



Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2021 Borough President Candidate Questionnaire

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

1) If elected, what would be your top priority in your first term?

Building Back Brooklyn Even Better. That will require on the ground engagement with communities, and strategically using capital funds to invest in infrastructure supportive of communities – like universal access to broadband. I would adopt a **holistic, intersectional and intergenerational framework for land use, transportation, energy and economic decision-making**. We must increase equity in transportation infrastructure (transit, bicycle, pedestrian), and energy production and distribution. We must meet the climate crisis head on by moving our economy to 100% renewable energy. We also need to move toward public power - for too long New York has been under the thumb of privately-owned corporate utilities. I've been a vocal advocate calling out ConEd and National Grid for providing shoddy service and hiking up their rates while their CEOs get richer. We need to transition to publicly-owned, democratically-accountable renewable sources of energy right away.

As an experienced activist on progressive transportation and environmental projects, I have seen first-hand how the voice of the average person is rarely at the table on decisions that impact their lives. I want to change that. Because I was often one of those people sitting in an auditorium late at night trying to impact change - I will put the voice, the creativity, and the intelligence of the community at the forefront of the rebuilding from COVID-19 and re-imagining that Brooklyn now faces. The Borough President is in a unique position to build a coalition of Brooklynites that can guide and implement real change. As Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm said, if there's no seat at the table for you, pull up a folding chair. **As your Borough President, I will work towards a more vibrant and inclusive Brooklyn, regardless of race, class, age, gender or sexual orientation...folks won't need a folding chair.**

My entire career has been about lifting the voices and fighting for the rights of those who have been historically marginalized. I will listen to Brooklynites, harness the energy of a strong coalition of citizen experts, and use the visibility of this position -- and capital dollars -- to make a difference in our children's education, our small businesses, environmental justice, housing, health care, transit, gun violence prevention, and an overhaul to our land use policy.

Through the capital dollars and the bully pulpit, the BP has a unique position from which to help shape vision, policies, and program needs of the City. Any plan to help Brooklyn recover from the impacts of COVID-19 that could be effective needs to be the product of on-the-ground engagement with stakeholders, and I intend to make this type of engagement a central piece of my work as Borough President. We need to talk to impacted parties about their needs, and then advocate, organize, and fund accordingly. I intend to



bring back the stakeholder task force approach of a former Borough President, with my own approach which is rooted in community engagement and empowerment.

2) What personal and/or professional experiences do you believe make you uniquely qualified to run for Borough President? Attach resume or CV if desired.

I am a longtime community activist, a disability rights attorney, and progressive Assemblymember for 6 years. I am running to become the first ever female Brooklyn President. Not only is it time for a woman to lead Brooklyn, but I am a woman with substantial experience in the community, legal, and political arenas. I am a fierce advocate for Brooklyn and I have never shied away from standing up to powerful interests or big developers. I am an extraordinarily accessible legislator, with a storefront office and frequently hosting public meet and greets.

I worked as an attorney in private practice and opened my own small law firm, concentrating on disability discrimination in standardized testing, higher education and employment. I was called upon to testify before the US Senate on amending the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 2008. I tried the landmark case of Bartlett v. New York State Board of Law Examiners. I was an adjunct Associate Professor at Fordham University School of Law from 1998 until recently. I also served as staff attorney at Hofstra Law School's Disabilities Law Clinic from 1992-1996. Before entering the law, I was a teacher of the deaf, a postsecondary disability services provider (Gallaudet University) and a certified sign language interpreter for over 20 years.

As a community activist, I have been involved in many re-zoning and land use issues. I co-founded a coalition of residents fighting the Atlantic Yards project, which still hasn't delivered its promised affordable housing, and has significantly displaced community members of color. On a positive note, I led community groups in envisioning what we wanted within the framework imposed by an Urban Renewal Area designation to plan for developing 6.5 acres of parking lots into 37.5% low and moderate income housing at Hoyt Schermerhorn. It is an excellent model for community-based planning. It is so successful that few people know about it now because no one is arguing about it!

I have had significant legislative victories against big industries and institutions that needed to change- a major gun violence prevention bill (red flag law or ERPO) currently being replicated across the country, the campaign finance reform bill to close the notorious LLC loophole, a gender neutral bill for firefighters and police officers, and an education equity bill for those with disabilities, and more.

Finally, as a Democratic District Leader for 10 years, I stood up to Vito Lopez, when it was a tough time to be a reformer. We've come a long way from days when I had to fight for rules reform and co-chaired the rules committee, opening it up to people who were not District Leaders and spearheading the establishment of the Independent Judicial Screening panel, which in addition to bringing rigor to the process, also increased the number of LGBTQ+ members and women serving on the panels that would evaluate who was qualified for County's endorsement.

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

504 Democrats, a city-wide disability rights political club has just endorsed me, and I will be making that announcement publicly soon. I also anticipate a few other endorsements this month, and more in the new year. I launched my campaign in October and have just recently started the endorsement process. Fortunately, most groups are also just starting the endorsement process now, opting to begin after the November general election.



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.

As a District Leader and then as an Assemblymember, I have never taken contributions from real estate developers. I am not accepting campaign contributions from law enforcement unions or the fossil fuel industry.

5) How do you propose helping NYC recover from the COVID pandemic and resulting economic recession, particularly given the projected shortfall in city revenue?

The Borough President has capital dollars, a bully pulpit from which to advocate for Brooklyn and her people, and it can also have a strong public presence to help shape vision, policies, and program needs of the City. This office is, to a large extent, what you make of it. I am going to continue to pressure the federal government to provide relief, and New York State to enact several revenue raising measures that are currently on the table. I am one of the few state legislators who is part of a revenue justice group with state economists who are looking out for all New Yorkers, not just the wealthy. We need a massive infusion of funds to aid the borough or we will be fighting over the crumbs.

Any plan that could be effective needs to be the product of on-the-ground engagement with stakeholders, and I intend to make this type of engagement a central piece of my work as Borough President. We need to talk to impacted parties about their needs, and then advocate, organize, and fund accordingly. I intend to bring back the stakeholder task force approach of a former Borough President, with my approach which is rooted in community work.

I have several specific initiatives and bills that I am pushing, including reforms to unemployment insurance, subsidies for individuals and small businesses so they can pay rent and mortgages, and revenue raising measures. I will also advocate for single payer health care in New York State (which passed the Assembly) and universal child care so people can stay healthy and return to work, with child care being one of the top obstacles before us right now in people's ability to return to the workforce.

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? Do you support D15's integration plan as it has been implemented? What changes, if any, would you make to the current D15 integration plan?

I will continue to advocate for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)'s foundation aid so that schools are equitably funded.

One of my top priorities is to ensure that every child in Brooklyn can read. For me, education can be a great equalizer, but education hasn't been equal in our City. Every child should be screened for dyslexia and other related learning disabilities when they are in early elementary school because reading is, to borrow an old phrase, fundamental. With early identification, we will be better able to target needed interventions before kids fall behind. I also hold a bill, which the Assembly passed but the Senate did not take up this year, to screen people who are incarcerated for dyslexia. Our educational system is not a level playing field -- while dyslexia amongst the general population is around 20%, research shows that between 50% -75% of people who are incarcerated have reading disabilities; too often these disabilities go undiagnosed and/or unaddressed in communities of color. Literacy is a matter of social justice, and I will continue to fight for this. I tried the landmark case of Bartlett v. New York State Board of Law Examiners in this area. That experience



has convinced me that early identification and reforming the way teachers are taught to teach reading are critical social justice issues.

I support the D15 integration plan and my office and I attended meetings throughout the process. So far it is working well. Experience will reveal where changes may need to be made. I am not sure we are there yet. We have also encouraged D13 in its work towards creating its own integration plan. The issue of reducing screens for school admission needs to be addressed broadly, and equitably in a culturally competent way.

7) How would you have handled the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 academic year? How would you prepare for a second wave of this pandemic? How would you propose to ensure that the needs of highly vulnerable children with special needs, who are homeless, come from poor families, and/or live in households without adults who could aid their learning are not left further behind when remote learning has to be relied on?

Overall on re-opening, I tend to agree with Councilman Mark Treyger's approach. In part, it is because he taught in the schools for over 20 years and is very familiar with how they work. As a former educator I know that the reasons schools work is the dynamic: the leadership and the engagement of stakeholders - kids, parents, teachers creating a school community. We should have reopened first for the younger grades and students with disabilities, as they are in the most formative years and are more harmed by remote learning through which they cannot get the special attention they need.

The City's plan was to close schools if 3% of citywide COVID-19 tests were positive over a seven-day period. However, this plan was not properly conveyed to the public, inadequate accommodations have been made for remote learners, and there is concern as to why the plan did not allow parts of the city or school system with low rates of infection to remain open. There was also confusion as to whether the City and State had different COVID-19 numbers, and this displayed a lack of not only coordination and planning, but leadership. I would have included a broader array of stakeholders in the re-opening plan, including parents with kids in shelters and those with disabilities. I also would have also used evidence to examine the possibility of keeping the schools open in areas where the rates of COVID-19 are low. Culturally competent communication is key.

We know that many kids still lack access to wi-fi, tablets, or the space to engage in remote learning. One of my goals is to wire Brooklyn. I will work with government, communities, and local organizations to assess the need and engage with community and businesses to create a mechanism to bring reliable broadband throughout the Borough equitably. We need look no further than the challenges in remote learning in our schools to see how profound a need this is, or to see the inability of many community members to access Zoom or other online services due to lack of funds for such services or unreliable service.

I take the public health crisis that continues to loom before us very seriously and support actions to slow the spread of COVID and protect our teachers and students. I am so grateful to our school staff who are working diligently to ensure that the school day is safe and engaging; many of whom are parents themselves and who must also be able to feel safe in their environments. This means that if they cannot work or feel unsafe, they need to still have full job protections and benefits. The City also needs to ramp up its testing and provide clarity on the current testing in schools, given the concerns in this area so that we aren't putting teachers and kids at risk.

I am particularly concerned about children who are homeless and those with special needs. Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza should open in-person specialized education programs so that these students get the services they need and are legally entitled to. Too many students are struggling at home because they need social emotional support and multi-sensory interventions to learn and thrive, which can only be



provided in highly specialized programs. This includes students with autism, intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities or who require bilingual special education services. I have written to the Chancellor and the mayor about this with my colleague Assemblyman Robert Carroll.

8) Do you support allowing non-citizen New York City residents to vote in City-based elections? Why or why not?

Yes, non-citizens are our neighbors who work and live and pay taxes here, and ought to have a say in who represents them.

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

Fortunately, the CFB system is quite robust, especially compared to the state system. I am unaware of any efforts to further modify it, but would be interested in hearing from CBID on this issue. As you may know, I was the main sponsor of the major NYS campaign finance bill to close the LLC loophole on the state level.

10) Now that the State government has passed the Reproductive Health Act, what steps would you have the Council and City Hall take to increase reproductive healthcare access, including maternal healthcare, and to do so equitably?

One issue is resources and the equitable provision of funds to clinics and culturally competent and trauma informed service providers. Some of the federal funds in this area have been cut, and New York has allocated additional funds but we know that more is needed.

Another key issue is to better monitor centers masquerading as providing reproductive health care, but that don't have any qualified medical personnel on staff. I've been fighting to ensure that women aren't duped into going to fake health clinics aka "crisis pregnancy centers", that thwart their access to real health care. This is an increasing problem and one that is hard to pin down and proven difficult to enforce. This even includes a fake center right in Downtown Brooklyn, purposefully in the same building as Planned Parenthood.

Another major obstacle before us is ensuring better access to comprehensive sex education. This has been a campaign that I have worked on for years with the advocates and through the state pro-choice legislative caucus.

Access to maternal health care and the racial and socio-economic disparities in maternal mortality are significant. We need to reduce poverty and income inequality, pass single payer health care in NYS, better train the medical community in implicit bias, better support and reimburse midwives who are invaluable in this area, support community health care providers, and ensure more diversity in the healthcare field through expanding loan forgiveness and scholarship programs.

I have long been a fierce advocate of reproductive health, and first worked in an abortion clinic decades ago.

11) 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 need big structural change. We need sustainable revenue sources directed at MTA operations, hardware and software, such as a state of the art signal system, regular maintenance of station security. An



infinitesimal payroll tax increase would generate billions. Further, congestion pricing fees, pied a terre and other revenue raisers are receiving increased support among members of the Assembly, and hopefully the Senate. The MTA can reduce its costs by putting in smarter management policies and with improved systems, would be able to break the lock that certain contractors have with the MTA because they are familiar with the byzantine system. This drives up costs and delays maintenance and improvements because too few people can do the work.

We need to prioritize the improvement of the bus network because the solution to the lack of public transit in transit deserts is to increase public transit. Building new subway stations is prohibitive; increasing bus service (buses are all accessible) and re-instituting inter-borough service between Brooklyn and Manhattan would make this more viable and accessible for commuters, and I will be advocating for this.

We also need to build out our protected bike lane networks and increase and improve the location of Citi Bike stations. The Borough President has capital dollars that can be used to fund the infrastructure necessary to improve the safety and efficiency of our bike and pedestrian access. We need to improve curb cuts at street crossings as many are poorly built and unsafe.

We need better enforcement of bike lanes and misuse of parking placards. The borough president does not have enforcement authority, but can use the bully pulpit to advocate for improved enforcement and can set a good example.

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

I am a staunch advocate for workers rights -- our people are our City's best resource. On many occasions over the years, I have taken a strong stand on behalf of workers to advocate for fair union elections and employment practices, and I will continue to do so if elected Borough President. Usually, I collaborate with unions and workers to identify what would be the most helpful role for me to play in a particular situation - from writing a letter, making a phone call, going to a rally, legislation, a press event, etc. Just in this past year, I have stood with teachers at schools who were not unionized, yoga instructors, home care and health care workers, airport workers, legal aid workers, and many others.

I also am a disability rights lawyer who has represented workers, and I was the chair of the NYS Assembly Subcommittee on Worker Safety, so I bring not only a sense of justice and fairness to the issue, but also my legal background.

13) 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?

I believe we need to look carefully at policies, practices and procedures to ensure that city agencies are capable of delivering services (education, food, senior services, health care, mental health care) in culturally competent and trauma informed ways. We need to increase physical and communications access for people with disabilities, broadband (wiring all of Brooklyn), increased language access, and assistance to businesses, education and health care in order to make these changes.

14) What policy and practice changes are needed for NYC government to ensure sufficient quality housing



that actually is affordable for existing residents in Brooklyn neighborhoods?

We need to pass the good cause eviction bill. We can't build our way out of this housing crisis - we need to also ensure that the housing we have now is more affordable.

We need to ensure that housing in new development is actually affordable, and that means reforming ULURP so the community is at the table from the beginning, as opposed to fighting to add or slightly expand meager affordable housing to an existing proposal. ULURP itself needs to be reformed and rewritten. As Borough President I will engage with communities at the outset and listen to their needs for development.

When projects are proposed I will be forearmed with real information about the lived experiences of various communities, their hopes and desires for their neighborhoods and the challenges they face. For example, as we learn more about climate change and various forms of pollution, including chemical toxicity, addressing development cannot be according to the old playbook. Brooklyn has two Superfund sites (Gowanus canal and Newtown Creek) and various fossil fuel impacted areas, such as bus depots and solid waste processing facilities, to name but a few. Addressing these needs demands clarity of thought and purpose armed with real scientific data. As Borough President, I will create a process to assess and reinvent ULURP with an eye towards Charter revision based not on theory, but on the facts on the ground.

15) 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 and hot water? What is your position on "privatization" of public housing/NYCHA, and on City government sale of public housing "open areas" (outdoor seating & recreation plots) and air rights to private developers?

The role of the borough president with NYCHA is like that of most other big issues, one of working with stakeholders to engage and encourage and support better allocation of resources to repair and upgrade NYCHA housing. NYCHA needs massive federal investment as well as state and local investment and honesty in communicating with residents, securing funds to provide jobs and workforce development to NYCHA residents within NYCHA. I do not support privatizing NYCHA, but am fully aware that residents of some public housing developments have supported RAD and believe they should have the right to engage in decisions that affect their lives. I did not support the "next gen" approach to building a mix of affordable and market rate housing on available NYCHA land/parking lots. The current blueprint proposal will be the subject of a hearing on Tuesday and, while I have been briefed on the proposal, I hope to learn more at the hearing before taking a position on it.

16) Given the City's Covid and post-Covid economic crisis, how would you approach your role in addressing the city's carceral system, including the plan to close Rikers?

I have long advocated for criminal justice reforms to dismantle the deep flaws that perpetuate racial and economic bias in our judicial system. I have fought to end solitary confinement, and to break the school-to-prison pipeline (I have a bill to do the same). I was one of the few state legislators to stand strong against the bail rollback. I support legalizing marijuana, including the allocation of revenue to communities most harmed by the drug war. I also pushed for the STAT Act to make statistical information regarding interactions with police available to the public. I also continue to push for the Fair and Timely Parole Act and the Elder Parole Bill.

I advocated to the Governor, DOCCS, and the public that advocated back in March for releasing older people who were incarcerated and others in order to reduce the spread of COVID, co-authoring with



Corrections Committee chair David Weprin a letter to the Governor and DOCCS to that effect.

I have engaged with the Brooklyn DA's office on reentry programs and working with young people to avoid gun violence and to address educational gaps. They are very interested in my bill to screen folks for reading disability, for example. I will work with the DA to ensure that Brooklyn is at the forefront of innovative programs and alternatives to incarceration.

16) 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 assume the functions removed from the NYPD?

We need to reallocate funding to various social and educational services, domestic violence prevention and counseling services, and cure violence programs that work in the gun violence prevention space. We ask police to do too many things for which they are neither trained nor for which law enforcement is appropriate. This includes basic transit functions like giving transit and parking tickets.

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

Reforming and shaping key charter mandated roles of the Borough President in formal land use review procedures is a key goal for me. A local land use boondoggle started my civic activism in the early 1990s and the crises in how we plan -- or don't -- remains a passion of mine.

ULURP is outmoded and literally sets up the community to fight someone else's idea of what the area needs. That's backwards in my mind. To that end, we must ensure that communities are at the table planning for their community because land use projects inevitably have significant environmental and economic impacts on our communities - and projects should reflect the communities' vision.

We need to completely reset the table and put community in the driver's seat in the initial planning. We have to stop tinkering with ULURP (which is not just flawed but fundamentally unfair to the community) and reliance on zoning as an answer to what should be comprehensive urban planning. Zoning is one tool, a rough one, and dramatically overused in NYC to the detriment of our communities; spurring gentrification and displacement of people of color and people with low incomes. Too often, we settle for the crumbs and praise projects that bring a meager amount of affordable housing and make developers rich, often with little to no transparency.

As someone who has read through dense draft EISs and engaged in the flawed public input portion of ULURP, I would also appoint a technical advisor to work with the Community Boards who can answer technical questions on engineering, environmental impacts, waste and sewage treatment, and the affordable housing levels, etc.

My experience living in the Downtown Brooklyn area for decades has given me a birdseye view of the intersection of land use, transportation, health and environment, which led me to support congestion pricing and the equalization of tolling policies years before Mayor Bloomberg proposed congestion pricing in 2007. I led the community advocacy that resulted in the first traffic calming study in the City. I advocated for burying the Gowanus Expressway into a tunnel due to its environmental impacts on the community decades ago; not only would such a project improve rates of asthma and pulmonary disorders, and help decarbonize Brooklyn, it would create a large number of good paying jobs of all kinds. It is literally the only fiscally responsible and environmentally sustainable approach.



Lastly, reforming the land use process won't be easy, and people who benefit from it will fight against it. But, I have a strong sense of the process, and I know how to get things done.

18) Do you have a plan to reduce and prevent homelessness in Brooklyn and NYC? Explain your plan.

I have long advocated for not just more affordable housing, but more deeply affordable housing and for more housing support for those who need it. We need to support approaches in land use that prioritize more supportive housing - a model that we know works.

The City's housing subsidies need to target people with lower incomes. The percentage of AMI that is used is often too high. I also support setting aside a substantial number of units - at least 15% - created in new state or city subsidized affordable housing projects for homeless families and individuals and setting in motion their eventual moving to permanent housing. We also need to ensure that folks making less than that who are underemployed, retired or on PA/SSI/SSD can remain in their homes.