



## Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2021 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

**Candidate Name:** Aaron Foldenauer      **Office Sought:** Mayor  
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**Campaign Contact Name:** Aaron Foldenauer      **Campaign Contact Phone**  
**Campaign Contact Email:** info@aaronfornyc.com      **Name of person filling out this questionnaire**

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?

As the next Mayor, Aaron will be focused on getting New York City moving again. We will need to reinvent neighborhoods to adapt to new work-from-home trends. We should also rethink our quarantine and testing requirements in a way that invites the world to visit our City. Because the tourism industry is crucial to our economy, Aaron will restart tourism to the City in a safe and innovative way. Tourists coming to the City will be given a free rapid COVID test upon arrival at an NYC-area airport. Once they test negative, they will be allowed to freely travel within the tristate area and enjoy the attractions the City has to offer. This will show the world that the great assets of our City, including restaurants, small businesses and museums, are open for business.

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

The *Gotham Gazette* recently recognized Aaron for his work as an “environmental advocate” in New York City politics. A veteran of New York City politics, Aaron Foldenauer has been recognized for his work addressing difficult policy issues and combating government corruption. After personally witnessing police officials seize political literature from members of the public in violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution during his run for City Council in 2017, Aaron filed several legal complaints against the City of New York. Shortly thereafter, in response to complaints that Aaron filed, the City agreed to never again repeat that unlawful conduct.

Furthermore, Aaron, an attorney, has been dedicated in providing free legal work to those who cannot afford it. For example, he successfully represented a youth mentoring organization in Washington Heights that was being harassed by another building occupant. Aaron eventually won this organization \$50,000, the right to remain in its offices, and the right to bring its certified therapy dog into the building which it uses as part of its programming to comfort troubled teenagers. Aaron has also represented a number of low-income, local New York City artists who have faced significant legal challenges.

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

Lists of endorsements will be forthcoming as the campaign unfolds.



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 non-establishment candidate, Aaron is focused on small-dollar fundraising and taking his message directly to the people. Aaron is not accepting any corporate contributions.

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

Our office workers are not coming to work. Tourists are no longer arriving at our airports. And small businesses are struggling. Aaron has proposed an array of innovative policies to get New York City moving again. We must encourage tourists to return. Empty hotels can be used for affordable housing. Midtown should be transformed into a vibrant business and residential neighborhood. Aaron will not wait to revitalize our City and get all New Yorkers back to work. With respect to the budget, Aaron will make the difficult decisions that we must make given the fact that our City now faces a tremendous fiscal crisis—all because of the inaction of our current elected officials.

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?

Aaron supports a longer school year, which will provide substantial benefits to minority students in particular. In the United States, the average number of days students are in school per year is 178 days, and children in New York are in school only 180 days. Countries that are more academically competitive like England, Italy, and China have their students in school much longer: 192 days, 204 days, and 260 days per year, respectively. Consequently, in the United States, many students, especially those from historically disadvantaged groups, start the academic year each fall with achievement levels lower than where they were at the beginning of the summer break. This summer learning loss, often called the "summer slide," occurs when students are out of school for extended periods of time. A longer school year and a shorter summer should be enforced to facilitate academic improvement and to stem summer learning loss. With respect to the D15 integration plan, Aaron will continue to assess the results of the plan and make policy changes as appropriate.

Diverse, high-quality schools across our city are crucial to ensure that every child has the same learning opportunity. Unfortunately, the curricula in our schools are warped. Studies show that only 37% of students that graduate from our City schools are actually prepared for college. Our career politicians trumpet "rising graduation rates," but in reality, we are merely passing our kids through the system—particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Our children need to be taught how to overcome adversity, but instead, our schools are coddling our children. Thus, our children are not graduating with the critical thinking skills that they need.



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?

During the pandemic, many students are not attending school at all, and other students are attending in-person classes only sporadically. This not only shortchanges our children from the education they deserve but also fails to consider the impact that this amended schedule has on minority children and the disadvantaged. Studies have shown that schoolchildren are unlikely to contribute to COVID super-spreader events and statewide testing results have showed that relatively few students have tested positive. We must assure that children have the option to attend school safely on a full-time basis. Aaron will encourage outdoor learning when possible and turn vacant office spaces into classrooms to facilitate social distancing. COVID-19 remains a concern in our community and Aaron's plan to reopen our schools keeps safety at the forefront.

In recent years, there has been the rise of "helicopter parents" who obsessively monitor their children. Unfortunately, the mentality of over-protecting our children now pervades our school system. Adults don't live in a bubble, and neither do our children. We must not over-protect our children and, instead, we must teach our children how to think and the benefits of taking reasonable risks in our competitive world.

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

I encourage any resident of New York City to get involved in politics. The more people who care about the future of our City, the better.

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

The campaign finance system in New York City is too complicated and ends up benefiting the failed political establishment. Aaron will fight to simplify our campaign finance system so that regular people can run for office without seeking professional help. We must encourage more people to run for office, not fewer.

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?

The lack of adequate healthcare remains a public health problem. Aaron has fought to stop hospital closures and will continue to fight to ensure that New Yorkers have access to sufficient health care. We also must make sure that our NYC Health & Hospitals system is adequately funded, particularly given the devastating impacts of the ongoing pandemic.

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 and in the City as a whole?

Trust in our subways is vital to getting the City back to work. The good news is that the air recirculation rate in our subway cars meets or exceeds the standards set for hospital operating rooms. Aaron will launch an awareness campaign to demonstrate to the public that traveling via subway is very safe, particularly with the addition of new safety protocols. Aaron will also ensure that additional filtration measures are implemented so that New York City subways have the cleanest air of any transit network in the country.

Aaron will also create a text hotline for subway riders to report disturbances. Currently, when a resident encounters a problem in the subway, there is no easy way to report it to either the MTA or the police. Aaron will establish a new reporting system in which any rider will be able to immediately send a text message to the authorities to report a problem, whether it be a mechanical issue, criminal activity, or some other uncomfortable situation. In each subway car, a car number will be posted that will identify for the authorities the precise location of the problem. Once the rider sends a text message to report an issue, personnel manning a 24-hour response desk will be able to immediately react. Police officers and other personnel will be strategically positioned throughout the subway system on 24/7 basis so that they can immediately respond to these reports as appropriate. This innovative SMS-based reporting system will create a safe and comfortable commute for all New Yorkers.

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?

As an attorney, Aaron has practiced employment law, and thus, fairness in the workplace is important to him. Aaron has routinely stood up against wrongful conduct, including by representing a number of women and minorities who were victims of employment discrimination. As a trained employment attorney, Aaron will fight for equality in our workplaces.

We must also not forget that small businesses employ an overwhelming proportion of our immigrants. Without the hard work of our immigrants, this City would cease to be the amazing place that it is today. Aaron will fight for our small businesses, which are under assault. Our diverse population relies on these small businesses, and tourists choose to visit this phenomenal city to experience a diversity of retail offerings and historic sights.

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?

As an attorney, Aaron has been a champion for minority and female lawyers attempting to succeed. For years, he served on the Diversity Committee of a large law firm, advocating for equal opportunities for minorities and women in the legal profession.

A tremendous problem facing New York City is the unemployment caused by the ongoing pandemic, which has disproportionately affected communities of color. Upwards of one million New Yorkers are out of work and lines at food banks are long. Aaron's job as an attorney is to make correct decisions for his clients, and he will bring much-needed common-sense leadership to New York City. Aaron will eliminate waste from the



system and bring back efficient government, which will lure New Yorkers back to the City. Aaron will not just work with his Commissioners, but also regularly interact with workers on the front lines, given that they are the ones who truly know what's going on.

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?

As income inequality has increased in this City and across the country, families and individuals are priced out of the neighborhoods they grew up in. Displacement has become the norm. This is unacceptable. Aaron will work to preserve our neighborhoods and that new affordable housing units are built for residents in lower income brackets. We must keep people in their homes wherever and whenever possible. Aaron will ensure that tax breaks are not given to luxury buildings; instead, Aaron will offer tax breaks for only moderate- and low-income housing.

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?

On Aaron's first day in office as the next Mayor of New York City, Aaron will call for a top-to-bottom audit of the New York City Housing Authority. NYCHA public housing facilities are in dire need of improvement on all fronts. In past several years, we have seen too many cases of dangerous and even deadly living conditions, including not only chronic issues with mold contamination, heat, air conditioning, and electricity problems, but also general neglect such as deadly elevator and smoke alarm failures. This is not acceptable and residents of one of the greatest cities in the world should not continue to be forced to deal with these problems. I will hold city officials accountable and fight for much-needed reform for our residents of public housing.

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?

The status quo with respect to Rikers Island is troublesome. However, the \$11+ billion price tag to build new borough-based jails looks increasingly unaffordable. In addition, new opposition has arisen to the borough-based jails and a judge recently struck down the City's plans to build the proposed high-rise jail in Chinatown, which is a key part of the plan to close Rikers. Thus, as the next Mayor, Aaron will look anew at the best way to address the issues at Rikers Island and a path forward.

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 can easily trim our police budget if we focus on making our police more efficient. In Aaron's neighborhood, Lower Manhattan, police officers are routinely seen idle, sitting in their cars. This must change.

We need a police service, not a police force. Unfortunately, our police officers are given training that overemphasizes combat, and are equipped with increasingly powerful weapons. Emblematic of this wrongheaded mindset was Mayor Bloomberg's statement that the NYPD was "his army" and the "seventh biggest army in the world." Unfortunately, the NYPD is organized like an army with sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. We should eliminate the military-style titles we currently give to our officers, which will go a long way towards ending the militarized mentality that pervades the police. Instead of the military-style ranks that are currently used, officers on street patrol could be called "Patrol Officers," supervising officers could be called "Managing Officers," and precinct and department heads could be called "Directing Officers." Changes such as this one will go a long way in ensuring that minorities are treated fairly by our officers.

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

Few New Yorkers can afford the luxury condos that have recently dotted the landscape of New York City. Aaron will fight for the realignment of incentives so that the real estate industry will build more rental housing, which is what this City needs the most. More rental units will mean more choices for consumers, and ultimately, lower prices for people who actually live and work here in New York City.

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

Aaron has proposed a comprehensive plan to get the people of our City back to work. Bringing back jobs to our city will go a long way to solve our housing and homelessness crisis. The homeless problem is one affecting all New Yorkers and we, as a society, need to understand and correct the issues and illnesses afflicting New York's homeless population. The City is now routinely putting homeless people in random hotels without adequate services and at a cost of upwards of \$600/night. The City is also shuttling the homeless in and out of Emergency Rooms without adequate post-care; these practices perpetuate, rather than fix, the underlying problem. Aaron will advocate for rehabilitative homeless shelters or halfway houses that provide mental health, medical, education, and job training services that will strive to get people on their feet and back to leading productive lives.