2025 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

GENERAL INFORMATION

Candidate info

Name Benjamin Chou

City Council District # 19

In which primary Democrat

Age 33

Education Undergrad from Queens College, Masters from Baruch College

Current job, position, or occupation FDNY Firefighter

Other positions or offices

President of FDNY Phoenix Society

Previous jobs or positions

n/a

Campaign contact information

Website www.benchou4ny.com

X https://x.com/benchou4ny

Instagram https://www.instagram.com/benchou4ny

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INTRODUCTION

1. What are your top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected?

Promise 1: Rebuild our sense of community. Our neighborhoods thrive when residents feel connected. I will expand investments in community-driven initiatives—like hiring local staff for neighborhood beautification, creating public art programs, and partnering with schools and civic groups—to ensure every resident feels seen, supported, and empowered to shape their own neighborhood.

Promise 2: Make life more affordable. Housing, utilities, and daily costs are growing faster than wages. That's why I'm fighting to cut the hidden property tax on ConEd bills and reform outdated property tax exemptions that benefit luxury condo owners. These are meaningful, equitable steps to make life in Northeast Queens genuinely more affordable.

Promise 3: Invest in real public safety. Safety means peace of mind built through partnership—not fear. Drawing on my experience as a first responder, I'll secure funding for smarter, preventive safety measures: better street visibility using daylighting strategies, pilot programs for motion-sensor lighting, and expanding our auxiliary police program. This approach puts resources and trust at the center.

2. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce? Why is that your top priority? If you are an incumbent, please also state what legislation you have passed which you are most proud of.

I would introduce legislation to expose and reform one of the most regressive hidden taxes in New York City — the property taxes Con Edison and other utilities pass directly onto consumers. These charges disproportionately hurt working families, seniors on fixed incomes, and small businesses, while allowing big corporations and the wealthiest to absorb the cost without blinking.

By requiring full transparency in billing and demanding accountability for how these taxes are calculated, we can begin to dismantle an unfair system that unfairly targets vulnerable New Yorkers.

3. In your view, what are the major needs of your district's constituents?

The major needs of our district center around affordability, safety, and community. Families are being squeezed by rising property taxes, co-op maintenance costs, and everyday expenses, making it harder to stay in the neighborhoods they've called home for decades. Seniors on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to these hidden costs.
Our residents also need strong public safety, reliable public transit, and investments in schools, parks, and small businesses — all while ensuring housing and utilities remain within reach for working families.

4. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running, and do you have any achievements or involvement in your neighborhood you are particularly proud of?

I've spent my entire life in Northeast Queens, and I'm deeply proud of my career as a firefighter, serving the diverse and dynamic community of Jamaica, Queens.

5. What experience have you had with good government and reform issues? (e.g., voting and election reform, campaign finance, ethics, police accountability, government transparency). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

I haven't yet had direct experience on these issues. However, these are critical for restoring trust in government, and I'm committed to advancing them as part of my work on the City Council.

6. What do you think the role of the City Council is in city government this upcoming term?

The City Council's role in the upcoming term is to serve as both a protector and a problem-solver. We must safeguard New York City from harmful federal policies that threaten our immigrant communities, civil rights, and local autonomy. At the same time, we must directly tackle the affordability crisis—rising housing costs, property taxes, and utility rates—so working families and seniors aren't priced out of their own neighborhoods.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

7. Do you support moving New York City's elections from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, and will you co-sponsor a Council Resolution supporting that measure?

No

Voter turnout in New York City elections is exceptionally low, as they are held "off-cycle" in odd-numbered years. To boost local voter turnout and reduce participation gaps, the Legislature passed and Governor Hochul signed a law that moves county and town elections to even-numbered years, and lawmakers are supporting a constitutional amendment that would do the same for city elections, including New York City's. Citizens Union is leading a coalition of groups advocating to move New York City's elections to even-numbered years, and the City Council is considering a Resolution in support of that shift.

Comments (optional)

I appreciate the intent behind the proposal to move New York City's elections to even-numbered years, but I have concerns that it could diminish focus on local issues. During even-year elections, federal and state races dominate media coverage and voter attention, which could overshadow critical city matters. While I fully support increasing voter participation, I believe we must explore reforms that maintain the visibility of municipal elections while making it easier for New Yorkers to vote—such as expanding early voting and improving outreach.

8. The New York City Board of Elections (NYC BOE) has been a source of frustration for voters and candidates for years. The City Council appoints NYC BOE members and has the power to appoint commissioners who are committed to reform, but the most recent commissioners have been appointed behind closed doors. Do you commit to request a public hearing for BOE nominees, and to only vote for individuals who are publicly committed to reducing party-based patronage and supporting open hiring practices?

Yes

9. Do you support maintaining the use of Ranked Choice Voting in New York City's elections?

Yes

10. New York City is one of the few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the primary election. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of completely open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in one primary where the top two candidates, regardless of party, move on to the general election?

Yes

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

11. Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by "bundling" donations from other people. Do you support limiting bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?

Yes

12. Are you a supporter of the City's public campaign matching funds program, and do you commit to protecting the independence of the program and ensuring that the Campaign Finance Board has sufficient resources to run the program?

Yes

ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

13. The recent pattern of indictments and resignations surrounding City Hall has exposed serious ethical problems in City Government. Please describe how you will maintain the highest ethical standards in office.

I will hold myself and my office to the highest ethical standards because restoring public confidence is essential to effective leadership. As a firefighter, I've spent my career serving the public with courage, integrity, and accountability—showing up for my neighbors in their most vulnerable moments. Those same values will guide my work on the City Council: making decisions transparently, putting the needs of the community first, and ensuring that every action I take is above reproach. Leadership isn't just about policy—it's about trust, and I intend to earn and uphold that trust every day.

14. Incoming public servants must sever ties and divest from companies or other interests that have business dealings with the City, but they are not required to recuse themselves when working on matters involving their former business partners, clients, employer, etc. Do you support forbidding public servants to work on matters relating to their former business partners, clients, employers, and other interests for a set period of time?

Yes

Comments (optional)

I support rules that prevent public servants from immediately working on matters directly tied to their former business partners, clients, or employers to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain public trust. However, I also believe there should be a thoughtful approach for city workers who have valuable expertise from their prior roles. In some cases, their insight into how certain agencies or industries operate can benefit the public good — as long as strong safeguards, transparency requirements, and ethics reviews are in place.

15. Some campaign consultants also work as lobbyists. Do you support restricting campaign consultants from lobbying the candidates they served for two years after the candidate won elected office?

Yes

16. Do you support moving lobbying oversight and enforcement from the City Clerk's Office to another agency charged with ethics issues, like the Conflicts of Interest Board?

Yes

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

17. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? (i.e., Place the final decision with the Police Commissioner; the Civilian Complaint Review Board; the Mayor; the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety; or another individual or entity).

I believe the Police Commissioner should have the final say on discipline, as they oversee the department's operations and have the context to make informed decisions. That said, final decisions must be guided by clear policies, transparency, and input from independent oversight bodies like the Civilian Complaint Review Board to ensure fairness and maintain public trust.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

18. The Mayor currently has the power to block charter revision ballot questions (proposed by the City Council, other charter commissions, and citizen petitions) by establishing their own Charter Revision Commission. Do you support removing this Mayoral power?

Yes

19. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and be put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?

Yes

20. Please provide your views about the New York City Council's "advice and consent" powers. In what cases, if any, should a mayor need the Council's approval for an appointment of a high ranking Mayoral official, such as an agency commissioner?

I believe the City Council's advice and consent powers are essential to maintaining checks and balances in city government. The Council should evaluate whether nominees are qualified, have a record of integrity, and are committed to serving the public interest. This process ensures that critical city agencies are led by individuals who reflect the values and priorities of New Yorkers.

ADDITIONAL INFO