

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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	Ari Kagan
Running for Council District number	47
In which primary	Republican
Age	56
Education	BBA from Baruch College
Occupation	Council Member

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Candidate for NYS Assembly in 2006 & NYC Council in 2013 & 2021. Was elected as Democratic District Leader and worked in that capacity from 2012 to 2022. Worked as Community Liaison for U.S. Congressman, two NYC Comptrollers & City Council Member. Have been active in Southern Brooklyn civic life for 30 years. Volunteered a Board Member for the Holocaust Memorial Committee, American Brotherhood for Russian Disabled, Association of East-European Jewry, Council for Unity & Racial Equality, Bensonhurst Business Club and many other groups. Hosted many rallies & meetings, like Rally against Hate and Anti-Semitism in Holocaust Memorial Park (Sheepshead Bay). In April of 1997, I was one of the organizers of the massive Immigrants Rights Rally on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Twitter

@AriKagan47

Facebook

Councilman Ari Kagan for Re-Election

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?

I have two offices in my district serving diverse communities from many neighborhoods. My staff speaks Spanish, Russian, Cantonese & Mandarin, Ukrainian and Georgian, Urdu and Hebrew. I hosted Town Halls in every neighborhood of my district, inviting many city agencies & giving constituents a chance to ask any questions & to share their concerns. My staff and I answer phone calls, reply to emails from constituents and have daily in person appointments in my offices. In the last 15 months, we helped to resolve thousands of individual issues. Major problems are NYCHA complaints from Coney Island & Marlboro, housing assistance, sanitation & transportation issues, complaints from tenants, homeowners and small business owners, restoration of lost social benefits, public safety concerns.

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?

1. Bill to make NYCHA property managers accountable for their responsiveness to tenants' concerns. Very important to make sure NYCHA tenants receive proper attention to their complaints about mold, lack of heat and hot water, roaches infestation, etc. Bill mandates NYCHA to audit property managers responsiveness and regularly report about these audits.

2. Bill to ban companies that charge a fee for "student debt relief" already provided by the federal government and creating a private cause of action for borrowers who fall victim to these scams. Students and their families should not become victims of fraudulent practices.

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.

As ethnic journalist, TV and radio host, I covered the work of many government entities and actively encouraged immigrants to participate in civic & political life. Together with many elected officials and community leaders I fought to provide translation services at poll sites. As Council Members, I participated and hosted many public hearings demanding answers and transparency from various NYC Commissioners and agencies. For example, as chair of Waterfronts & Resiliency Committee last year, I asked Parks Dept. to report how they spend money for Coney Island Boardwalk restoration. I asked Commissioners of DEP & DEM about NYC preparedness for storms and hurricanes.

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: To continue my advocacy for the restoration of the Boardwalk and for ferry service in Coney Island

Second: To make NYCHA accountable for ignoring tenants' concerns

Third: To finish repairs and renovations of Marlboro Houses Community Center

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?

City Council has an oversight role to make NYC BOE work more efficient and transparent.

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?

I strongly support this idea. We need to do everything possible to increase voter participation and turnout for every election, including municipal election.

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.

Yes. I inform voters at every opportunity about rank choice voting.

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?

Yes, I strongly support open primaries.

*** 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.**

As a journalist and community leader, I have always publicly advocated for more open and democratic elections, active participation by voters. As Council member, I promote the transparency of BOE and our political system, inform voters about the work of City Council and bills that are proposed in City Hall. Last year, I hosted a public rally against politically motivated and undemocratic redistricting process that completely ignored opinions of many Southern Brooklyn communities, creating very oddly shaped 47th Council district.

I am ready to participate in public debates with my competitors - both in Primary and General elections.

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?

In 2021, there was an Independent Expenditure that spent money in my favor when I ran on Democratic primary. I did not ask for it and won that Primary by substantial margin (more than 12%). At the same time, there were many anonymous attacks against me in 2021 - by massive email blasts and by creation of fake campaign website with negative/false information about me.

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?

I do support banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to strengthen New York City’s campaign finance system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

In my 3 elections for City Council - 2013, 2021 and now - I have participated in the NYC campaign finance system and believe it is an important instrument of democracy.

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.

I hosted and participated in many public hearings in City Hall asking City Commissioners and other Administration representatives to provide transparent information and reports. I called out some agencies on social media and press releases, if they ignored their responsibilities for people of NYC.

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?

I set an example as Council Member and asked my staff to follow all ethical standards.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics in New York City government. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

I asked for a resignation of Council member staffer who insulted and used vulgar language on his voice mails to the Asian American female reporter. I also criticized in the media a staffer of NYC Council Speaker for his dual role as a \$150,000 a year Council staffer and President of a full fledge political consulting firm.

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 Police Commissioner should have a final say - after looking into CCRB recommendations and Office of the Inspector General reports. Then NYPD should make its decisions public and regularly report about it to NYC Council.

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)?

They have to make their reports public on a regular basis.

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?

I support these efforts and secured significant funding from NYC Council to Cure Violence programs, youth services, as well as to mental health programs in our communities.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve police accountability, oversight of the NYPD, and police-community relations. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

I hosted many public safety forums in my district where community leaders and high ranking police officers were discussing the situation in various neighborhoods. I also actively participated in PCC meetings, PSA 1 meetings with tenant leaders. I brought leaders of NYCHA and NYPD to Coney Island Houses TA emergency meeting when three women were assaulted there.

I promote local recruitment efforts, so we will have more police officers from neighborhoods they patrol.

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?

The Council should be more democratic, effective, and open legislative body. I was against these proposed changes.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)? 3,000 votes on Primary

What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals? I raised more than \$28,000

How many individual donors do you have? 300

Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable (you can also share a link to a list of endorsements)

I received an endorsement of the former State Senator Marty Golden and NYC Council Minority Leader Joe Borelli

ADDITIONAL INFO

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

I am an immigrant from Belarus, a husband and a father of two beautiful children who graduated from

NYC public schools. I love to help people and work hard to bring positive results to communities I represent.

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