



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: Donovan Richards

Position: Queens Borough President

Do you identify as progressive?

Yes

Why do you identify as a progressive?

I identify as a progressive because at the core of my beliefs are principles of social justice, reforming economic inequality, expanding workers' rights, and changing society for the better.

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

Housing is the number one priority of my campaign, we need to fight for tenants rights like rent regulations and vacancy decontrol so that people are able to continue to call Queens home. High rents are pushing people out and making our city unlivable, I'll fight to put an end to the practices that have contributed to that. Too often I've seen residents have to battle landlords in court without legal representation, we must ensure that there is funding to housing court attorneys available. I'm also committed to ensuring that NYCHA cleans up its act and makes the necessary investments into its collapsing infrastructure. Residents do not deserve to be subjected to the decrepit conditions that we constantly see reported.

What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders?

I have received the endorsement of DC 37, Former BP Claire Shulman, 32BJ, UFT, and the Queens County Democratic Party.

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?

I believe that all voices need to be respected in the process. My integrity will not be compromised by my contributors.

Are you willing to sign the QCC4All Accountability Pledge?

I will not be signing the QCC4All pledge.

Do you believe housing is a human right?

Yes, housing is a human right and I will fight to ensure everyone has an opportunity at more accessible and affordable housing.

What do you believe are the causes of the housing crisis in New York?

A lack of truly affordable housing and tenants not being equipped with the proper resources to stem the tide of displacement have both contributed to the housing crisis in New York. Additionally, the housing problem is exacerbated by the NYC Dept of Housing Preservation setting too-high rent targets for consideration in housing lotteries and applications, as well as increasing inequality between rising housing costs and stagnating wages.

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

The Office of the Queens Borough President can help low income individuals and families to be in the best possible spot to access truly affordable housing. I have introduced legislation to require the City to include measures to affirmatively further fair housing in its report on creation or preservation of affordable housing. I have worked with the Dept. of Housing Preservation to create 100 percent affordable passive house multi-family building, in Rockaway Queens, and will continue to enable the growth of equitable housing. As chair of the Land Use Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises I negotiated the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing framework, a stronger, more inclusive affordable housing plan. Since then MIH has had a profound impact on my neighborhood, establishing thousands of affordable housing units. I will work to put an end to the practices that have contributed to rising rent pricing out residents. This includes measures such as providing funding to housing court attorneys, so that residents are not left to battle landlords without legal representation. I have been stalwart in my advocacy to call for expanded funding for homeowner services to support programs to help displacement caused by foreclosures, scams and tax liens. As a proponent of the city's first initiative to fund Community Land Trusts I aim to empower residents to fight against the rising cost of living displacing so many.

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

I have always been fervent in my advocacy on behalf of the working class and have supported unions in every stage from negotiating fair contracts, organizing to strikes. I was able to secure the relocation of the Bartlett Dairy plant back to Queens, and along with it 400 good union jobs. When it comes to new developments I have always prioritized good union jobs and have been a vocal proponent of expanding workers rights and benefits.

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

There is collective power in unions, and all workers benefit from union membership. I have always been a proponent of union representation on community boards, and will continue to pledge my fervent support for their appointment. Raising awareness and clearly demonstrating as well as communicating the benefits of organized labor are necessary steps to increasing civic engagement. We must continue to strengthen unions capacities to tackle barriers to civic participation such as growing economic inequality, wage stagnation, and racial and gender inequities.

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

As Queens Borough President, I will play a vital role in the growth of organized labor by being a vocal advocate on behalf of all of Queens, and making sure organized labor's voice is heard and has a seat at the table with mayoral agencies, the city council, the New York State government, public corporations, and private businesses. The borough president can help to ensure that organized labor is included in the conversation during critical land use decisions. I've secured more than \$2.2 billion in infrastructure development for Southeast Queens, and pushed developers to accommodate organized labor, allowing workers to organize on the site and guaranteeing them a prevailing wage. We have established the blueprint here in the 31st Council District, and now I want to take it borough wide. Labor being part of the conversation, and the voice of workers were essential to the blueprint we created, and will remain part of it in the borough president's office. As Borough President I will continue to support labor friendly development projects and make sure that all residents see the benefits of public resources.

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

Yes, we must ensure that public K-12 education is accessible to all residents of the Borough, especially those who are currently underserved and disadvantaged by long commute times.

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

Education equity is of paramount significance, every child regardless of their parents income or the color of their skin deserves access to a great education, I am a fervent advocate for allocating funds to public schools that will enable all students to succeed. Funding sound education is a matter of equipping schools, teachers and students with adequate resources. We must fight to promote solutions such as the foundation aid formula for pre-k to 12 public schools, to resolve the promises of the campaign for fiscal equity case. Additionally we must prioritize keeping NYC schools healthy and safe, fair budgeting is essential to improving the quality of education in NYC.

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?

Desegregating public schools and increasing diversity is vital to improving the education equity. I support the D28 approach, gaining input and direction from members of the community is crucial to properly integrating schools and understanding the communities priorities. Additionally, we need to ensure that teachers reflect the diversity of the communities where they teach.

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

I have worked to secure capital upgrades for CUNY, and am supportive of bringing a CUNY campus to Central Queens, furthering access to affordable education opportunities for a currently underserved part of the Borough.

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

Expanding access to public higher education in Central Queens means investing in transportation for students as well as integrating more CUNY infrastructure in currently underserved areas. By the same token it is equally important to provide a variety of opportunities for the plethora of diverse students, this means expanding opportunities for technical education.

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?

Rockaway residents need every transportation option on the table to cut down on some of the longest commute times in the city and improve access to jobs, resources and culture across the five boroughs. I am supportive of the QueensWay plan, including parkland in the plan to bring back the Rockaway Beach line is a win-win for all of Queens.

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

I am a proponent of vertical farming and green roofs, and understand the positive impact that these changes can have on increasing local food production in a sustainable way. This principle also extends to establishing and enhancing community gardens to better serve communities.

What is your environmental plan for Queens?

As chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection, I addressed the decades-old systemic issue of flooding in Southeast Queens. I secured more than \$1.5 billion to help fill the enormous sewer infrastructure hole in Southeast Queens, and will continue to pursue sustainable solutions to environmental problems. In addition, I have been a vocal advocate for putting an end to practices like fracking which endanger residents' health. I have been resolute in my efforts to fight for climate justice, from advocating for mandatory climate education in schools to being a proponent of banning plastic bags, spearheading the opposition to the Williams pipeline, and being a vocal sponsor of INT 1253 committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I have worked to achieve climate justice at every step of the Rockaway Revitalization project, with storm resilient infrastructure and eco-friendly as well as sustainable development.

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?

As Borough President, I'll fight for everyone who uses public transportation, because whether it's delays on the subway or a lack of access to bus service, the MTA has let down hard working commuters. Everyday, I speak with Queens residents who rely on public transportation and who find themselves waiting on platforms or walking long distances to find a bus stop. I promise to hold the MTA accountable and ensure that investments are in our infrastructure. We need trains that run on time, and that requires long term investment to fix signals and tracks, something that I will continue to advocate for. I'll also work to find new ways to deliver public transportation options to those who have previously been left stranded by a lack of bus or train service.

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 Queen's bike lane network and how might we make our streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

I'll work to find new ways to deliver public transportation options to those who have previously been left stranded by a lack of bus or train service. I've advocated for bike sharing programs to help bridge the gap for those communities that lack public transportation. For those who bike, there must be more protections put in place, including expansions to protected bike lanes and stronger laws for those who drive recklessly and put bikers at risk.

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?

Expanding the on-demand pilot program can be instrumental in improving the quality of Access-A-Ride service. In addition integrating more ADA compliant infrastructure into our transit system is a necessity to accommodate those facing mobility challenges. Increasing transportation accessibility for in-need populations is of critical importance to increasing equity across the Borough.

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

I am a proponent of closing down Rikers where it costs over \$200,000 a year to confine a single inmate. It is time to reform our broken criminal justice system that has crippled the lives of young black and brown men and women. The plan to close Rikers is the most sound, viable, humane plan to make our city the most decarcerated big city in the nation, and to do so quickly and with efficacy.

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?

As a member of the City Council's land use committee, I am in favor of the land use action to barr Rikers island from jailing another soul, and will continue to advance this process by supporting the borough based jail plan and map changes.

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?

As Borough President, I would vote the same way as I did on the Land Use Committee, strongly in favor of this fundamental change to close Rikers. Additionally, I will prioritize the local community boards input in making decisions regarding the future use of Rikers land.

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

As Borough President I will ensure that the community is included in the conversation during critical land use decisions. I am also a fervent supporter of increasing diversity of community boards to better reflect the areas they represent. I was a vocal proponent of ballot measures designed to diversify our community boards with new voices and perspectives and will continue to advocate for such changes, promoting diversity as a strength.

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

I will work to ensure that community boards are more representative, inclusive, and equitable. This means democratizing the process by implementing transparency and term limits, it is irresponsible to back all community board recommendations if those recommendations are not truly reflective of the community needs and interests. It is imperative that we see more public housing residents on our community boards and also look at ways to make it easier for people to join.

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

I have been vocal in my support for Community Land Trusts to stem the tide of displacement and have spearheaded the city's first initiative to fund CLTs. CLTs are a powerful tool to preserve affordable housing and put neighborhood decision-making in the hands of the community members.