

2023 Voters Directory



Vote on Tuesday, Nov. 7 • Vote Early Oct. 28 - Nov. 5



A NONPARTISAN GUIDE
TO INFORMED VOTING

General Election



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Citizens Union Endorsed Candidates

2023 GENERAL ELECTION

Brooklyn

City Council District 37

Sandy Nurse (D)

City Council District 43

Susan Zhuang (D)

City Council District 47

Justin Brannan (D)

Queens

City Council District 23

Linda Lee (D)

**The following candidates were preferred by
Citizens Union in the Primary and are on the
ballot in the general election:**

City Council District 26 Julie Won

City Council District 29 Lynn Schulman



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CITIZENS UNION MISSION

Citizens Union (CU) is committed to reforming New York City and State government to foster accountability, accessibility, transparency, honesty, and the highest ethical standards. For the past 125 years, we at Citizens Union have devoted ourselves to holding our local governments accountable to do better in all of these areas, and we remain committed to enfranchising all New Yorkers. Some of our current initiatives include restructuring the city’s election calendar to boost turnout, monitoring the new state ethics watchdog, and expanding access to absentee voting. In all of these efforts, we have been — and will remain — nonpartisan.

Stay up to date with the latest happenings of the CU team and our work by liking our [Facebook](#) page and following us on [Twitter](#).

THE VOTERS DIRECTORY

The 2023 General Election ballot includes races for the New York City Council, Bronx and Queens district attorneys, judicial positions, and two ballot questions to amend the state constitution.

To help our supportive Citizens Union members prepare to vote, Citizens Union has been publishing an annual Voters Directory for over a century. The current edition provides a roster of Citizens Union’s endorsed candidates in several key races, and information about the rigorous evaluation process and assessments of candidates.

For more information, visit the NYC Board of Elections website at vote.nyc or call (866) VOTE-NYC.



General Election Overview

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2023 is a unique off-year election. Because City Council districts were redrawn last year following the decennial census, all 51 members of the City Council are completing a shortened, two-year term, and go on to run (if they choose to do so) to represent these newly-drawn districts for another shortened, two-year term. Council Members will be able to run for a full, four-year term in 2025.

Citizens Union worked to ensure the Council redistricting process was fair, open, and independent, and supported hundreds of New Yorkers in getting involved with the elaborate mapmaking project.

Two Council seats are “open” this year. District 43, a newly-created district in southern Brooklyn, will be filled for the first time following this election. In District 9, which covers Harlem, the incumbent Council Member announced she would not seek reelection.

The 2023 November general election ballot also includes races for county district attorneys, civil court judges, and voter referendums. The Mayor, City Comptroller, Public Advocate, the five borough presidents, and the Manhattan and Brooklyn district attorneys are not up for reelection this year.



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Uncontested Incumbents

Of the 51 seats on the New York City Council, 12 incumbents are running uncontested. Two other candidates who won their party primary election but are not incumbents are running uncontested. In District 9, the incumbent is not seeking reelection. In District 42, the incumbent lost the primary. In addition, the Staten Island District Attorney is uncontested.

The following candidates are running uncontested in the general election this year:

Brooklyn

Council District 35
Crystal Hudson (D)

Council District 36
Chi Osse (D)

Council District 41
Darlene Mealy (D)

Council District 42
Chris Banks (D)

Council District 45
Farah Louis (D)

Manhattan

Council District 2
Carlina Rivera (D)

Council District 7
Shaun Abreu (D)

Council District 9
Yusef Salaam (D)

Council District 10
Carmen De La Rosa (D)

Queens

Council District 21
Francisco Moya (D)

Council District 30
Robert Holden (D)

Council District 32
Joann Ariola (R)



Staten Island

Council District 50
David Carr (R)

Council District 51
Joseph Borelli (R)

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OVERVIEW

In a low-profile election year, Citizens Union has evaluated four general election races for New York City Council to determine what candidates strongly support our issues, can advance a reform agenda, and can best fulfill the obligations of the position.

Interview teams made up of Local Candidates Committee members assessed the candidates based on their responses to Citizens Union's questionnaire, independent research, first-hand knowledge of the candidates, and interviews with the candidates. The result of that evaluation is detailed in this Voters Directory, which Citizens Union has been publishing as a guide to its supportive members for over a century. All interviews and meetings were held by video conference.

An "Endorsed" rating reflects a candidate that Citizens Union deems not only qualified for the office, but also a viable candidate, committed to an agenda of positive reform. Please note that candidates not endorsed may nevertheless be highly regarded, which is generally reflected in the commentary.

Citizens Union issues a "Preferred" rating in primary elections, and an "Endorsed" rating for general election contests. A "No Preference" rating may result when there is insufficient information available, it is believed that the candidates are of equal merit, or if no candidate interviewed by Citizens Union is believed to be effective or capable of representing the district. A "Dual Preference" designation may be offered to two qualified candidates, but not a "Dual Endorsement." A "Dual Preference" shall be used only as a last resort, and, in the case of such determination, CU shall explain its reasoning in its Voters Directory.



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OUR CRITERIA

The following guidelines are used by the Local Candidates Committee and Citizens Union Board of Directors in the evaluation of candidates:

- Support for Citizens Union’s reform agenda is the primary criterion used in deciding our support for a candidate.
- Other criteria considered in evaluating candidates and campaigns:
 - » A record of ethical integrity
 - » Commitment and ability to advance CU’s goals, if elected
 - » For incumbents: demonstrated support for CU’s issues while in office
 - » Evidence of ability to wage an effective and competitive campaign
 - » Reliance on small-donor, local financing of the campaign
 - » Candidates’ grasp of issues specific to the race’s jurisdiction, and whether they propose thoughtful solutions to represent constituents’ interests

Evaluation of the candidates and the decision to support a particular candidate shall be made without regard to political party and in a nonpartisan manner.



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All candidates questionnaires can be found
online at citizensunion.org.

Brooklyn

COUNCIL DISTRICT 37

Cypress Hills, Bushwick, City Line, Ocean Hill, Brownsville,
East New York

Sandy Nurse ★ *Endorsed Candidate*

Democratic, Working Families

Age: 39

Occupation: City Council Member (District 37)

Education: Emmanuel College (B.A.), The New School (M.A.)

Sandy Nurse was elected to represent the 37th Council District in 2021 after a career in environmental and social justice nonprofits. She continued to focus on these issues as the Chair of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, leading the Council's ambitious Zero Waste legislation earlier this year. Nurse strongly supports CU's reform agenda and has cosponsored measures to move city elections to even-numbered years, improve the design of ranked choice voting, and change post-employment lobbying restrictions. She prioritizes police accountability and wants to empower the CCRB with the authority to determine disciplinary action. She describes her approach to elected office as "co-governance" - developing and moving legislation with coalitions of grassroots organizations. In her interview and questionnaire, Nurse demonstrated exceptional competence in addressing the issues at hand and was able to skillfully communicate important insights on enhancing the City Council's work. Citizens Union appreciates her commitment to reform and endorses her in this race.



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Isaiah Vega

Republican, Conservative, Medical Freedom

Age: 21

Occupation: Self-employed

Education: SUNY York College (B.A.)

A recent college graduate, Isaiah Vega is an avid community volunteer. Most recently, he got involved in the Medical Freedom Party, a collaboration of candidates who believe individual rights had been violated by COVID vaccine mandates and seek to reinstate and compensate unvaccinated workers who were forced off their jobs during the pandemic. Other priorities for Vega include strengthening education and public safety. He noted his support for most of CU's reform priorities. He believes that a bipartisan committee of Council Members, the Mayor, and an NYPD commanding officer should be in charge of discipline in cases of police accountability. Citizens Union appreciates Vega's dedication to the community and encourages him to remain civically involved.

COUNCIL DISTRICT 43

Bensonhurst, New Utrecht, Dyker Heights, Sunset Park

Susan Zhuang ★ *Endorsed Candidate*

Democratic

Age: 37

Occupation: Chief of Staff, Assembly Member William Colton

Education: Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (B.S.),

SUNY Oswego (M.A.), University of Southern Indiana (M.B.A.)

Susan Zhuang has worked for William Colton, the longtime Assembly Member who represents some of the neighborhoods in this new council district, since 2015 and she is now his chief of staff. She has told CU that her work in the Assembly taught her how to "cut through the red tape" while building a strong constituent services operation. If elected, Zhuang's top priorities would be to improve public safety by increasing the number of Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking officers, expand school programming for special needs and gifted students, and address quality-of-life and affordable housing for seniors. In her candidate questionnaire answers, Zhuang supported most of CU's reform priorities but differed



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on the question of open primaries, saying it could allow improper actors to interfere and weaken general election candidates' appeal. Zhuang supports improving transparency within government and called to establish an independent ethics oversight agency with power to investigate pay-to-play issues and big corporate spending. CU was impressed with Zhuang's emphasis on constituent work, her understanding of needs in the district, and her ability to elucidate the interplay between issues like public safety, education challenges, and language barriers. Citizens Union believes she is well suited to navigate city government to leverage resources for her community. We therefore endorse her in this race.

Ying Tan

Republican

Age: N/A

Occupation: Volunteer, Senior Social Services

Education: N/A

Ying Tan, a mother of two and a community activist, has dedicated the past seven years to volunteering in senior social services. Her entry into local politics was spurred by the City's proposal to reform the admission process of the Gifted and Talented program. Her campaign is centered around enhancing services for senior citizens, improving education, and bolstering public safety measures. Tan aligns with some of Citizens Union's reform priorities, such as advocating for the move of municipal elections to even-numbered years. However, she holds differing views on other matters, opposing initiatives like open primaries and remaining undecided on issues like ranked choice voting. While media reports place her residence in Queens, she told CU she plans to move her permanent address back to southern Brooklyn. Citizens Union values Tan's dedication to her community.

Vito LaBella

Conservative

Candidate did not respond to requests for a questionnaire or interview.



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COUNCIL DISTRICT 47

Bay Ridge, Coney Island and parts of Bath

Justin Brannan ★ *Endorsed Candidate*

Democratic

Age: 44

Occupation: City Council Member (District 43)

Education: Fordham University (B.S.)

Justin Brannan is completing six years on the City Council, the past two as the chair of the Finance Committee. He is now running for reelection to represent a redrawn district that stretches from Bay Ridge to Coney Island. 29 of Brannan’s bills were enacted; he says one of his biggest legislative achievements was expanding the definition of domestic violence to include economic abuse. Other issues he has worked on include healthcare, infrastructure, business improvement districts, and the environment. Brannan supports several CU reform issues such as Ranked Choice Voting, moving municipal elections to even-numbered years, and the campaign finance matching funds program, although he was critical of what he described as problems with the Campaign Finance Board’s performance. As Finance Committee chair and together with Speaker Adrienne Adams, he has made the budget negotiation process more transparent and open to council members. A notable difference with CU’s positions is around a pay-to-play policy: Brannan opposes banning bundling from lobbyists and people doing business with the City because he believes existing donation limits on those individuals suffice. Brannan is an effective and competent elected official who dedicates his time to serving his constituents and delivering to his community. He thus earns Citizens Union’s endorsement in this race.

Ari Kagan

Republican, Conservative, Parent

Candidate returned his questionnaire but refused to participate in an interview.

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COUNCIL DISTRICT 23

Bayside Hills, Bellerose, Douglaston, Floral Park, Fresh Meadows, Glen Oaks, Hollis, Hollis Hills, Holliswood, Little Neck, New Hyde Park, Oakland Gardens, Queens Village

Linda Lee ★ *Endorsed Candidate*

Democratic

Age: 44

Occupation: City Council Member (District 23)

Education: Barnard College (B.A.), Columbia University (M.S.W.)

Linda Lee was elected to the City Council in 2021 and is the first Korean-American to serve on the Council. Prior to her election, she led a community nonprofit helping senior citizens and served on the NYC Civic Engagement Commission. She had an impressive rate of legislative success in her first two years in office: eight of the 13 bills she introduced passed along with two other resolutions. As the chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, she is particularly proud of her bill to track and report on the opioid settlement fund and her work on developing a “mental health roadmap.” Lee supports most of CU’s reform priorities, but mentioned she needs more time to think about open primaries and engaged the interview team on moving local elections to even-years with honesty. She wants to improve city contract processes with nonprofits by adding accountability and transparency measures that would ensure nonprofits are paid on time. Ahead of the looming budget cuts, she says protecting education budgets would be her priority. Citizens Union appreciates Lee’s thoughtful and practical responses to policy issues, support for reform, and clarity on navigating between city, state, and federal governments. Therefore, we endorse her in this race.



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Bernard Chow

Republican, Conservative, Medical Freedom, Common Sense

Age: N/A

Occupation: Landlord

Education: N/A

Bernard Chow is currently a full-time candidate but prior to that, he worked as a healthcare plan advisor for a provider in Staten Island. He is civically engaged in the community and advocated against changes to the specialized high school program and around issues related to landlords, including opposing good cause eviction and the eviction moratorium during the pandemic. He has worked with Council Member Inna Vernikov of Brooklyn to establish a community safety group in her neighborhood. Chow told CU he is running because the government has “moved away from common sense,” particularly on issues related to the migrant crisis. The latter seems to be the focus of his campaign. Chow supports the majority of CU’s reform priorities including moving municipal elections to even numbered years, Ranked Choice Voting, open primaries, and banning bundling by those listed in the Doing Business with the City database. He differs on CU’s police accountability priorities. Citizens Union appreciates his involvement in the civic matters of the City and his community.



Questionnaire

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This year, Citizens Union revamped the candidate questionnaire to include fewer Yes/No questions and more open-ended questions, with the goal of eliciting fuller, more nuanced responses from candidates. Therefore, this Voters Directory does not include a table of questionnaire responses like previous Voters Directories. Citizens Union will review this new format ahead of the 2024 election.

SERVING CONSTITUENTS

- 1 For most New Yorkers, the most important thing their Council Members do is provide constituent services. How have you run your office (or for non-incumbents, how would you run your office) to serve your community's needs? Please give specific examples. What are the major problems in your district that require constituent services?
- 2 For incumbents: Which bill did you introduce, and most want to see passed? Why is that your top priority? For non-incumbents: If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce in the new year? Why is that your top priority?
- 3 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.
- 4 What are your top three campaign promises or goals? Feel free to reference an answer to another question on this form rather than restate it.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

- 5 How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use (or have you used) your power as a Council Member to improve the operations of the NYC BOE?



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- 6 Citizens Union recently published a report about moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, so they would align with presidential or gubernatorial elections, showing this change could boost voter turnout, diversify the electorate, and save money. What is your position on that proposal to move New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years and on the overall concept?
- 7 Are you a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? If so, how will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works? If not, please elaborate on your position.
- 8 New York City is one of few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the election that typically decides who gets elected to office. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in the primary?

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

- 9 If you ran for office before, to what extent have Independent Expenditure entities ("Super-PACs") spent money in your race? Was it done in your favor or opposition of your candidacy?
- 10 Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by "bundling" donations from other people, a loophole that can give insiders greater access to officeholders. Do you support banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?

OVERSIGHT OF CITY HALL

- 11 For incumbents: Oversight of the administration is one of the most important roles of the City Council. Please describe how you used your position to ensure City agencies and City government are accountable to the people of New York.



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- 12 In the last year, media reports have exposed potential ethical issues within City Hall concerning conflicts of interest among top officials, the use of public resources for private matters, appointments of friends and relatives, and loosening transparency measures. How do you see your role as a Council Member in ensuring high ethical behavior standards and effective ethics oversight and enforcement?

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM

- 13 Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? How would you ensure that penalties imposed on police officers are commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?
- 14 What changes should be made to the independent oversight bodies to ensure they can effectively hold police officers who commit wrongdoing accountable (the Civilian Complaint Review Board, Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD, the Commission to Combat Police Corruption)?
- 15 Under the 2021 police reform plan, the City committed to expanding programs that effectively shift responsibilities from the NYPD to other agencies in areas like mental health, homelessness outreach, school, and youth, while investing in alternative models for community-driven public safety, such as Cure Violence programs. What do you think about the progress of these efforts? How would you improve policing in the City’s various communities?

CITY COUNCIL RULES

- 16 In December 2022, Speaker Adams proposed changes to the Rules of the City Council that would have potentially rolled back positive reforms related to bill drafting services and the power of members and committee chairpersons, among other issues. Although this proposal has been pulled, additional work is needed to make the Council a more democratic, effective, and open legislative body. What reforms would you like to see in the Rules of the City Council?



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Ballot Questions and Citizens Union Recommendations

The language provided below is the text of two ballot referenda, which will appear on the ballot. For more information about the ballot questions, including arguments in favor and against, see the Campaign Finance Board Voter Guide, available at www.nycvotes.org. The full text of the proposals can be found on the New York State Board of Elections website at www.elections.ny.gov.

PROPOSAL NUMBER 1, AN AMENDMENT: Removal of Small City School Districts From Special Constitutional Debt Limitation

The proposed amendment to Article 8, section 4 of the Constitution removes the special constitutional debt limitation now placed on small city school districts, so they will be treated the same as all other school districts.

CITIZENS UNION HAS NOT EVALUATED THIS PROPOSAL REGARDING THE REMOVAL OF SMALL CITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS FROM SPECIAL CONSTITUTIONAL DEBT LIMITATION.

PROPOSAL NUMBER 2, AN AMENDMENT: Extending sewage project debt exclusion from debt limit

The proposed amendment to Article 8, section 5 of the Constitution extends for ten years the authority of counties, cities, towns, and villages to remove from their constitutional debt limits debt for the construction of sewage facilities.

CITIZENS UNION HAS NOT EVALUATED THIS PROPOSAL REGARDING EXTENDING SEWAGE PROJECT DEBT EXCLUSION FROM DEBT LIMIT.

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This Voters Directory would not be possible without the hard work of members of the Citizens Union Board, Local Candidates Committee (LCC), and staff. 30 volunteer LCC members and staff members formed nonpartisan interview teams and evaluated 8 candidates in 4 races. We thank them for contributing their time, energy, and expertise to interviewing and evaluating candidates, especially during this challenging moment. We thank you for your support, and hope you enjoy the latest edition of the Voters Directory.



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W. JaVon Rice,
Technical Manager

James Robinson,
Director of Development
Ben Weinberg,
Director of Public Policy

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