



QCDC Candidate Questionnaire 2020

Thank you for applying for the Queens Central Democratic Club (QCDC) endorsement. If you have any questions about this document or the endorsement process feel free to email us at qcdcny@gmail.com. Please email us the completed questionnaire by Friday January 17.

Full Name:

Position: Queens Borough President

The Candidate

1. Do you identify as progressive? **Yes**
2. Why do you identify as a progressive?

My record on the New York City Council shows that I have successfully stood up against 1) gender and race discrimination; 2) the kind of crony politicking that led to some city council districts receiving unfairly low capital-improvement funds at the expense of taxpayers, regardless of need; 3) the rampant human-rights abuses that occurred at Rikers; 4) the incredible fiscal corruption that occurred in the Queens Library System that in the end only hurt regular people in low-income areas trying to use their neighborhood branch library.

3. What is the single most important issue to you as a candidate for elected office and why?

The most single important issue in this election for Queens Borough President is for the next borough president to address the great inequities between Queens and the other boroughs. Name an issue, from transit funding to culture/arts funding to per-pupil public school funding to affordable-housing subsidies -- Queens is the least-assisted borough. A true progressive agenda is one founded on equity; Queens needs to receive its Fair Share from the city's budget.

4. What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders? **TWU Local 100 and IBEW Local Union 3.**

Pledges

1. Will you pledge not to take any campaign contributions from for-profit corporations, for-profit corporate PACs, real estate developers, corporate lobbyists, and professional landlords?

Yes. However, I'm unclear on the definition of "professional landlords." Does that include regular citizens who happen to earn income on a few extra properties? I would reject contributions from "large" professional landlords if these individuals or corporations are so identified.

2. Are you willing to sign the QCC4All Accountability Pledge? **Yes.**

Housing

1. Do you believe housing is a human right? **YES**
2. What do you believe are the causes of the housing crisis in New York?

In NYC part of the problem stems from our city officials not doing more to ensure truly affordable housing be built with every luxury skyscraper that has gone up, especially under Mayor Bloomberg. In Queens part of the problem stems from the fact that we have not received enough affordable assistance from the city -- our borough represents almost a third the population but we've only received 9% in assistance from the city for affordable housing.

3. What is your vision for addressing the housing crisis in Queens?

Three-fold. One, fight for more affordable housing assistance from the city. Two, force developers trying to build large apartment buildings or skyscrapers to set aside more for affordable housing. Three, by addressing the serious problems we have with mass-transit in our borough (so much of our borough is a "transit desert"), we can find new places to add affordable housing. I'm the only candidate in this race with a comprehensive transit plan that allows for us to also address affordable housing.

Labor

1. What is your relationship to the union movement in New York State?

I got my start in unions. Before I won a seat on the NYC Council I belonged to the Painters Union working in art restoration on major NYC historic buildings. As a single mom in those days I knew just what living paycheck to paycheck felt like; I couldn't have gotten by in NYC without support from my union!

2. What would you do to support the rights of workers to form unions, and to expand unionization in Queens County?

Workers at private companies in Queens likely won't be seeking help from the Queens Borough President on such an issue, but if they did I would help in whatever way was most appropriate (i.e. if the bully pulpit of the office is called for, I will use it. If more confidential assistance is required, I will go that route). I am proudly pro-union and believe that workers should be given the opportunity to make the decision to unionize if that was their decision.

3. If elected Queens Borough President what would you do to ensure union labor is used in all building projects?

The Queens Borough President has a great deal of leverage on zoning issues. New buildings should not be approved to be built without significant union participation. Builders currently constructing buildings now can be creatively pressured to use union labor if they are not already. The bully pulpit of the Queens BP position can and should be used to advocate progressive issues like this one.

Education and Higher Education

1. Do you believe that Central Queens should have more public K-12 schools?

Absolutely yes. Public schools in Queens are tremendously overcrowded, more so than any other borough. When I was on the NYC Council my district (30) was one of the most overcrowded areas in all of NYC, but I pushed hard to add additional schools such as PS 290 to alleviate that, and by the time I left office a good deal of the overcrowding issues had been addressed.

2. What is your K-12 vision for public education in Central Queens?

As part of my plans as your Queens Borough President, I will fight to alleviate overcrowding and will fight to increase per-pupil spending across the borough.

3. What is your view on the lack of diversity in public schools? Do you believe the DOE's approach, particularly regarding D28, is the current one? If not, how would yours differ?

I think the DOE is moving too quickly on a plan that will have kids forced to move around all over central Queens, an area lacking in quality mass-transit. This hurts parents and kids alike to get children to schools that are not near them. Their goal of desegregating the schools is admirable, but their approach is wrong. We should first wear out every other tough decision before putting such a burden on the kids to be bused outside of their own community -- notably, in their education platform, not even Black Lives Matter endorses busing as a solution to addressing racial injustice. Queens is the most diverse county in the world, but the DOE somehow doesn't trust parents and communities in Queens to find ways to improve diversity within our own neighborhoods.

4. Do you believe there should be more CUNY or SUNY schools in Central Queens?

Absolutely! I have been saying on the stump that one key to economic growth in Queens is more innovative connections between higher education and the public and private sectors. Adding CUNY or SUNY schools to the area only improves Queens overall.

5. What is your vision to have more access to public higher education in Central Queens?

Beyond the SUNY/CUNY idea, the first step to public higher education in Central Queens is making sure all kids have more opportunities to advance beyond K-12. Right now we are facing a number of issues in the K-12 levels, and issue I had addressed in an earlier question.

The Environment

1. Central Queens is home to some of the largest parks in Queens; from Forest Park to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. What is your vision to invest in our parks? Do you support the QueensWay plan?

As a NY Councilmember I do have a positive record of supporting parks and planting trees, and definitely want to review and support additional ways we can to improve our parks. Regarding QueensWay, I supported it on the city council -- my one distinction is that I support plans for a park *north* of Forest Park while I support rail plans *south* of Forest Park, as it could connect the QNS to the Rockaway Beach.

2. What are your views on vertical farming & having more locally grown foods in Queens?

I fully endorse the idea of vertical farming and locally grown foods and would happily support legitimate options or proposals that would be brought to the borough president's office to expand upon that in Queens.

3. What is your environmental plan for Queens?

Before leaving the city council I had a study done on how to make Queens carbon neutral by 2030, because the environment should be a top priority for Queens residents. This is ambitious but achievable! We need to build out our infrastructure, ensure solar panels are on all government buildings and incentivize solar on private ones, ensure that regular homeowners understand *all* of their financial options to improve home insulation, and review and execute on a plan to plant more trees throughout the borough. But most importantly we need to get more people across Queens out of their cars and into working, expanded mass-transit. (That said, please see my answer on transportation.)

Transportation

1. Many parts of Queens are a virtual Transit Desert, and even those areas with good mass transit options are experiencing regular delays and overcrowding, particularly in areas seeing significant development - including here in Central Queens. What is your vision for expanding and improving Transit services for the residents of Queens?

Before I left the city council funded and completed a major DOT study to review the viability of taking the under-used freight line stretching from Hunters Point through a dozen neighborhoods in Queens to Jamaica at 120th Street and converting it for light rail passenger use (this line would be called the QNS). This idea gives Queens a great deal of flexibility: fewer transit deserts, more opportunities for smarter growth for the borough. That means more opportunities for affordable housing and more stable economic growth. Moreover, this is a plausible plan because it costs one-tenth the cost of, say, the 2nd Avenue subway expansion in Manhattan (which travels a much shorter distance.

Queens, in fact, has a number of under-used freight lines that could be used in this way, and I endorse the plans to convert those other lines in the same way. Also, right now the MTA is doing Queens no favors by drastically rewriting our bus lines, in many cases cutting services and routes when they should be expanded.

Effective mass-transit is vital for Queens. People need to get to work. People need to get out of their cars (which goes a long way toward improving the environment). And people don't often think about transit in this way but helping the working poor and elderly move around the borough IS a social-justice issue.

2. Does your vision for improving transportation options in Queens include making the use of bicycles more practical and safer? How, if at all, would you work to improve and expand Queens' bike lane network and how might we make our streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

As a NY council member I devoted discretionary capital-improvement money to help make the Brooklyn Queensway bike-lane safer. There are other opportunities to expand bike lanes in Queens, too -- the Lower Montauk Lower branch rail line, for example (QNS), can come with a bike lane to the side.

3. Access-A-Ride provides a critical service to those of us with mobility issues, but it is a source of many complaints. What, if any, reforms and changes would you advocate for the Access-A-Ride system and how would you work to make existing Transit, particularly subways, more accessible for those facing mobility challenges?

Access-a-Ride is a broken system because it costs too much. I would rather explore a better system, such as -- for example -- creating a voucher system that allows people to take cabs, Ubers, or other private transit.

Rikers and the Kew Gardens Mega-Jail

1. What was your position on the plan to close Rikers & create the Kew Gardens mega-jail?

My record on Rikers is clear: It needed to be closed. As the former chair of the city council committee that oversaw Rikers, I saw firsthand the human-rights abuses that took place there. I investigated Rikers thoroughly, to a degree few other people have, and it became clear to me in that investigation that Rikers could not be salvaged as a jail (where people are sent after they are arrested but *not* convicted).

The mega-jail is different than the Rikers issue. I do not support the mega-jail. I just support keeping (but fixing) the existing jail in Kew Gardens.

2. How will you use the land use process to put forward your vision of the future of Rikers and the new jail in Kew Gardens?

The land-use process on the mega-jail is already done. The vote has taken place. But I would certainly try to work with the mayor and city council to re-use the \$2 billion in a different way. Also, I support the plan proposed by the Commission to Close Rikers Island that would turn the entire island into a renewable energy island.

3. A new city council and mayor in 2021 could change the outlook of the Kew Gardens mega-jail and Rikers. What would be your vision of Rikers and the mega-jail in Kew Gardens as Queens Borough President from 2021 and beyond?

The larger question is how we view our criminal-justice system. As a society we have to stop thinking mega-jails and start thinking rehabilitative spaces. While it's true that there will always be some convicted felons who cannot be rehabilitated regardless of how hard you try, as a society we have to start thinking about how we can end the mass incarceration problem we have inherited today in America. Rikers is being closed, the mega-jail should not be opened; an open, honest dialogue needs to take place as to what happens next.

Community Boards and Land Trusts

1. Do you have any plans to increase the voice of community boards in Queens?

I want more diverse community boards. We need more people participating in the democratic process, a greater mix of people for age, gender, ethnicity, and race. It might help if these boards played a more direct role with the borough president's budget -- I would look into participatory budgeting for these boards.

2. If elected, do you envision your relationship with community boards being different or like any of your predecessors?

Very different. I want more voices, more diversity, and real partnerships with community boards.

3. Will you use Community Land Trusts as a tool to give communities a stronger voice in community developments?

The people need their voices heard: I support any and all grassroots social-justice efforts to address problems like affordable housing, which is what CLTs do. But I wouldn't "use" these groups, as by definition they are grassroots groups whose job is to apply pressure to their elected officials like the borough president. As an elected official my door is always open to listening to groups such as CLTs.