



**CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION 2009**

Candidate Name: Lynne Serpe Age: 37

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District 22

Campaign Address: 31-10 35th Street #1R Astoria NY 11106

Campaign Telephone Number: (646) 352-1967

Party Affiliation(s): Green Campaign Managers Names: Robyn Sklar & Helen Ho

Website & Email: www.SerpeForCouncil.com, vote@serpeforcouncil.com

Education: B.A., Dartmouth College

Occupation/Employer: Community Liaison, Community Environmental Center

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

- Steering Committee, Two Coves Community Garden in Astoria
- Executive Committee, Long Island City Alliance (LICA)
- Co-founder, Triple R Events: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
- Street Tree Care Volunteer, Department of Parks & Recreation
- Volunteer, Transportation Alternatives Queens Committee
- Campaign Manager, Oakland Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) campaign
- Recount Manager, Ohio Recount 2004 (presidential vote)
- Community Liaison & Election Reform Coordinator, New Zealand Parliament

I am also active in the voting system reform movement and was a Senior Analyst to FairVote and the former Deputy Director of New America Foundation's Political Reform Program.

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES NO

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES NO

(Please note: Citizens Union can grant its "Preferred Candidate" and "Endorsed Candidate" rating only to candidates we have interviewed. We will make every effort to interview candidates in each race for City Council.)

Signature of Candidate:  Date: July 21, 2009



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I. CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Please state your position on the following issues by indicating whether you support or oppose each. You may elaborate in the space provided at the end or on additional paper.

VOTING AND ELECTIONS REFORM

1. What is your position with respect to allowing voters who are registered as independents to vote in party primaries?

I support a modified-closed primary system as in CA.*

2. What is your position on passage of state legislation that would allow referenda initiated by the City Council and/or the public to appear on the ballot at the same time as a referendum initiated by a charter commission appointed by the Mayor? **Support**
3. What is your position on increasing the pay of Election Day poll workers above the current \$200 they are allotted per election event? **Support***
4. What is your position on restructuring New York's current board of elections model to eliminate political party responsibility for overall election administration and replace it with a system that narrows political party involvement to certification of candidate petitions and the actual counting of votes? **Support**
5. What is your position on having an election administration system where there is a local elections executive director appointed by the mayor upon recommendation by a new board that is chosen by the mayor and the city council? **Support**

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

6. What is your position on implementing "war chest" restrictions that would prohibit a candidate from transferring funds raised in a previous election cycle into a current campaign committee for a different office? **Support**

7. What is your position on allowing campaign financing for ballot proposals? **Support**

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

8. What is your position on allowing Council committees to function more independently of the speaker than is presently the case? **Support**
- a. Should committee staff be hired by and report to committee chairs? **Support**
- b. Should committee hearings and votes be scheduled at the direction of the chairs? **Support**
- c. Should committees be able to issue subpoenas by a vote of their members? **Support**
9. What is your position on:
- a. limiting councilmembers' ability to earn outside income? **Support**
- b. making the job of councilmember a full-time position? **Support**
- c. eliminating or limiting stipends for committee chairs and leadership positions? **Support**
10. What is your position on requiring that any future increase in councilmember compensation not affect those serving in the current term of the council and only be applied prospectively to the following term? **Support**
11. What is your position on consolidating the current City Council committee structure and reducing the number of overall committees? **Support**
12. What is your position on term limits for elected officials? **Support**
13. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that changes to term limits may only be approved by the voters? **Support**
14. What is your position on the recent extension of term limits for the city's elected officials to three consecutive four-year terms? Please explain your answer. **Oppose**

The position of NYC voters was clearly expressed in two public referenda. The decision to ignore the voters' will and extend term limits was nothing more than an undemocratic power grab by many of the very same City Council Members who benefited from the implementation of term limits in 2001. I testified at the public hearings about my opposition to the extension and [wrote about in amNY](#). The City Council fast-tracked vote on this was only weeks after the deadline to place an item on the November ballot and very little attention was paid to the fact that the Mayor never bothered to act on his 2008 State of the City Address in which he clearly announced that he would be forming a Charter Revision Commission, which could have looked at this and a number of other very important issues.

POLICY ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

Please state your position on the following issues by indicating whether you support or oppose each, where applicable. Please also use the space provided below each question or on a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the questions which require a detailed answer. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

15. Knowing that the police department and commissioner retain ultimate authority for determining whether an officer is guilty and penalty, what is your position on transferring power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board to prosecute cases of police misconduct, such as force, abuse of authority, discourtesy, and offensive language? **Support**
16. What is your position on changing the current land use process under ULURP to increase the role of community-based planning? **Support**
17. What is your position regarding the creation of a Charter Revision Commission to review specifically the roles of the various offices of government and how well government has functioned since the 1988 and 1989 charter review commissions? **Support**
18. What is your position on reforming the current pension funding structure to create multiple tiers for future city government employees?
This question is not clear enough; a multiple tiered system already exists.
- a. In FY 2008-09, New York City spent \$12 billion on pensions and fringe benefits for City employees out of a total budget of \$62 billion. What would you do to address the growing pension costs borne by the city and New York City tax payers?

The public employees of New York City are not responsible for the current financial crisis. These employees are the teachers of our children, our medical personnel, our bus drivers, sanitation workers, subway train operators and conductors and more.

The current and growing pension obligations have grown unsustainable and must be reformed but we must ensure that we do not place an unfair burden on young municipal workers, and discourage quality people from entering city government. Public employee unions ought to be able to negotiate freely to get the best pensions they can under these difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, they cannot do so, because Section 201 Part 4 of the Taylor Law prohibits collective bargaining on pensions for city workers. I support the abolition of the Taylor Law and the empowerment of unions to bargain in good faith with the city, on this and other issues.

I would also conduct hearings on practices that inflate the pension payout calculations, such as "spiking". Spiking is the use of overtime and creative accounting to inflate the calculated average salary for the last 5 years on the job.

19. What is your position with respect to the City Council **Support**
passing a resolution calling upon the State Legislature
to establish a State Constitutional Convention?

a. If support, what are the three most important areas that need improvement?
Election reform, campaign finance reform and greater New York City Home Rule.

b. Do you believe that greater home rule should be granted to the City of New York? If so, in what areas should further sovereignty be given?

Yes, I believe the City of New York should be granted greater home rule, in particular around rent regulations, schools, tax policies, MTA governance and roadways. We need to repeal the Urstadt Law and the City should have the power to levy taxes. We should also have greater control over the State Parks that are located within New York City. The regulations limiting bike riding and dog walking in State Parks are unsuitable for New York City life.

20. Taking into consideration the lessons learned from the debates surrounding congestion pricing and the Ravitch Commission's recommendations to provide the MTA with long-term funding, what would you propose to address the MTA's fiscal solvency issues and ensure that the burden for funding the MTA is equitably distributed among all stakeholders?

The City must consider increasing its contribution to the MTA during budget deliberations and, as previously stated, lobby for greater authority over tax policy (while demanding greater accountability of the MTA).

The cost involved with maintaining bridges and connecting roadways should be borne in part by auto users, just like subway fares already pay for two-thirds of operating costs (the highest cost-recovery ratio in the country). Tolling all the currently free East River and Harlem Bridges at an amount equivalent to the cost of a single transit ride is estimated to bring in over half-a-billion dollars annually.

Building a robust Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, particularly in what are affectionately known as the "outer boroughs" where reliable mass transit is often scarce, will be faster and

cheaper to install than new subway lines and can quickly serve areas in Eastern Queens that are not well-supported by mass transit.

Finally, while not related to MTA funding, the expansion of NYC's bike network, an investment in bicycle parking and bike racks on buses will keep the current momentum of commuter cycling growing. Cycling is unique: infrastructure is cheap to install, there is low-to-zero impact on surface roads and the environment, and it promotes better general health, which lowers medical costs over time. Although not for everyone, an improved and interconnected bicycle network's high payoff versus low cost means it cannot be ignored in any discussion of transportation and funding.

21. What would you propose in terms of creating a greater role for the city council in determining and deciding the city budget?

The City Council needs to use its power to create an alternative budget more often; in this way it can ensure that its budget priorities are clear when holding public hearings and send a strong message to the Mayor. When I recently testified during the budget hearings on the proposed cuts to the Libraries, many members of the public were unclear that the cuts were proposed by the Mayor not the City Council. In addition, we need to decentralize the budget process; the Speaker holds far too much power.

22. What is your position regarding the City's past practice of using surplus tax revenues to pay down future health cost and pension obligations, and the decision not to do so this year?

This practice is a symptom of health and pension obligations that are no longer sustainable given the City tax revenues. Budget decisions must address both short-term and long-term needs, and not be based on currying political favor. For example, if the \$400 property tax rebate had instead been dedicated to the health care trust fund (or the MTA or other budget priorities), we would have had approximately \$250 million annually or close to \$1.2 billion that could have been used for those purposes.

23. What is your view of how the taxes paid by New Yorkers compare to the value that is received in City services? Do you believe that taxes should be raised or lowered? To the extent you believe taxes should be changed, please provide specific proposals about what taxes you would raise and what services you would cut, if you didn't raise taxes, listed in order of greatest magnitude.

The value of city services received compared to taxes paid depends very much on one's place on the socioeconomic ladder. One good example is the subways. Inadequate tax funds are dedicated to the maintenance and improvement of the subway system, and a constantly growing regressive "tax," the transit fare, is levied against those too poor to afford other means of transport. In return, riders are now receiving *reduced* service -- fewer trains, filthier cars and platforms, less safe conditions -- for greater cost.

The City Council needs to establish clear budget priorities and then decide how it can efficiently, sustainably and transparently fund those priorities. I am completely opposed to the use of taxpayer dollars to provide incentives or tax breaks to build sports stadiums. I support

restoring the Stock Transfer Tax which worked fine for New York City until abolished during the Reagan era. The Stock Transfer Tax would generate hundreds of millions of dollars in much-needed revenue for the City every year.

There are many ways to reduce government spending without negatively impacting the ordinary working people that create the wealth of this city. One plan would be to drastically reduce privatization (outside contracting) of all government services that could and should be performed by city employees. The current ad campaign by DC37 is correct when that union asserts that using city employees whenever possible eliminates waste, saves tax dollars and keeps city money within the five boroughs to stimulate the economy.

It is very possible that some city programs and services contain waste that should be eliminated, but each should be examined on a case-by-case basis and alternative solutions be explored. It is essential for the City to use a scalpel rather than a meat cleaver to confront this issue of cuts in city programs and services. We need to look at “best practices” of other urban locations around the country and around the world.

For example, the City wastes \$15 - \$20 million dollars of taxpayer money on runoff elections in citywide races when no candidate in the primary receives at least 40% of the vote. Instant Runoff Voting is a proven solution that would allow voters the opportunity to rank the candidates in their order of preference (1, 2, 3...) on a single ballot so that we could have one election, not two – saving time and money.

We also need to drastically change the way we handle waste and significantly improve our reuse, recycling, composting and waste disposal systems. The cost of recycling and trash disposal are nearly equal in New York City today, and a recent study showed that - in no more than five to six years - the city's curbside recycling program will become less expensive than trash disposal and will reduce the Department of Sanitation's (DSNY) overall operating costs.

We can save money, create or keep jobs in the City and combat global warming by expanding the public space recycling program, creating a curbside composting pick up program, limiting use of non-recyclable food and beverage containers and packaging materials sold in stores, require all demolitions to submit a waste management plan and process recyclables at local recycling plants.

According to DSNY Residential Waste Characterization Study, about 22% of our waste is food and yard waste that can be potentially diverted with new legislation that would create an official NYC curbside compost pick up program that would include yard waste, leaves, and food items. This compost could be used to help nurture our “Million Trees” and plants in parks and community gardens throughout the City. Additionally, concession revenues collected in New York City Parks should fund New York City Parks, not just go into the general fund.

24. Many policy advocates champion the creation of a more diversified economy, and one that is less reliant on Wall Street. What is your position on such a plan? If you support it, what would you do to diversify the city's economy? How would you adjust spending in New

York City to accommodate the anticipated reduction in tax revenue as the tax base shifts to lower paying jobs?

Our reliance on Wall Street is obviously unsustainable. A diversified economy must support small business and our rapidly growing independent work force. The City needs to use its powers over land use and the budget in order to foster an economy that provides more jobs (with living wages, benefits, paid sick leave and opportunities for advancement) to more people and which leaves the City with a more stable revenue base.

We need to invest in a green economy, with green manufacturing jobs and jobs in the field of energy-efficiency in order to reduce the carbon emissions of our aging housing stock and improve the living situations of millions of tenants and property owners. We need to mandate that all municipal buildings, including schools and libraries, become models of sustainability with solar thermal, solar photovoltaic (PV), wind or green roof projects installed by 2020.

Every service and program run by the City should be examined to determine its carbon footprint, and City employees whose jobs might otherwise be eliminated as redundant in the current economy could be retrained to perform tasks that would reduce the carbon footprint of those programs and services.

Additionally, I would promote an Immigrant Entrepreneurship Program at Queens Economic Development Corporation and a pilot project to create trainings and workshops specifically for self-employed independent contractors, including freelancers and consultants, similar to the Entrepreneur Assistance Program (EAP) they offer. I will also work with the Queens Public Library, which already provides much-needed employment resources, to establish a series of seminars, tax clinics and business plan workshops for independent workers.

25. What would you propose the Department of Education do to increase the ability for parents and teachers to become more meaningfully involved in the education system? What other positive changes can be made to the New York City public school system?

I support directly elected school boards and restoring non-citizen voting in those elections. While there were several drawbacks to the old system, one solution to address the low voter turnout for past school board elections is to schedule the elections to coincide with elections for Mayor and/or City Council. And expanding the New York City Matching Funds Program to school board candidates (developing new criteria and funding levels) will address the concern that voters didn't know the candidates.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for all the public schools in New York City's diverse neighborhoods. I believe allowing parents and members of the community to elect and *bold accountable* school board members will provide opportunity for more meaningful involvement than the current councils. At the very least, a majority of PEP members should be parents of public school students.

As far as positive changes, the Department of Education needs to invest in new technologies, such as programs that would allow parents to access grades and other information about their children's school performance online. Trainings should be held in

the schools and local libraries (which offer free internet access) so that both parents and teachers are familiar with the software.

New York City can build on its JOP (jointly-operated-playgrounds) program to help increase the amount of space available for children and adults to play on the evenings and weekends. These schoolyard-to-playground programs often need the support of elected officials to help navigate issues of access, maintenance and safety between the school administration and the local community.

I am an active community gardener in an area of Astoria considered a 'food desert.' Far too many school children have no access to fresh, healthy produce and numerous studies have shown the link between proper nutrition and school performance. I would work to implement a healthy lunch program in conjunction with increasing the number of student gardens on school properties. **In addition, the City needs to require that *all* municipal buildings, including schools and libraries and senior centers, should have green roofs, which will lower utility bills and improve our air quality.**

Finally, we need to end the demoralizing and costly practice of "Rubber Rooms." According to a Daily News article last year, "*...an unprecedented backlog in the teacher discipline system ... has bloated the population to twice the size of four years ago - and is costing taxpayers at least \$65 million a year.*" We need to streamline the process to get teachers back on the job or off the payroll. The money saved should be spent on unfreezing the current hiring freeze on public school teachers.

26. What would you propose to increase the transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York's operations and accountability to the city and its voters?

The Board of Elections should be nonpartisan.

City of New York's Board of Elections meetings are always held in the middle of the day, in downtown Manhattan. These meetings should be rotated to the different Boards of Election offices in each borough and attempts made to occasionally schedule meetings in the evening to allow for more members of the public to attend. Additionally, the Board of Elections drastically needs to update its website and documents that are available online, including sample ballots.

27. What would you propose to further enhance transparency regarding the relationships between council members, their families, and nonprofits that receive funding from New York City?

This question brings up a broader topic: the entire system of discretionary funding needs to be reformed in order to improve overall transparency and accountability. The Council has taken some steps in the right direction by listing the names of Council Members, who have co/sponsored items, but there is still information missing and the Speaker has too much power in the process. Nonprofits that receive City funds could be required to turn in financial disclosure information to the Conflict of Interest Board, much as candidates for office are required.

Additional Comments:

***Question 1:** I support a modified-closed primary system rather than a full open primary system in order to protect smaller parties who may not have a large membership. Non-affiliated or “independent” voters are the second largest chunk of voters in New York City after registered Democrats.

***Question 3:** I support requiring training for all poll-workers. Although I have not been able to serve as a pollworker in New York City based on my party affiliation, I have served as a pollworker in Los Angeles and the need for pollworker training is essential, especially with so many changes due to HAVA compliance issues and new voting equipment.

I also advocate for a change in the state law which requires two pollworkers from each of the top two vote-getting parties at each election booth. In New York City, this effectively results in Democratic Party members being deputized as “Republicans” on Election Day rather than allowing unaffiliated voters or third-party members to serve. At a time when the pollworker population is dwindling - and the number of people registered outside the two-party system is growing - this should be a simple solution (if it weren’t necessary to go through Albany).

In addition to IRV for city-wide primaries, I support the use of IRV for special elections. Overseas military and other absentee voters should be allowed to cast an IRV ballot even if the City retains the current two-round runoff system.

There are a range of other good government issues that I discuss on the campaign trail, including but not limited to: ballot access reform, ending felony disenfranchisement, Election Day registration, reform of the appointment process to Community Boards and making their budgets and meeting agendas available online (Community Board 1 in Queens doesn’t even have a website listed on the Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit page).



CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Citizens Union is adding a new element to its evaluation of candidates running for office. As a candidate who presently does not hold elected office, CU is interested in knowing your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position.

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as, to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

We thank you very much for your response. Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

I do not make many “promises” on the campaign trail, preferring to listen to the concerns of residents and talk about practical solutions and legislation I will introduce or co-sponsor. The few “promises” I have made are generally in response to specific questions asked by voters. They include:

1. I promise to never vote myself a raise.
2. I promise not run for a third term, unless three terms are approved by a voter referendum.
3. I promise to be a fresh, independent voice on the City Council advocating for a just, healthy and sustainable city.
4. I promise to never forget I serve the voters not party bosses.