



2026 Special Election Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

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

For over 125 years, Citizens Union (CU) has been devoted to holding our local government accountable with the highest ethical standards and fighting for political reforms that improve New York democracy (<https://citizensunion.org/issues/>). To promote a competitive and diverse political culture, a fair and open political process, and accountable and responsible government, we evaluate candidates running for office and back those who strongly support reform. Our evaluations are done through questionnaires, independent research, and interviews conducted by our Local Candidates Committee. (<https://citizensunion.org/citizens-union-evaluation-process/>).

As a prerequisite for receiving the support of Citizens Union, please complete the following questionnaire and submit your response by Sunday, March 29, 2026. As you complete the form, you can click "Save" and return to the form later. Once you have completed the questionnaire and submitted your response to us, you will receive a copy of your submission. Your submission will be posted on our website (with the exception of contact info).

Upon receipt of your submission, we will reach out to you or your staff to schedule a virtual interview with members of our Local Candidate Committee. The interview will be recorded. Shortly thereafter, we will announce our support in key priority races to our members and on our website and other channels. 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.

Please feel free to reach out to Citizens Union with any questions or comments at candidates@citizensunion.org.

Thank you very much. We look forward to your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Candidate info

Name Layla Law-Gisiko
Age 55
Education Master Journalism (Sorbonne Université)
Current job, elected office, or occupation President City Club of New York

Other elected offices

Democratic District Leader AD75/A

Previous jobs or positions

Journalist, reporter, documentary director, writer. (free lance)

Campaign contact information

Website www.laylaforny.com
X <https://x.com/laylaLawGisiko>
Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/laylalawgisiko/>
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61579566704583>

INTRODUCTION

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

1- Deep, Permanent Housing Affordability

I will fight to save NYCHA and recommit to Section 9 public housing as the foundation of deeply affordable housing in New York City. That means investing in repairs, ending the slow drift toward privatization, and preserving public control. I will also protect and expand other forms of true affordability –Mitchell-Lama, rent-stabilized housing, and limited-equity co-ops–while ensuring that any new development delivers permanent, enforceable affordability, not temporary or illusory set-asides.

2- Protect Municipal Retirees

I will oppose efforts to diminish or privatize the health benefits of municipal retirees and ensure the City honors its commitments to the workers who have served it. These benefits were earned by municipal retirees and must be protected with the same rigor as any contractual obligation.

3- Lower the Cost of Living

I will focus on the everyday costs that are squeezing New Yorkers, child care, utilities, groceries, insurance, and basic services, by strengthening oversight, demanding transparency, and advancing policies that curb excessive costs and protect residents from unfair burdens.

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

I have lived in the district for 29 years.

I am proud of a record of showing up and standing up, especially when the odds were not favorable. I helped lead the fight to stop the use of eminent domain on the Penn Station blocks, protecting residents and small businesses from displacement. I have stood alongside public housing tenants, including going to court with them, to challenge actions that threatened their homes and rights.

I have organized with neighbors to take on powerful interests, insisting on transparency and accountability. I also took NYCHA to court pro se under FOIL, and won (I am not a lawyer), because the public has a right to know how decisions affecting their homes are made.

3. 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 have extensive experience in good government and reform work, grounded in both advocacy and practice. As President of The City Club of New York, a good government organization founded in 1892, I have focused on transparency, accountability, and public participation in decision-making.

I worked to help secure passage of the 2022 state law requiring Community Advisory Committees (CACs) to be open to the public, an important step toward transparency in large-scale development projects.

I also brought a pro se FOIL case against NYCHA challenging excessive redactions, and prevailed in court, reinforcing the public's right to access information.

I have worked closely with Reinvent Albany to push for greater transparency around Penn Station and MTA decision-making, and have supported reforms such as banning lobbyists from appointments to city and state boards to reduce conflicts of interest.

More broadly, I have worked to expand public participation in government processes, ensuring that decisions are not made behind closed doors.

As a District Leader, I have also taken responsibility for the proper conduct of elections in the district, visiting polling sites, monitoring operations, and making sure voters are able to cast their ballots without issue.

Across all of this work, my focus has been consistent: strengthening public accountability, improving transparency, and making government more accessible and trustworthy.

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

The City Council's role this term is to serve as an active counterweight—through oversight, legislation, and meaningful engagement in land use decisions.

It is essential that the Council fully weigh in on land use. ULURP must be treated as a serious deliberative process, not a rubber stamp. Projects must be scrutinized for legality, public benefit, and long-term impact on communities.

The Council must also safeguard transparency, insisting that decisions are made in the open, with full access to information and genuine public participation.

A critical function of the Council is holding public agencies and authorities accountable, including EDC, NYCHA, and other public benefit corporations that often operate with limited oversight. The Council must demand answers, review the underlying data, and challenge decisions that are not supported by facts.

Finally, the Council has an important role in shaping policy direction through resolutions, sending clear signals on issues that affect the city, even when authority is shared with or held by the state.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

5. New York City is one of few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the primary election. Over one million independent ("unaffiliated") voters are excluded from participating in the primary election, and their number is growing. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in one primary, where the top vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, move on to the general election?

Yes

Comments (optional)

This applies to the entire state of New York

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

Yes

7. 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 press for 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

*** 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 in New York City.**

I have taken concrete steps to improve and strengthen the electoral process. As District Leader, I systematically visit polling sites on Election Day to monitor operations, address issues in real time, and ensure voters can cast their ballots without difficulty.

Last year, I also organized a series of webinars to educate voters about ranked-choice voting, explaining how the system works and how to navigate the ballot. These efforts were aimed at increasing voter understanding, reducing confusion, and ultimately boosting participation.

My focus has been consistent: making elections more accessible, transparent, and effective for the people who rely on them.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

8. 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

9. 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

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve New York City’s campaign finance system.**

I strongly support the campaign finance matching program—it is one of the most effective tools we have to amplify small donors and curb the influence of large contributors. But it can and should be

strengthened.

First, the system must be more reliable and accessible. Technical failures or delays—especially near filing deadlines—undermine confidence and disadvantage grassroots campaigns. The process should be streamlined and consistently functional.

Second, I would support capping campaign expenditures across the board, including for campaigns that choose not to participate in the matching program. I would also work to reduce the outsized influence of PACs and independent expenditure committees, and create a more level playing field.

Third, we should expand participation by making it easier for small donors to engage, with clearer guidance and outreach so more New Yorkers understand how their contributions are matched.

ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

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

I will maintain the highest level of ethics in office by applying the same standard I have followed throughout my work: read the fine print, disclose fully, and avoid even the appearance of a conflict.

I will adhere strictly to all disclosure and conflict-of-interest rules, and go beyond them by refusing gifts, as well as outside income.

I will draw clear lines around influence. I will not recommend registered lobbyists for appointment to Community Boards, and I will require that applicants fully disclose affiliations with 501(c)(4) organizations and any entities engaged in lobbying, so that potential conflicts are transparent from the outset.

I will operate with transparency, making information accessible, explaining decisions, and ensuring that constituents understand how and why choices are made.

11. The ban on using City resources for electioneering has been eroding in recent years - particularly when the legislative and executive branches are on opposing sides of a ballot referendum. This activity is clearly prohibited by the City Charter, but no government agency has stepped in to regulate or put a stop to it. The City Council spent millions of dollars on mailers and a campaign opposing the housing ballot questions proposed by the 2025 Charter Revision Commission, after conducting a similar campaign in 2024. Do you support closing the loophole that allows public officials to violate the electioneering ban without facing consequences by empowering the Conflicts of Interest Board to enforce existing restrictions?

Yes

12. 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

13. Some campaign consultants also work as lobbyists. Do you support restricting campaign consultants from lobbying their former clients for a period of two years after their client has won elected office?

Yes

14. 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

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics standards in New York City government.**

To strengthen ethics in government, I would focus on expanding both the scope of oversight and the quality of training.

The Conflict of Interest Board should be mandated to look beyond direct financial benefit and examine non-financial conflicts, relationships, affiliations, and indirect influence that can shape decisions. The current framework is too narrow and misses real risks.

Equally important is training. Ethics cannot be treated as a one-time compliance exercise. City officials and staff should receive regular, practical training that addresses real-world scenarios, evolving standards, and how to identify and manage conflicts before they arise.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

15. Who do you think should have the final decision on discipline in the New York City 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).

Police accountability must be independent, credible, and enforceable. That means the final say on discipline should not rest solely with the Police Commissioner or the Mayor.

The Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) should have binding authority in substantiated cases, particularly on disciplinary recommendations. Civilian oversight cannot be meaningful if it is only advisory. The Police Commissioner should retain a role in implementation, but not the ability to override findings. The City Council's role is to set the legal framework by ensuring the CCRB has real authority, adequate resources, and transparency requirements. The Mayor appoints leadership, but accountability cannot be political.

Please provide any other info you would like us to know about you and your candidacy.

I wrote about the need to improve transparency in government in this op-ed.

<https://www.gothamgazette.com/130-opinion/11328-new-york-sunlight-penn-station-economic->

development/

Here is a link to the court case I filed pro-se against NYCHA to obtain documents under FOIL.

https://www.nycourts.gov/reporter//pdfs/2025/2025_34482.pdf

I have pledged to only recommend community board members for appointment who are not registered lobbyists.