



**Queens Central Democratic Club**  
Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2021  
New York City Comptroller

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](mailto:qcdcny@gmail.com). Please email us the completed questionnaire by Friday, March 5.

Full Name: Brian A. Benjamin

1. What is the single most important issue to you as a candidate for elected office? Why?

Police accountability & public safety. If am is elected New York City Comptroller, I will use all the powers of the office to ensure policing is transformed and modernized until it is fully accountable and appropriately scaled to our communities.

2. How would you use this position differently from your predecessor?

I have more investment management experience and so I know I can work directly with each of the five pension funds and their other trustees to ensure there are making better returns for the retirees. This saves the city funds, as a bad year of pension investment returns also means that the city has to put more money into the funds! I also will use the office to address public safety and policing issues.

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

I have not taken any such pledge.

4. Do you support reducing the NYPD budget? How would you work with the Mayor and City Council to reflect your position?

The police budget is a major part of my platform, you can read my full plan [here](#)! I do support reducing the NYPD budget, and I will work to do so by beginning an audit of the NYPD on day one.

5. What is your plan to address the massive deficit crisis the City is facing?

Saving the city money by managing the pensions more responsibly, refinancing bonds, and aggressively rooting out waste.

6. Do you support taxing millionaires and billionaires? What specific tax policy changes would you call on the New York State legislature and the Governor to implement in order to increase City revenue?



I do, I co-sponsor bills in the Invest In Our NY Act.

7. The New York City Pension Fund is in part funded through investment in oil and gas companies, and pipeline manufacturers. Do you support divesting in fossil fuels? If so, how much divestment would you target by the end of your term in 2025? What are other types of assets that the City currently holds that would you divest from?

I do support divesting from fossil fuels and continuing on the targets the current comptroller has set.

8. How would you leverage the City's economic power and priorities to encourage an agenda of socioeconomic justice?

Fiscal policy is civil rights policy! I will use the office of comptroller to measure the equity of our recovery from COVID-19 and direct resources to communities in need.

9. How will you use your role as sole trustee of the NYC Employees Retirement System to vote shares and influence corporate actions?

I will work with the other trustees of the pension funds to make investments that make good returns AND improve our city. I've done this before as a trustee of Brown University.

10. In January 2021, New York City announced intentions to terminate business contracts with Donald Trump after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. How will you improve City procurement and contracting to ensure the City does not do further business with fascist right-wing interests?

I certainly support ending contracts with any business whose practices harm New Yorkers, and I think that includes Trump! NYC's contracting process has to change to make it easier for good, local businesses to win contracts. Right now, more than ¾ of the contracts that reach the office of the comptroller are already late. I propose that we run contracts through agencies and the comptroller's office in parallel to get small businesses their contracts faster!

11. What is your plan to increase women and minority-owned business representation and investment in City procurement and contracting?

As a former principal at a M/WBE, this is an important one to me! In 2017, the legislatures passed a law which allowed the Procurement Policy Board to make purchases from M/WBEs between \$20,000 to \$150,000 without formal competition in hopes that this would increase opportunities for M/WBEs. I believe the city must take advantage of this program more frequently, and each of my audits will determine the level to which appropriate entities are taking advantage of this measure to the greatest extent possible.

12. How will you use your position as Comptroller to implement a small business recovery plan?

I recently launched one, which you can read [here](#).



13. What economic policies do you support to address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis in New York City?

I am a former affordable real estate development developer, responsible for creating more than a thousand units of permanently affordable environmentally sustainable units, so this will be a priority for me

The current administration has a goal to build or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. Anyone with any sense of the crisis we are facing knows that this is woefully inadequate. If we are serious about addressing the crisis, I know we need a master plan which actually takes into account the real need that New Yorkers are experiencing, allowing us to know how many units of affordable housing we need at each level of affordability and where.

As comptroller I will ensure that we are dealing with real numbers, and ensure that we aren't aiming goals that are disconnected from real needs. If it doesn't reflect the real need in each community, I will say so. If what we the need, for example, is 50,000 units at 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) and 15,000 units of transitional housing in a certain borough but instead we build (either ourselves or by incentivizing private developers) 75,000 units of 90% of AMI, we haven't really helped anyone—these apartments won't be affordable to those who need them and our resources will have been wasted.

To ensure this does not happen, my first hires will include an assistant comptroller for Housing and Economic Development. The Assistant Comptroller for economic development will be able to ensure that the city is actually following through and is reasonably determining what to build at what level of affordability and where. The office will measure progress through audits not only of the various authorities and agencies involved in building, but also stem to stern audits that will look at the equity and sustainability of the programs.

The comptroller's office can directly contribute to the creation of housing through the statutorily mandated Economically Targeted Investments (ETIs). These can be used much more aggressively, and should be more actively managed by the comptroller in partnership with the labor trustees. My financial background and my affordable housing background will allow him to help find opportunities to make good returns for our retirees while also increasing the affordability of the city those retirees live in. For example, right now, the city is paying more than \$6,000 a month to keep families in hotels as temporary shelter. This is obviously money well spent to keep a family safe and warm during a pandemic, but it is not a good permanent solution. I believe the office should look at hotels that are currently experiencing financial trouble or even on the brink of bankruptcy. Using ETIs, the pension funds can create an entity that the investment managers can instruct to purchase these hotels and convert them into temporary or even transitional housing. This is a sound financial investment that a private company will not make, but that both guarantees a good return for the holders of the pensions (a primary goal) but also serves the people of the city.

14. The future of Rikers Island will have tremendous social and economic impacts on the city, what is your position on what should be done with Rikers Island?

One of the first bills I sponsored in the Senate was a bill to close Rikers Island in three years. Now that we have begun this process, I support the Renewable Rikers plan.



15. How would you use your position as Comptroller to address increasing income inequality within New York City?

As I said before, fiscal policy is civil rights policy. I will continue to support the kinds of increased revenue sources I support as a state senator to fund programs to address income inequality.

16. What is your position on the BDS movement?

I do not support the BDS movement.

17. How will you use your position to initiate a city-wide conversation about race and racial injustice?

I will begin a new kind of auditing focused beyond dollars and sense called "Equity and Sustainability Audits." You can [read the plan here](#).