



Friday, April 16, 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

Phelan Dante Fitzpatrick

Running for Council District number

3

In which primary

Democratic

If elected, which legislative conference will you join (e.g., Democrat, Republican, other)?

Democrat

Age

39

Education

High School

Occupation/Employer

Small Business Owner

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Campaign Contact Information

Website

www.phelanforcitycouncil.com

Twitter

phelandante

Facebook

phelandante

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.

I am a New Yorker working and living in my community for over twenty years. I take great pride in my community, in my neighbors, and my fellow New Yorkers. And I know what it takes to run a successful business, to manage a budget, to employ New Yorkers, and to care for employees. City Council is about being a representative. It’s about customer service. My experience empowers me with a strong sense of what it means to be a public servant. My office would put people first. A constituent services director would help with both proactive outreach and reactive response to the needs of our community. I would never hesitate to roll up my sleeves and help a constituent myself whenever possible. We’ll hold open office hours both in person and virtual, as well as at different locations around the district.

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 am not an elected official, but during COVID our campaign has helped deliver food to those who need it, provided whistles to community members to help keep our streets safer, and in the coming weeks we will be announcing our Spring Partnership 2021 – a clothing and food drive that partners with local small businesses and NYCHA residents.

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

Over 20 years

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

My first bill would be to provide for the 911 system to be able to send mental health and medical professionals when appropriate in response to a call for help. We need to decriminalize our neighbors who are met by police when they are in need of a social worker.

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?

Public matching funds and rank choice voting have been critical to democratizing our city government and I would fight to keep those in place. I would also work to improve the technical systems that hold the Board of Elections back, such as C-Access and the donations platform that is incredibly limited in functionality compared to other solutions like ActBlue. We also need more accountability to ensure that things such as mail in ballots are distributed with the full confidence of the public - something we didn't always see last year.

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?

Yes - ranked choice voting is the ultimate form of a democratic voice and allows voters to feel that they had a say in their government even if their first choice does not win. We need to preserve this system and continue to provide public service announcements for education. I would also support working with the Board of Elections to simplify the ballot with clearer, graphical instructions so that everyone knows how the system works.

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?

We need to adhere to the city charter rules, but we can go further. We should insist on an equal gender balance as well as non-binary representation. And we should also look at a judicial check to ensure a third party consensus the commission – and their decisions – are fair and equitable.

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

Yes, but I would first need to learn more about how an open system might empower or disenfranchise current members of parties other than Democrat in a city where in most cases only the Democratic Primary process yields office holders.

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

We need more public oversight over a police force that has proven they are not always equipped to protect the public.

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?

We should implement an appeals process that escalates the final decision from the Commissioner to a judicial panel.

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

Consolidating these bodies will ensure that every infraction referred gets the same fair and equal level of oversight.

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

Police officers should be held to the same standards and subject to the same investigative transparency as citizens. Privilege is why we are where we are.

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.

- a) End the presence of NYPD in our public schools, which disproportionately criminalize students of color and create a tense learning environment and perpetuates the school to prison pipeline.
- b) End the projects of creating new jails in other boroughs and close Rikers Island for good. Abolish the cash bail system, which disproportionately keeps low income and people of color behind bars.
- c) Send mental health and medical professionals

when necessary to 911 crimes to decriminalize our neighbors who are met by police when they are in need of a social worker.

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

I have a deep conviction for this as a candidate running for the current Speaker's seat against his Chief of Staff. One person should not be allowed to set the legislative agenda of the City of New York.

15. Do you support reducing the overall number of committees so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?

No

Comments

Committees exist to allow members to become specialists in issues that affect all New Yorkers. We can reduce the size of committees or work to improve their efficiency, but we should not reduce the level at which City Council is able to focus on particular issues.

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?

Discretionary funding should be distributed based on the number of people living in each district and only revoked with a vote of either a committee or the full council.

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 need to require that all City Hall officials hold public virtual office hours and, to the best of their abilities, safely hold in person office hours in each of the five boroughs.

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?

Well before the pandemic hit small businesses, especially those run by minority operators, have been hard hit when it comes to raising rents, rising healthcare costs, and high taxes. Getting this district back on our feet has to serve and support the Mom and Pop shops, the bodegas, and the artists. A renewed economy that favors businesses who stayed upon during this past year does a great disservice to the many others that rely on walk-in customers and have low capacity for online marketing. Moving forward, we have to create business policies that are holistic and consider the neighbors who need the most assistance getting back on their feet. This also means getting the

Theater District back up and running safely, and integrating New York's new legalized marijuana in a way that provides jobs and that anti-discrimination laws are enforced when it comes to the ways in which they are monitored.

a) Pass the Small Business Jobs Survival Act (SBJSA), which addresses the root causes of businesses in operation for more than 5 years and will create a minimum 10 year lease with right to renewal, equal negotiation terms, and restricts on raising property taxes.

b) Add a public bank that is owned by the residents of New York City that acts as an alternative to Wall Street corruption.

c) Continue to raise the minimum wage so that it is in step with inflation, increased costs of goods and services, and is enough for every New Yorker to live on.

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 don't have this experience yet, but I am committed to it as a future Councilmember. I was disappointed by the FY21 budget. Mayor de Blasio and the City Council failed to live up to their promises. Gutting public schools to pour money into the NYPD exhibits where the mayor and Speaker Johnson's priorities lie—in conflict with the people. Right now, we have people in office who spend more time politicizing movements, virtue signaling on social media, and campaigning for office than actually legislating. These have never been compromises for the welfare of our city, but decisions made to secure them themselves jobs, while the rest of us have been losing ours. New Yorkers have had enough of the smoke and mirrors of our government.

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: Safer Streets - see previous criminal justice answers.

Second: Equal Opportunity - ensuring that school funding, housing rights, and so many other social programs are prioritized by the City.

Third: Economic Recovery - see previous recovery answer (#19)

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?

As a first-time candidate, my experience is unique compared to others in the race. I am not a political insider, and I have never held public office. In our democratic society – when your representatives do not understand your struggles, do not share your values, and make decisions that affect your life – you need to stand up and do something about it. The opening of the council seat in District 3 was not only a sign that it was time for me to get involved. It was my responsibility.

I moved here over 20 years ago, the year before September 11, looking for opportunities that a Queer, Black, 19 year old wouldn't find in Cleveland, Ohio. For the past 16 years I've been a small business operator in District 3. I'm a single dad to an amazing four year old daughter named Artemis. I was raised by a white single mother who worked three jobs to support me. I had an openly gay, black father who, when I was 19, was murdered outside of a gay bar in an attempted mugging that remains a cold case to this day. That's what drove me to get into this race – my daughter deserves to grow up in a better world than I did.

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.

