



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](#).

**

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Marti Allen-Cummings

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

Education

Occupation/Employer

Self

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Campaign Contact Information

Website

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

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/MartiGCummings>

Facebook

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

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.

Being of service to the community is why I got in this race. I have a fantastic and diverse team of community leaders behind me who I would plan to hire and/or call upon to help connect with constituents. I am a very hands on candidate and plan to be in office as well. For example, our campaign has hosted dozens of community clean ups so I can get to know people in the neighborhood in way that improves quality of life and builds trust with those who have lost faith in government. I plan to continue spending every Saturday morning with a trash bag in hand working side by side with my neighbors while I am in office.

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 launched my campaign in September of 2019 and had plans for a block-by-block listening tour of the district throughout 2020. Obviously, COVID threw a wrench in that plan but it became more important than ever to listen to the needs of our community. We immediately got to work handing out PPE in the district and reusable bags with information about best practices and resources regarding COVID. At the same time, we activated our list of 300+ volunteers to help deliver groceries to neighbors who could not go out due to risk factors. As the pandemic progressed, we heard the increased needs of those experiencing food insecurity. In

response, we organized a food drive. We distributed canned food and non-perishables directly to community members and also coordinated the donation of food from local restaurants to shelters and food pantries.

Throughout the year, I also deepened my support of mutual aid groups like Upper Manhattan Mutual Aid organization and organizations like The RDJ Refugee Shelter. The needs of our community are great but there is enough food and housing for everyone if we look out for the most vulnerable and that includes those experiencing homelessness. I am a co-Founder of the Uptown Wagon and have spent every Wednesday night doing outreach to those overlooked and forgotten on the streets of our district. We have grown quickly and now serve more and more people every week with food, clothing and other resources.

Being of service is the animating principle of this campaign. I have seen firsthand the generosity and resilience of our neighbors. That's why we launched our Month of Service program and recruited dozens of new volunteers specifically to help their neighbors. To date we have completed projects like a warm apparel drive, writing Holiday cards to Seniors who can't visit their families, coordinating volunteer tutors for students struggling with virtual school and continued check-in calls to residents throughout the district. Now is the time for us to inspire others to action and to do what we can for those who are struggling. We will continue to make service a pillar of our campaign and my office if elected.

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

Majority of last 10 years

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

A bill on bathroom access in NYC

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 think the BOE is an insular entity that is not welcoming to political newcomers. We have so many hurdles in the system which is designed to benefit incumbents and machine candidates who have access. When I went to file my petitions, I spoke with two candidates (one for Mayor and one for City Council) who were turned away for minor clerical infractions without any explanation. We must work to make our system more open and inclusive so our government can reflect the true diversity of our communities.

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 am a HUGE supporter of RCV. I have worked very hard to cultivate a friendly atmosphere in our race and we regularly receive comments from moderators about how supportive we are with each other. This is how politics should be. We are all here to do the work for the people and will continue to do that regardless of the outcome of the election. I have hosted two virtual events about RCV for voters to learn about their options and have two more planned. We are also launching a digital ad just focused on how to vote in June and a mailer with RCV details.

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 think New York has made some progress but has a long way to go. I would look to appoint advocates who have a proven history of fighting against gerrymandering and racial discrimination in redistricting. Anyone who denies New York still has a problem in this area is likely not fit to serve on the commission. Currently Districts 7, 9, and 8 cut Harlem into pieces - diluting the power of the vote in the neighborhood. Notably - West Village, Chelsea, FiDi, Gramercy and others are all kept whole. I would like the proposed maps to specifically address this type of class and racial discrimination.

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

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

The Police Commissioner should also be a civilian from outside the NYPD

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 believe that CCRB rulings should be binding. Far too often, confirmed claims of misconduct are ignored or result in nothing but a slap on the wrist. We need a much more specific and comprehensive disciplinary matrix for all NYPD officers. There should be similar discipline for similar offenses. I will use the bully pulpit of City Council to call out the atrocious practices of the NYPD to silence protestors and harming BIPOC communities.

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.

We must reduce the budget of the NYPD and re-focus their resources on the rise in shootings in 2020 (70% of which are unsolved). This means investing in community resources like mental health, addiction services, housing and violence

interrupters. We can do this by expanding the budget and scope of our EMS department and empowering them to respond to more emergency situations without NYPD. Other changes I would like to see happen: precinct commander approval by Community Board, decriminalize poverty, remove NYPD from schools, fund job placement services for formerly incarcerated.

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?

Comments

I do not have a defined position on this yet

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 think more of the discretionary funding should be allocated through a formula model based on factors like population, unemployment rate, school funds, and AMI. By investing in those who need it most, we can have the biggest impact.

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?

We have seen the pandemic radically change the way we conduct business and if done correctly, that presents an opportunity. We can open the doors of City Hall to the people of NYC by making our meetings more accessible and viewer friendly. We should invest in universal broadband and invest in community liaisons to actively invite community leaders and organizations to participate in hearings and meetings that impact them. If we are not putting funding into these efforts, then only people who have resources will be able to access our City Council and make their voice heard. At the same time, we need to return to in-person work as quickly and safely as possible to ensure that New Yorkers know where they can find their representatives.

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?

As a gig worker who has been out of work for most of the last year, I know firsthand how hard it is for working people in NYC right now. The most important part of recovery is investing in people who need it most with direct cash relief, one-shot help with back rent, and support for struggling local businesses. My industry is one of the hardest hit - Arts/Culture/Nightlife - with 66% of jobs gone. We will not be fully recovered until this sector is back

to fully functioning. The theaters, bars and culture bring millions of people to our city and support jobs in hotels, taxi's, restaurants, shops, and beyond. To do this, we need better long term planning for not just vaccination (pay people to receive it!) but also testing/tracing for inevitable future outbreaks and clear guidelines for large gatherings in the fall. Then we need to work to restore New York's image which has been trashed by Fox News and Newsmax to bring back tourism in the city through a PR campaign. By investing in people and planning for the future, we can work toward a strong 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 been an activist for more than a decade but began politically organizing after 2016. Like millions of Americans, I was disgusted with the direction of our country and needed to have a direct hand in righting the course. That's when I founded a new political club and brought hundreds of new people from my community together. I hope to continue that fight for a more accessible and responsive city government as the next City Councilmember for District 7.

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: Make housing more affordable

Second: Integrate and fully fund schools

Third: Public safety through community investment

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 proud to be running as the first openly nonbinary candidate for City Council or (to my knowledge) any elected office in New York state. It has been an uplifting and challenging experience but feel that it has made me even more grateful for all those who have broken barriers to make my run a reality. I hope to work with Citizens Union to make our city government one that works for everyone.

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.