needs of district 7. Lastly, seniors are a large portion of the district, and having someone knowledgeable to connect constituents with services or advice will also be necessary. I also liked the idea of a moveable council office, and intend to set up temporary spaces in public events (street fairs and other outdoor activities such as what the CDC response to the pandemic permits) to bring my office staff closer to people and their needs rather than always requiring them to come to the district office. While a constituent is in the office, I would want to seize the opportunity to potentially address other matters – like voter registration, food scarcity or housing insecurity, education for themselves or a family member, retraining or employment, domestic violence, and much more – if they came to the office with one issue, while they are there perhaps there are other matters than can also be addressed too. Another thing is responding to all correspondence in 24 hours, nothing is more frustrating as a constituent to reach out to an elected official and not hear back from them for weeks, if not at all. Maintaining a constant flow of information to and from my office will be a challenge – it is difficult right now even as a civilian, but it is something I intend to master if I am elected to serve in the council. If there is an award for outstanding constituent service, it would be my goal to win that award every year.

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

Access to medical care is critical, so I would prioritize funding for our public hospitals. I would seek to establish more medical clinics in low-income communities that do not have convenient access to medical care, and I would fully fund the NYC Care program, now costing about \$100 million a year, to provide inform the thousands of New Yorkers without health insurance to learn about Metro Health Plus, the City's health insurance program. While NYC Care itself is not health insurance, it has had a positive impact and I would want to continue it. I would press the Governor to provide universal health care through the New York Health Act, and I would continue to support a national healthcare program. Housing insecurity is another big issue, as a number of residents have been unable to pay their rent due to being laid off from jobs that were closed during the shutdown

response to the pandemic. Helping those residents recover, and finding a solution to the missing rent while not transforming the housing crisis into an eviction crisis will be a high priority. There is money from the federal government and the state available, but we will also need to work out some longer-term solutions so that people are not punished, and impoverished, for following the government's instructions to stay home. No one should become homeless because of COVID, and it will be my job, along with allies in the new city council, to push back against real estate forces that would evict thousands of residents. Beyond health care and housing, there is going to be a need to help the small businesses of the city get back on their feet, which is why I have called for a capital fund to help small companies start and restart as part of COVID-19 recovery, with targeted investment in minority & women-owned businesses. I believe there is pent-up demand for businesses to reopen, but they will need start-up capital, and the city should step in where banks or investors fear to tread. We should make direct capital into businesses, not loans, but investments to help small businesses get started as we move out of the pandemic's restrictions.

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

50 years. I believe in public service and want to be a champion for the district I have always called home. I have deep roots in my community as a lifelong resident: I grew up here in rent-regulated housing, attended local public schools, and went to neighborhood parks and libraries as a child. The challenge is to enable all New Yorkers access to the same quality schools, parks, libraries and housing. I am part of progressive change in my work, my political action, and my civic participation. Now I want to be part of that change in the City Council.

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

As affordable housing is the single biggest issue in District 7, and I have called for 1,000 new units on sites owned or controlled by NYC, so I would start with legislation to advance two of those sites: developing permanently affordable senior housing over the Con Edison substation site at 110th and Amsterdam Avenue, and redeveloping the

MTA/NYCT Bus Garage-Antique Bus Storage Depot at 128th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Con Ed owns their 110th Street building, but the land is owned by the City, along with the 250,000 sf of undeveloped air rights. And the MTA-owned bus depot sits on almost a full city block that is zoned for almost 360,000 sf of undeveloped air rights, and I would want to move those two projects along immediately.

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?

Dysfunctional and parasitic. The system is archaic, many of the employees are patronage hires, errors are frequent and the pace of change is glacially slow. Part of the problem is that in this essentially one-party town, the Democratic party – particularly the county machines – benefit from the control of elections and are reluctant to change them. I would seek to make the NYC BOE an independent agency, similar to the NYCCFB, and sever the formal relationship between it and the dominant political parties, which serve to slow things down rather than provide balance to the board. We need better oversight and accountability, and if elected I would call for hearings to start that process and make it clear that I would be pushing for changes. Some of this will require changes to state law, but the Council can put pressure on the state, with a newly empowered veto-proof majority in the legislature and a weakened Governor, now may be the moment to push through reform.

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 strong supporter of RCV. It has created a surprisingly pleasant and cooperative campaign among (most of) my fellow candidates, which is an enormous change from previous elections and in turn making the discussions more policy focused and less about candidate disparagement. It has encouraged all of us running in the 7th district to expand beyond our bases and reach more voters across the district. And it has prompted talks with

several of my candidate colleagues about doing a joint event next month to help voters understand how RCV works.

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?

The post-2010 census created the current map for the district, making it much more compact and rational, a significant improvement over its earlier iteration which sprawled across upper Manhattan and the Bronx. I would seek out thoughtful and data-driven appointees, to try to shape the next map to be as fair, representative and inclusive as possible. In particular I would want to solicit appointees from underrepresented communities and hear voices not previously participants in the process. I would absolutely seek gender representation – which includes people who are nonbinary as well. I would seek out people who would draw districts without fear or favor, and balanced populations within a tighter range than the 10% deviation allowed by law. I have a history of supporting nonpartisan and representative district maps, including being the lead plaintiff suing the LATFOR and then Governor Cuomo in 2012 (Cohen v. Cuomo) to prevent the GOP's state senate seat expansion in a blatant attempt to retain power in the NY State Senate that year.

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

Yes, I believe it is time for us to move to an Open Primary. The turnout for the last competitive Democratic Primary in 2013 was 650,000 people, and in a one-party town like NYC, winning the Primary is tantamount to winning the election. That is less than 8% turnout in a city of 8.5 million.

Moving to an open primary would increase voter participation and motivate more New Yorkers to be engaged with the process, as the majority of registered residents either cannot vote or do not vote until the November general election, when the choice for Mayor, as well as most municipal positions, have largely been decided by the previous June Primary.

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?

Definitely not the Police Commissioner. I believe the CCRB should be empowered to sanction officers who break the law. As noted by CU and many others, CCRB recommendations are routinely ignored by the Commissioner. The buck has to stop with someone with accountability and integrity, the CCRB is a better option.

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.

NYC has the largest police force in the nation, over 36,000 uniformed officers. Back in the 90's we had a force about a third smaller, at 25,000 officers, and about 500,000 major felonies each year in that decade. Today we have under 100,000 felonies annually but the overall number of cops has increased. If we were able to manage with fewer officers and more crime 30 years ago, we can manage with fewer officers and less crime today. Even cutting our forces back to 90's levels we would still have the largest force in the country, twice the size of Chicago's, a distant second with a headcount of 12,000. We would save over a billion dollars in annual expenses, money we could re-allocate to affordable housing, public education and libraries and many other areas that would benefit from additional funding. But I want to be clear that reallocating the money from the police to other policy areas is only a small part of the struggle. There is a culture in the police that focuses too much on law enforcement and not enough on public safety. It involves retraining – and not just the cops, but the whole criminal justice system. We have a lot of work to do. As our police force has expanded in size, it has also taken on far more non-law enforcement responsibilities. A new "mental health corps" could potentially be far more effective (and certainly less lethal) in addressing someone having a personal mental health crisis, and additional investment in drug treatment and homeless outreach would reduce the need for the police for matters that should really involve social workers and other professionals rather than law enforcement.

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?

Yes

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?

I would remove the power of discretionary spending from the control of the speaker so that members are able to vote their conscience and their values without fear of punishing vulnerable CBOs, causes,

and communities within their district. The Speaker is still endowed with significant power, both hard and soft, this change will make the body more democratic while also giving the Speaker the ability to lead.

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?

Part of this is about access to technology through internet service, too many in this city cannot afford broadband, which is still viewed as a luxury product but should be considered essential, like water or energy. The city already has enough fiber in the streets, it should bulk purchase broadband access from ISPs and resell it at a discount (or for free if necessary) to enable more New Yorkers to access the internet. While the pandemic has wreaked havoc on the city, it has also exposed many of us to new tech and new ways of operating. Remote hearings and meetings has been helpful to promote attendance by working people, people with family obligations and people with health concerns that would have otherwise not been able to participate. We should incorporate remote tech into our plans when the social distancing rules are lifted and we can meet in person, to allow continued access by people unable to attend a meeting or hearing in person.

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?

There are several plans for recovery but the most far-reaching and has the most equitable structural change is the NY Workforce Recovery Strategy Group, which is led by the NYC Employment & Training Coalition, a group of private sector and human services organization leaders. They produced a strategic plan for New York City's

economic recovery called “Recovery For All: A Vision for New York City’s Equitable Economic Recovery” and I have relied in large part on this report as a basis for my own plan, and will work with E&TC to make it become a reality in the City Council. Much of the report focused on a strategy focused on opportunity, equity, education and training for our economy to create healthier communities, more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient business climate. Getting “back to normal” is not good enough: “Normal” for millions of New Yorkers meant multiple low-wage jobs with little mobility, no access to healthcare or other benefits, little economic security and unsafe working conditions, and unpredictable schedules. A stronger and inclusive economy that ensures job quality, career mobility, living wage pay and benefits, stable schedules, and safe working conditions is essential. We must work in collaboration with CBOs to build better policy, programs and investments. And guard against austerity budgeting now is the time to double down: invest in a sustainable economy and rebuild NYC’s economy with a focus on its workforce and local small businesses is an investment in our future economy and tax base, not an act of charity. An equitable recovery must prioritize resources toward community investments through new revenue and cuts in other portions of the City budget. We should fund employment programs including transitional employment, wage subsidy, work-based learning programs and apprenticeships, with targeted local hiring in hardest hit communities. Develop, expand and fund a city-wide 21st century career development system focused on training, upskilling, employment and education supports for a post-COVID economy. Integrate workforce development into all economic development efforts that arise to jumpstart the economy and build in sustainable funding sources. Invest in accelerated public projects to repair and rebuild public infrastructure & longer-term infrastructure projects that create equitable opportunity. Focus public employment on equity: people of color, low-income, and public housing communities that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and the job losses as a result of the virus should be directly targeted to take part in public works projects.

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.

Term limits, which have enabled turnover in the political system and prevented lifetime appointments to public municipal office. And the city's unparalleled matching funds program, broadening and deepening the pool of candidates that can participate in the political process.

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: Affordable housing, addressed above

Second: Public school equity, now with the AQE money in the state budget, we can work on rebalancing the inequities in our schools, pushing for smaller class sizes, secondary language instruction, and new technology

Third: Responding to climate change - This is the biggest threat we face as a city, a country, and a planet. It touches on all aspects of our lives - housing, schools, transportation, everything. I am committed to making NYC the leader in responding to global warming. And we must have climate justice, so that a Green New Deal helps all of us, not just the privileged.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Please feel free to attach any additional information such as resume, campaign brochures, or issues statements.



Dan Cohen for City Council 2021 bio.pdf

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

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.