



Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2023 Candidate Questionnaire

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Name of person filling out this questionnaire: Alexa Avilés

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) If (re-)elected, what would be your top priority or priorities in your term?

If re-elected my priorities for this upcoming term, includes:

- Maintaining and providing quality constituent services.
- Ensuring city agencies are responding and proactively engaging with the residents of the district, on any projects that impact residents.
- Budget Justice where communities/people, as well as a caring economy, are prioritized in funding decisions
- Access to safe and dignified affordable housing which includes the city's investing in building and preserving low-income & affordable housing
- Advocating for transparency and accountability in Public Housing which includes an audit, obtaining additional resources and improving conditions for residents
- Ensuring that all children get access to quality education at every educational level through college
- Protecting, strengthening and expanding the social safety net
- Advancing policies that address climate change & sustainable infrastructure improvements

2) What personal and/or professional experiences do you believe make you uniquely qualified to run for City Council?

Prior to being a Council Member, I was deeply involved in the community through serving as a Community Board Member on Brooklyn's CB7, a PTA president at a local public school, an SLT member at a local middle school and as a member and board member of several nonprofit organizations.

In my professional career, I worked at a Foundation that provided grants for social justice not-for-profit organizations working to address a range of policy issues including affordable housing, immigrant rights, reproductive rights, worker issues, land use policy, governmental transparency and accountability as well as a range of arts based work.



In addition to growing up in Brooklyn, the combination of personal and professional experiences I think helped to position me to run, win, and now run again.

3) List all of your endorsements, including but not limited to elected officials, unions, political clubs and community-based organizations.

At this early stage of the process, I only have one endorsement from NYC DSA.

Last year, I held almost every endorsement from significant elected officials, unions, political clubs and community-based organizations. I expect to obtain the support of many of these organizations.

4) What, if any, groups or industries will you not accept campaign contributions from? If any, please note specifically whose money you will not accept.

I will not accept money from:

- Police & other law enforcement unions, correctional officers' unions
- Real estate (PACs, big landlords, developers)
- Corporate PACS
- Crypto currency industry
- Fossil Fuel lobbyists, executives, and the fossil fuel industry's financiers

5) What do you think of the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2024 preliminary budget? What actions do you plan with respect to this budget? How do you propose helping NYC recover from the COVID pandemic and resulting economic downturn, particularly given the projected shortfall in city revenue?

I think the Mayor's FY 24 preliminary is nothing short of a classic austerity budget. Beyond the \$2B surplus from this year and the administration's highly unusual move of having an additional \$1.8B in short term revenues reserves that have yet to be expended, these cuts in addition to the most recent budget modification are frivolous and harmful. One of the most troubling cuts in the preliminary budget is a 35% cut to oversight. As agencies are destabilized with growing vacancies while everyday New Yorkers need ongoing and expanded services and support, the Prelim adds serious insult to injury.

Tax revenues are not expected to decrease but what will be shifting away are the federal pandemic emergency dollars. Rather than taking a sledgehammer to the agencies we all most profoundly depend on, I would utilize a more precise approach to make needed cuts while shifting resources to those agencies most aligned, effective and needed.



6) What measures would you take to improve educational opportunities for all students in NYC? How do you plan to ensure that all NYC children are able to attend high-quality, integrated schools?

First, we need to stop cutting funding for the public education system and audit how resources are being distributed throughout the DOE. This past year, I have witnessed how this critical agency operates with little transparency and accountability which is unacceptable.

While the administration and many before it acknowledge inequity and segregation, our city still does very little to address segregation and the deep disparities in school funding and services. Unfortunately, as an entity of the state, these issues require as much state intervention as the city.

In addition to fully funding NYC public schools, several additional measures that would improve education opportunities for all NYC students include:

1. Implement small class sizes.
2. Utilize the D15 diversity initiative as a model to be replicated across the city.
3. Remove discriminatory screens and practices that have disparate impacts on Black and Latino children and push them into carceral systems.
4. Increase support for English-Language Learners (ELLs), and prioritize smaller ELL classroom sizes.
5. Clear the backlog of special education services and ensure each district has an appropriate number of available seats for all students at every level.
6. Adopt and fully fund universal afterschool for elementary schools.
7. Hire, train and place more social workers and mental health practitioners in schools.
8. Expand parent voice and engagement in decision making locally and citywide.

7) Do you support any campaign finance reforms for NYC? If so, please describe.

I am generally supportive of any reform measure that brings increased transparency and equity into the electoral process.

I recently signed on as a co-sponsor to improve rank choice voting and expand restrictions on the revolving door of lobbyists and city government.

8) The MTA is facing a significant revenue shortfall and many parts of the city lack access to reliable public transportation. What measures would you implement and/or enforce, to promote safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options for mass transit users, pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers in Brooklyn?



We are advocating for the state colleagues to pass the “Fix the MTA” legislative package to fill the deficit, improve service, and increase accountability all without passing on fare increases to riders. Part of my district includes Red Hook, a transit desert. I am most excited about the provision to make buses free –and have long advocated there are communities like Red Hook who should have free busing. Other cities have done it and it has proven to dramatically increase ridership while helping some of the most vulnerable residents.

For just 1.5% of last year’s state budget (\$222B), the State could fund the annual cost of this entire package (~ \$3.3B/year). Moreover, we can join with this year’s proposals to tax the rich and increase the revenue available to the State. We must invest in our public transportation system, it is the lifeblood of NYC. NYC & NYC DOT needs to fully fund and invest in full implementation of the Safe Street masterplan.

9) How would you ensure that underserved communities receive fair and equitable treatment from city government? What policies do you support that would level the playing field for historically marginalized groups?

Several years ago, DYCD began a re-alignment, where the commissioner led the entire agency through inquiry and planning around how the agency can ground in equity. They began the hard work of recalibrating and seeing what needed to change operationally. All NYC agencies need that kind of leadership and explicit focus on equity. Unfortunately, politics changes leadership and these types of systemic changes need sustained focused attention because it takes years to shift agency culture and operations. The City Council must set the tone and may need to use legislation to mandate and at minimum set guardrails in place to protect underserved communities. In fact, much of my staffs’ time is dedicated to trouble shooting for residents and holding agencies to account for the work they are supposed to be doing for NYC residents.

One of the major policy changes I will continue to advocate for to level the playing field is meaningful resident engagement which means residents are engaged thoroughly pre-during- and post projects and that residents have actual decision making power at the table. Much of the City’s community engagement is performative. What I am advocating for is not just engagement but empowerment. A good example of this is the MTA, that body should have rider representation, but it does not. It’s important to note that I advocate for democratically elected representatives, not politically appointed people because we want accountability to the people not an elected representative.



10) How would you ensure fairness in employment, salary, workplace conditions, and promotion? What is your position on strengthening and increasing access to union membership?

The passage of the law requiring publishing of salary ranges is one small step in the right direction. We need to continue to demand workers rights are held across the board and that the city will invest in enforcement to hold bad actors to account. Wage theft is a persistent issue and the city continues to not invest in expanding its own ability which undermines the whole system. We need to invest in reinforcing the worker rights we have passed and purport to stand by.

I am supportive and really excited about the movement of unionization we have seen over these past two years. This includes city council staffers which is great. I say, "People over Profit all day everyday." As a socialist member, we have spent a lot of time talking to residents about workplace organizing and every worker's right to safety, fair wages and dignity and respect. I am one of the co-prime sponsors on the Secure Jobs Act that would prohibit firing anyone without a just cause. I will continue to fight for these kinds of shifts which recenter the focus on protecting workers over corporations or corporate interests.

11) What policy and administrative changes are needed for NYC government to ensure sufficient quality housing that is actually affordable for existing residents in Brooklyn neighborhoods? Do you have a plan to reduce and prevent homelessness in Brooklyn and NYC? Explain your plan.

Our city has been in an ongoing housing crisis. Beyond food insecurity, housing is the number one issue residents come to our office for assistance. Like many other issue areas the state holds an outsized power in helping us truly address these housing and homeless issues. The fundamental problem we face is that housing has been commodified and because of that the industry is solely focused on profit, not on housing people. Short of our government truly embracing social housing, the response is multilayered.

Unfortunately, the Mayor's primary constituency is the real estate lobby and I'm afraid that his proposals are mostly rhetoric with no real investment. Some of the proposals I have been advocating for include:

- Passage of three bills at the city level. Collectively these bills center tenants, take property out of the speculative market that drives up prices and create a pathway for nonprofit developers to compete and get access to land to build the kind of housing that we desperately need. The bills include:
 - Intro 196: COPA
 - Intro 637: Disposition of real property of the city (Public Land for Public Good)
 - Int 714: Establishing a Land Bank
- We must clear the backlog in the shelter system where it takes almost two years for people to find housing. This means we need to address arbitrary and contradictory



administrative barriers and regulations. I am a co-sponsor of some legislation to address this issue, but more needs to be done.

- Investment in low-income, social housing. We are not addressing where the greatest need is. AMI is not the right tool. Our city and state need to make investments commensurate with the urgency and scope of the issue.
- We must also continue to preserve the units we have and crucial displacement. This includes continued expansion and support of Right to Counsel, protecting small homeowners and expanding opportunities for homeownership to everyday New Yorkers. Right now, HPD does not have enough inspectors to address housing conditions, this is a real problem in stabilizing stock and addressing critical conditions that put residents in unsafe environments.
- We must break the cycle of big-money, developer-led; reactive, unresourced, and slapdash development in our District. Our lack of comprehensive planning as a City is part of this problem. We will be launching an effort to develop a development framework for our community that will help us to move with intention and clarity. The Brooklyn Borough President is similarly also trying to do this borough wide to address the problems lack of planning perpetuates.

12) What policies would you pass or enforce to ensure public housing/NYCHA repair, upkeep and security, and access to alternate housing and services when lacking essentials such as heat, gas, electricity, etc.

As the Chair of Public Housing at the City Council, an enormous part of my first year governing has been focused on addressing the compounding and unrelenting issues facing tenants in NYCHA. One of my greatest frustrations is that NYCHA is actually a state authority and the City Council has little authority and ability to pass policies to govern the agency. Moreover, the state has had little interest in oversight or investing in the authority which has directly contributed to its current state of affairs.

This year, I will focus on pushing my state colleagues to double down on oversight, demand a financial audit of how NYCHA spends its resources, engage in deeper dives on operations and its impacts on residents like contractor accountability, and demand increased federal government investment. I have been advocating for greater oversight authority, but it has been slow going. We will work to continue to empower residents to hold NYCHA and city agencies to account for all the ways they harm or ignore them. We will continue to push work order reform and HPD to take NYCHA seriously and hold them to account as well rather than allowing them to police themselves.

13) Describe your vision for public safety in New York City? What, if any, functions would you like to see removed from the police department? What agencies would assume the functions removed from the NYPD?

The current system simply provides only punishment and dehumanization. Furthermore,



punishment and incarceration are not accountable nor do they repair harm. We know it is true that hurt people hurt people. My long-term vision is the creation of a public health and safety system focused on healing, human dignity, and repair.

For this kind of transformation, this would require changes at every level of government, because this system is enabled by multiple systems. At the local level, Council's role would include: 1) changing the narrative of the system and being very deliberate about language; 2) eliminating policies/practices that incentivize the current system such as broken windows policing, the criminalization of poverty, mental illness or drug use; 3) enacting policies that divert people from system contact (such as pre-arrest diversion and rehauling the 911 system, having robust services so that people can get what they need first) and decarcerate (removing people who are needlessly entangled (poverty crimes, girls and TGNC youth, adolescent behavior, mental illness, technical parole violators, bail, pardons) ; 4) divesting from public monies from police and carceral systems and reinvesting those resources into other services that support community health and well-Being 5) funding those services we know are critical to the health and wellness of communities.

I would remove police from many functions: schools, mental health response, homeless sweeps, traffic enforcement, youth development programs among others. When systems break down, rather than address the issues we insert police which is unfair to police as well.

14) Do you support changes to the ULURP process and to other NYC zoning mechanisms? If so, what specific changes do you support?

I do support changes to ULURP which is a thoroughly broken process that is biased towards developers. I am supportive of a new process that centers equity and people over profit. This process would include not only expanding the definition of "environmental impact" but also the geographic area that the analysis includes (impacts don't end one block from the property). The most important part of reforming ULURP would be to have the city adopt a comprehensive planning approach that would actually allow the city to engage in equitable development and a holistic approach.

15) Following the Dobbs decision, what steps do you think the City Council should take to increase reproductive healthcare access and to do so equitably?

Dobbs is just horrendous, but the right has been systematically working on this for a longtime. I am very proud to be part of the Council that took immediate steps to protect reproductive healthcare for NYC residents and all who come here. We passed the "NYC Abortion Rights Act", a package of legislation to safeguard and advance abortion and reproductive health care which includes a \$1 million fund to support direct access to abortion care for people facing barriers to such vital health care. I am proud that it is the



largest funding commitment made by a city in US. We also passed a number of bills to address maternal mortality which disparity impacts Black women. While we accomplished this there is more to do in the space of ensuring all people get access. So we will need to be dogged in monitoring, closing loopholes and adequately funding comprehensive reproductive and sexual healthcare and services.

16) What is your position on the Mayor's plan to restructure medical benefits to a Medicare Advantage Plan for all past and present NYC teachers and other municipal workers? What actions do you propose to take with respect to this plan?

I am opposed to amending the Code because:

- NYC must meet its obligation to retirees.
- The MLC created a fund to help stabilize impacts of rising healthcare costs, but used about \$1 billion on other things without ever replacing it.
- The proposal did not address the root causes of the problem and the city would be revisiting the issue within 5 years.

In turn we must do several things:

- Put together a taskforce to figure out what structures need to be put in place that are transparent and can address the issues at hand.
- Retirees identified a number of savings, we must look at those seriously and implement savings measures.
- We must reel in hospitals, pharmaceutical companies on costs - it is simply out of control (the city has started putting in some common sense guardrails) but needs to do more in conjunction with state and federal partners since it is a multi-jurisdictional issue.