

2023 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

Dear candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat on the New York City Council! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serving the public.

This form includes six sections with questions about your positions on various reform issues and your plans for the office:

- Serving constituents
- Elections and voting
- Campaign finance
- Oversight of City Hall
- Police accountability
- City Council rules
- There are also questions about the candidate's bio and the campaign

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for office and to issue our preference for the June primary.

Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

You can learn more about Citizens Union's policy agenda in our [issues section](#).

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If you wish to be considered, please submit this questionnaire by Tuesday, March 14, 2023.

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** at the bottom of every page. Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. Citizens Union cannot see your answers unless you submit the form.

You can also download a blank questionnaire [here](#) and email it to us.

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Candidate info

Name	Susan ZHUANG
Running for Council District number	43
In which primary	Democratic
Age	37
Education	MASTER DEGREE
Occupation	Chief of Staff to Assemblymember William Colton
Website	susan4ny.com

Twitter

@susanzhuangnyc

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/susanzhuang43>

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)

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?

Serving as chief of staff to Assemblymember Colton has provided me the opportunity to both learn the most pressing issues in the district and to see firsthand how to build a strong constituent services operation. Each year we help over 5,000 constituents with their issues – working to cut through the red tape and government bureaucracy to deliver real results. The issues we hear the most about deal with concerns around public safety, the lack of quality, affordable housing, and access to opportunity at great schools.

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?

My top priority is ensuring that our communities are safe. That means getting the guns off our streets and stopping the rise in hate and bias crimes, particularly those targeting the AAPI and Jewish communities in my district. Legislatively, I want to expand access to specialized high schools and gifted and talented programs, so that all kids have the opportunity to succeed and thrive in our schools.

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.

During the pandemic, as Assemblyman Colton's chief of staff, I worked with him in support of expanding access to voting through no-excuse absentee voting. I have also been vocal in my support to increase language access for government documents into additional languages in NYC.

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.

First: Improving public safety

Second: Expanding opportunity in our schools

Third: Creating affordable housing

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?

Historically, the BOE has failed in its mission to educate voters, increase turnout, and effectively administer elections. There must be more transparency and accountability and I will use my oversight role on the Council to hold them accountable and improve services.

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.

6. What is your position on that proposal to move New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years and on the overall concept?

Conceptually, I strongly support any measures that increase turnout, expand diversity, and save taxpayer dollars.

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.

I support RCV and intend to educate voters in my district how to vote in a RCV system.

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?

I have concerns that open primaries will allow other parties to nefariously interfere in elections, resulting in weaker general election candidates who are not able to appeal broadly to the electorate.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve elections and voting or increase competition in New York City's political system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

Although voting rules are largely determined at the state level, I support same day voter registration, no-excuse vote by mail, and expanded language access for non-English speaking voters.

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?

N/A. This is my first run for elected office.

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?

YES

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.

N/A

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](#).

12. How do you see your role as a Council Member in ensuring high ethical behavior standards and effective ethics oversight and enforcement?

The City Council plays a major role in administration and agency oversight. I plan to aggressively pursue ethical issues, budget anomalies, and anything else that needs more accountability and oversight.

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?

The CCRB should be empowered to discipline officers found guilty of 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)?

All of these offices should be empowered to and given the necessary staff and budgetary resources to investigate and hold accountable those guilty of corruption, abuse, or wrongdoing.

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?

We need improved police-community relations. That means more community policing with cops walking the same beat in the same communities day after day, more officers who speak the language of the communities they are policing, and more funding for community based anti-violence organizations and mental health service providers.

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?

I support more power for individual members to bring legislation to the floor when it has majority support via sponsorship.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)?

3,000 votes at most will be needed to reach 50% after ranked choice tabulations.

What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals?

I have raised over \$32,000 and received over \$167,000 in matching funds. I am fully funded for the primary election and intend to raise another \$25,000 for the general.

How many individual donors do you have?

I have received 410 contributions thus far.

Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable (you can also

share a link to a list of endorsements)

I have been endorsed by New Majority NYC, Assemblymember William Colton, and former Councilmember Mark Treyger and community leaders

ADDITIONAL INFO

Please review your answers by clicking **PREVIEW ANSWERS** below.

At the bottom of the preview page, you can

- get a copy of your answers by clicking **PRINT**, and
- submit the questionnaire by clicking **SUBMIT**.

IF YOU DO NOT CLICK SUBMIT, WE WON'T RECEIVE YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE.

Once you click **SUBMIT**, you will receive a confirmation email. *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