



Queens Central Democratic Club
Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2021
New York City Council District 29

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 qdcny@gmail.com. Please email us the completed questionnaire by Friday, March 12.

Full Name: Douglas Shapiro

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of businesses closed their storefronts in our district. As Council Member for CD29, what is your plan to bring back businesses to our storefronts? Additionally, how do you plan to support the storefronts that already exist?

Queens only got about one-third of pandemic related federal loans compared to Manhattan. Queens political leadership must do a better job of communicating with small business owners in the language that they feel most comfortable in. Many grants and low-interest loans went elsewhere because people simply did not know how to participate in those programs.

We cannot put any new or additional conditions, whether from the community board or any other body that would make a new business think twice about opening in the area. Bringing in new businesses to the area is one of the best things that can happen for existing business owners because it will drive more indirect foot traffic to their store.

2. The Mayor and DOE Chancellor just announced that they will be disbanding the gifted and talented program in NYC Public Schools. Do you agree with this cut? Why or why not?

No I do not agree with this cut. G&T programs should be expanded, not contracted. Every child, regardless of their zip code, deserves to be rigorously challenged, with a curriculum that helps them maximize their learning. The next council and mayoral administration must make a rock-solid commitment to fully funding educational programs including expanded G&T.

3. We have seen our neighbors suffer from food insecurity unlike any other point in recent memory. How will you work with NYC to provide emergency food services to our neighbors (particularly seniors) and support to our food pantries such as Masbia, Queens Community House, and Commonpoint Queens?

I will only support a moral budget for NYC. We have to recommit to the essential fundamentals: fully funding healthcare – that includes all social determinants of health including food – fully funding education, and investing in infrastructure.

A larger share of discretionary Schedule-C funding should also go to food pantries if the need persists through 2022.



4. We have a couple of citywide races coming up - if a citywide candidate wanted to see some of the best food and shops CD29 had to offer, where would you take them on a tour?

Atlantic Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Lefferts Boulevard, Austin Street, 108th Street and 63rd Ave

5. Business is a lifeblood to any community, and that also translates to jobs. If a major commercial business (i.e. Target or Key Food) wanted to come and open shop in CD29, what requirements would you ask of them in order to bridge them into our community?

I've talked to thousands of our neighbors. They want more businesses, including bigger businesses (for example: Whole Foods) in our district. Look around. Everyone can see there are many vacant storefronts in every major commercial area in the district? Many have been vacant for several months. Vacant stores hurt existing businesses tremendously. Our neighborhood shouldn't be making it any harder for a new business to open up shop in our community. In this environment, entrepreneurs and corporations will simply look at other locales if they get the sense the community does not want them to be there or is making unrealistic demands. We should welcome the new business with open arms. The community doesn't at it's own peril.

6. In your view, what are the biggest criminal justice concerns in CD29? What changes, if any, need to be made, and how?

Statistically, our community is safe relative to many neighbors in NYC. However, many seniors do not feel safe in our community. There has been an increase in mentally unstable folks that have intimidated and harassed our neighbors over the last few years. More services to help out folks who are permanently homeless (such as unconditional housing) or suffering from mental health issues would improve everyone's quality of life.

Changing the location of a jail will not change the treatment of those incarcerated. There is no role for additional jail capacity in our society. The Kew Gardens jail is a public policy and fiscal mistake. Rather than spend \$9 billion on borough-based jails, the city should recommit to supporting healthcare, education, and vital infrastructure. We desperately need to build a new middle school in our community, not a new jail. Better schools and better roads, not bigger and better jails.

7. Forest Hills Hospital provides front line, life saving work on a daily basis, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. What reforms need to be implemented for our healthcare workers, and what recommendations would you provide to help streamline vaccine distributions?

For hospital workers, at the minimum we must ensure adequate PPE and that adequate staff are hired. Many essential workers have been asked to perform roles that they have not been trained to do because of staffing (shortage) issues.



Ideally we can also pass stronger whistle blower laws where hospital workers can highlight unsafe working conditions for both providers and patients.

To facilitate faster vaccine distribution in the area, we can partner with existing in-home programs such as Meals on Wheels and God's Love We Deliver to expand reach. We must make it easier for seniors to get on a vaccination appointment or get on a waitlist. We must allow seniors a single call-in number to make an appointment and/or join a waitlist and expect a call back. That may require adjusting personnel tasks at the DOH such that folks are literally booking appointments for people through the byzantine online process. The digital divide is real – many people cannot (lack of computer or internet access) or do not know how to get an appointment (too complicated, decentralized, overwhelming). Layering on top potentially transportation issues and this becomes a truly daunting task for some older folks.

Deeper partnership with community based organizations including religious organizations will better help identify people in need. We need to meet people where they are, whether at-home, or where they may be out in their community.

8. CD9 has a large senior population, and Queens as a whole has one of the fastest growing senior populations in NYC. How would you work with the Department for the Aging to provide more resources to our district and support our seniors?

This is a moral issue. About 40% of seniors would be impoverished if they did not receive Social Security. DFTA only receives about \$300 M in funding. That's a ludicrously small amount of resources for a key social service that funds senior centers and a full range of support services for an especially vulnerable population.

We need to create fiscal space (see Q 16) to expand the level of resources this agency receives.

DFTA has a support line, Aging Connect. These specialists can be onsite at vaccination locations. We need to think about more opportunities to bundle multiple services at a single point of contact. For example social service referrals and/or GetFoodNYC with vaccinations.

Also please see: <https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/10218-rebuild-health-care-infrastructure-care-seniors-nyc>

9. According to the Bowery Mission, there are nearly 80,000 homeless individuals in NYC, with over 60,000 of those individuals utilizing a public shelter and 4,000 that live on the street. How would you as a Council Member help stem the tide of homelessness in New York City?

There were 8,000 homeless people in NYC in 1989. So there has been a near ten-fold increase in about 30 years. Most homelessness is episodic, not permanent. The two largest direct causes of homelessness are domestic abuse and housing affordability. So many folks have no financial cushion as they are living paycheck to paycheck. If they get laid off, or have a medical emergency, or their income is disrupted, even temporarily, they may face enormous



consequences – they are housing insecure.

From 2000 until the great recession, the city built 2 new units of housing per new job created. Between 2009 and pre-pandemic the city only built 0.5 units of housing per new job created. Citywide, if we want to reduce homelessness and improve housing affordability, we must dramatically build new housing stock, especially multi-family residential housing. The government can not do this alone, there is a large and important role for more private sector development to build new housing. Habitable housing must be a human right.

We also must be humble and realistic. We must recognize we cannot ‘solve’ homelessness in two or four years. There is too much NIMBYism all across NYC to build the quantity of housing that has been required to keep pace with demand.

10. Our district is one of the few in Queens without a homeless shelter. What are your feelings on homeless shelters to address NYC’s growing number of homeless individuals? Should a shelter be developed in this area?

No. Many homeless folks distrust shelters, many homeless folks would rather stay on the street because they so deeply distrust ‘the system.’ Shelters are a band-aid. Longer-term (as mentioned in Q9) we must build much more housing to improve affordability, to stem the number of folks who are housing insecure.

11. Our community boards are considered the first line of local government interaction. Similarly, the Council Member has a say in nominating community board members. If elected, how would you work with our community boards and strengthen them?

I spoke with a young interracial couple while canvassing last week who recently moved to the community. They were frustrated and they told me they did not feel that they had any input into community decisions, and their community board applications had previously been rejected.

Community Boards are usually ineffective when they are insular and do not broadly reflect the will of the community. Community Board 6 does not reflect the demographics of the district, from an ethnicity, age, neurodiversity, or diversity in thought within the district. The demographic composition of Community Board 9 is much more diverse and reflective of their area.

There should be no limit on the number of members of a community board. There should be strict term limits (six, not eight years) for members of community boards. The way you strengthen community boards is you make them open institutions without barriers, not merely social clubs. Then you will get the most robust lower-d democratic participation.

12. Bike lanes were installed along Queens Boulevard as part of Vision Zero, resulting in the removal of parking spots. Are you in favor of extending bike lanes along Queens Boulevard?



The DOT has already made clear this project will progress, continue and conclude in the next city council term.

13. The City Council reviews certain parts of the ULURP process, including housing and urban renewal plans and zoning map changes. What are the factors that would lead you to go against the recommendations of the local community board in the ULURP process? How do you view the tradeoffs between the affordable housing that new construction can bring against the impact of potential overdevelopment?

NYC has as-of-right development. Local community boards advise and can influence development, but their opinion has only sometimes been considered with recent projects. The community board is 50 people and is only sometimes representative of majoritarian views that prevail in the district. There are about 150,000 people that live in this district.

The most important factor is how most of the existing, long-time neighbors to the development feel. But that cannot be the only factor. The totality of the economic impact must be considered. Especially at this time, good paying union jobs can be created from new development. We must increase the supply of housing in NYC, and some of that increase certainly should occur in District 29.

14. What is your long-term plan for the Kew Gardens jail?

I'll continue to support any lawsuits that fight against any of the borough based jails, including in Kew Gardens. There is a good chance the new city council and mayor will change course regarding the borough-based jails plan.

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15. What are your three priority budget items for our Council district?

Supporting our seniors, fully funding healthcare, fully funding education

16. How would you propose closing the City's budget gap?

In 2013 the city budget was \$73 Billion. Due to a bull market, the budget pre-pandemic was \$89 Billion dollars. Ask yourself, did most people's standard of living increase in that time? No. What quality of life issues improved in NYC? None.

So, on the costs side, every single agency budget needs to be combed for savings. The city bureaucracy ballooned under the de Blasio administration, we need to immediately ask for early



retirements, voluntary separations to rein in personnel costs that have exploded.

On the revenue side, more progressive taxation for households making \$400k or more. That change alone would balance the budget immediately and would even give us the space to reduce the regressive consumption tax in NYC.

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

By speaking up loudly and repeatedly against new jails. America has the largest incarcerated population per capita in the world, and it's not even close. 655 per 100,000 people which is much worse than China, Iran, or Saudi Arabia. When this society has built new jail cells, it has always found a way to populate them extraordinarily disproportionately with black and brown people.

Criminal justice is just one area where America has not lived up to its true meaning of its creed. Racial injustice permeates our unequal education system, our segregated housing system, our financial system. The zip code of where you grow up is a hugely explanatory variable for your educational, health, and income lifetime outcomes.

Hate crimes are up tremendously partially because white supremacists have been emboldened to act on their hatred for minorities including Asian-Americans. The next city councilperson must denounce hate targeted toward any community, loudly and repeatedly. The next city councilperson must double-down on interfaith and community events that explicitly bring people from different cultures together for more mutual understanding.

18. When filling out your ranked choice ballot, which candidate will you rank second and why?

Edwin Wong. I believe he would be an effective city councilman and could build alliances with folks from all over the city. I have been grateful to have the opportunity to speak with him and learn more about his vision, and I am confident his heart is in the right place.