



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

Citizens Union would appreciate your responses to the following questions related to policy issues facing the City of New York that are of concern to Citizens Union and the citizens of the City. We plan to make public your responses to this questionnaire in our Voters Directory, on our website, and in other appropriate venues. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union will use to evaluate candidates who are running for office in order to determine our “Preferred Candidates” for the primary election and “Endorsed Candidates” for the general election. In order to receive Citizens Union’s “preferred” or “endorsed” status, in addition to completing the questionnaire, candidates must participate in an interview with Citizens Union’s Local Candidates Committee.

We thank you very much for your response.

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Candidate Name: Jumaane Williams\_ Age: 33

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 45

Campaign Address: 2092 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11210

Campaign Telephone Number: ( 347) 299-4791 Fax: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Ted Fertik, 347-451-8561

Website & Email: [www.jumaanewilliams.com](http://www.jumaanewilliams.com), [info@jumaanewilliams.com](mailto:info@jumaanewilliams.com)

Education: B.A. in Political Science, Brooklyn College; M.A. in Urban Policy and Administration, Brooklyn College.

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Consultant, Community Neighborhood Economic Development

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Assistant Director, Meyer Levin Beacon

Community Organizer, Flatbush East Development Corporation

Housing Director, Flatbush Development Corporation

Executive Director, NYS Tenants & Neighbors

Member, Community Board 18, Brooklyn

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? **YES**

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? **YES**

*(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: \_\_\_\_\_

**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.

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**VOTING AND ELECTIONS REFORM**

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|---|---|--|
| 1. What is your position with respect to allowing voters who are registered as independents to vote in party primaries?   | <b>Support</b>                                  | Oppose   |
| 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?  | <b>Support</b>                                  | Oppose   |
| 3. What is your position on increasing the pay of Election Day poll workers above the current \$200 they are allotted per election event?   | <b>Support</b>                                  | Oppose   |
| 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? | <b>Support</b>                                  | Oppose   |
| 5. What is your position on having an election administration system where there is a local elections executive director appointed by the mayor upon  | recommen<br>dation by a<br>new board<br>that is | chosen by<br>the mayor<br>and the city<br>council? |

Support

Oppose

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**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

**Oppose**

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|---|----------------|--------|
| 7. What is your position on allowing campaign financing for ballot proposals? | <b>Support</b> | Oppose |
|---|----------------|--------|

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**CITY COUNCIL REFORM**

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| 8. What is your position on allowing Council committees to function more independently of the speaker than is presently the case?  | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| a. Should committee staff be hired by and report to committee chairs?  | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| b. Should committee hearings and votes be scheduled at the direction of the chairs?  | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| c. Should committees be able to issue subpoenas by a vote of their members?  | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| 9. What is your position on:   |                |               |
| a. limiting councilmembers' ability to earn outside income?  | Support        | <b>Oppose</b> |
| b. making the job of councilmember a full-time position?   | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| c. eliminating or limiting stipends for committee chairs and leadership positions?   | Support        | <b>Oppose</b> |
| 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? | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| 11. What is your position on consolidating the current City Council committee structure and reducing the number of overall committees?   | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |

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|--|----------------|---------------|
| 12. What is your position on term limits for elected officials?  | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
| 13. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that changes to term limits may only be approved by the voters? | <b>Support</b> | Oppose        |
|  | Support        | <b>Oppose</b> |

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.

I opposed the Mayor's and Speaker Quinn's bill to change the term limits law in New York City. Never mind that the voters voted for term limits twice. I voted for term limits twice. The Mayor and the Speaker presented a number of arguments that no one could be expected to take seriously, in particular that introducing a bill to change the law after it was too late to put it up for a referendum was actually more democratic than having a referendum. Most New Yorkers viewed it as a power grab, and I agree with them. The current councilmember from my district voted for the bill and I have strongly criticized

him for his vote. I do believe in term limits. I believe it should be for three terms, not two. The way in which it was changed, however, was repulsive.

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**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.

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|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| <p>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?</p> | <p><b>Support</b></p> | <p>Oppose</p>  |
| <p>16. What is your position on changing the current land use process under ULURP to increase the role of community-based planning?</p>  | <p><b>Support</b></p> | <p>Oppose</p>  |
| <p>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?</p>  | <p><b>Support</b></p> | <p>Oppose</p>  |
| <p>18. What is your position on reforming the current pension funding structure to create multiple tiers for future city government employees?</p>   |                       | <p>Support</p> |

## Oppose

- 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?

I think it is a mistake to blame difficult budget conditions on public employees' benefits. We should protect and defend the benefits that working people – public and private – have fought to earn. Certainly those benefits, which are often greatly exaggerated, should not be reduced. A decent life in retirement is a right. I think the important issue is to work to eliminate the disparities between what public and private employees receive in terms of benefits by working to enhance the benefits of private sector employees, a great many of whom have next to no benefits at all. Some of that should come from the government through dramatically expanded health care coverage, for example. Some of that should come from dramatically increasing unionization in this country so that workers have vehicles to fight for a bigger piece of their own companies' pies.

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19. What is your position with respect to the City Council **Support**  **Oppose**  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?

We need to change the manner in which bills are brought to the floor. The people of the state would benefit from seeing more bills debated on the floor even if they don't pass.

Committees in the legislature should be more empowered and more independent, similar to the changes proposed above for the City Council. Greater home rule should be granted to large municipalities.



- 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?

First and foremost, we need a greater level of sovereignty over our housing laws, which are currently voted on by non-New York City legislators who are more than happy to vote for laws sponsored by real estate interests who have little effect on their own constituents. Second, we need to ratify the city's control over its schools, but the convention should investigate what that system should look like and consider building in constitutional guarantees for parental and teacher participation. Third, greater sovereignty should be granted over local taxation.

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?

I supported some form of congestion pricing, so long as the MTA can find a way to increase capacity simultaneously, otherwise the overcrowding would become intolerable. In general, though, I believe strongly that our public transportation system is one of the things that makes this city great. Maintaining our system – and expanding it to meet the needs and exigencies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should be one of our highest priorities as public servants. Clearly the MTA faces extraordinary long term costs in the form of capital projects, maintenance, pensions, and more. To be able to complete projects that have already begun, or to realize those that haven't, the MTA will need to secure large amounts of long-term funding. Many ways have been proposed and I am open to many of them. I think the public knows that these costs must be borne in one way or another. The public objects to the seemingly arbitrary way in which fares are raised, because they have no idea what happens inside the MTA. Solving the MTA's longterm funding problems will require getting the public bought in so that they want to think seriously about how to do it. Measures should be taken to make the Authority's budget more transparent, at the very least. Legislators should engage in good faith conversations with their constituents about what they need.

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

The public probably assumes that the Council has greater control over the budgeting process than it does. In reality, the Mayor sets the agenda, and the council gets to argue about the margins. A Charter Review should look closely at the City's budgeting process and evaluate ways for the council to have a greater role, for example in the relevant committees having more direct say in the budgets of agencies they are designed to oversee. New York has a strong mayor system, and most voters probably don't think that should be fundamentally altered, but New York City has a budget of over \$60 billion per year, and sensibility alone dictates the creation of real institution checks and balances to ensure that the budget truly reflects the priorities of New York's citizens.

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?

In general I believe it makes sense to devote surplus revenue to paying down future health and pension obligations as a way to ensure the city's longterm fiscal health. This practice is a meant as a bulwark against years when there is a possible shortfall. The fact that the City did not do so this year is a reflection of the difficult times, but is in keeping with the spirit of the practice to begin with.

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.

New Yorkers have access to a great many services through their government – more probably per capita than most other cities in the country, and that is an impressive feat when considering the city's size. Most of these are services which New Yorkers deserve to have. And many of those services that New Yorkers deserve to have are not provided at a high enough quality and are not well enough funded to ensure their proper delivery. On the whole I think that most New Yorkers understand that their tax dollars go to pay for things that they know they need, such as schools for their children, meals for seniors, hospitals, libraries, police, fire,

sanitation, and so much more. Sometimes, though, they feel that those taxes are unfairly levied. Homeowners in New York often chafe under high property taxes. And poor and working-class New Yorkers are unfairly burdened by sales taxes. I do believe the City on the whole needs more rather than less revenue to fully provide the services that New Yorkers want and deserve. I think the most fair way to do this is through a progressive income tax. New York is the most unequal city in America. The wealthiest among us can afford to pay a little bit more to help create a city that is a good place for all of its residents to live, work, and raise their families.

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?

These are difficult questions that don't lend themselves to brief answers, but the following are a few thoughts. First, it is clear that an economy built around "FIRE" (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Entertainment) is an economy that privileges the very wealthy and affords fewer and fewer opportunities for the kinds of good paying jobs that used to help bring New Yorkers and all Americans into the middle class. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, New York was the largest manufacturing city in the world. Up until the 1950s, the Port of New York, which was actually in New York City, was still the busiest in the world. Clearly neither of those two things is the case anymore. We need to have a vision of what constitutes a good job. In my opinion it is one that pays a wage that can sustain a family, that offers opportunities for advancement, that affords protection against arbitrary actions by employers, and that bestows dignity upon the person who holds it. There are sectors of the economy in New York which are currently small but that could grow – everything from environmentally sustainable manufacturing, to medical research and technology, that have the potential to be those kinds of jobs. If, however, we do increase the number of decent paying jobs while losing some of the exorbitantly paying jobs, we will need to rethink some aspects of our fiscal practices. I do, however, believe that a properly structure progressive income tax can resolve much of the problem. The American economy from the 1940s through the 1960s sustained its highest recorded average wages with the lowest levels of income inequality at least in part because of a steeply graduated progressive income tax.

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 positives changes can be made to the New York City public school system?

There is much in our school system that New Yorkers should be proud of. With 1.2 million children, we are far and away the biggest school system in America and I think it's safe to say that we are in better shape than many. I am a product of New York City's public schools – from Kindergarten through to completing my masters degree, and I am very proud of that fact. As a child who dealt with both Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Tourette's Syndrome, I benefited both from resources that were available in the public schools, and from an involved parent, so I know the importance of both. I do believe that the Mayor has arrogated an inappropriate and counterproductive amount of control to himself over the last seven years, and I think that there is broad consensus among parents and teachers that some checks are needed. There were good aspects to the bill passed by the Assembly, but on the whole it gave the Mayor a pass. At the very least, I thought that the composition of the Panel for Educational Policy should have been changed to give actors other than the Mayor control over a majority of the Board's appointees. The Chancellor would still have had enormous freedom of movement, but it would have created an institutional check on his and the Mayor's power. I support the Mayor of the City of New York having control over the City's schools, just as I support the City Council of the City of New York having control over the City's rent laws. But in almost every other arena there exist institutional checks to the Mayor's powers. That education, which involves just about every person in the City, should be excluded from that, is simply bizarre. The Mayor and the Chancellor have pursued a number of policies which don't work nearly as well as they say they do – for example an over-emphasis on testing – and as citizens, as parents, as teachers, we should be able to do something about that.

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?

Much could be done to increase transparency at the Board of Elections. As a City Council candidate, I get to interact in the space of the same day with both the Board of Elections and the City's Campaign Finance Board. The CFB is not a perfect institution, of course, but in general information is available both through their website and over the phone. The Board of Elections should have a better website that provides more information in a more easily accessible format, and that encourages the public to look at how elections are administered in New York City. I do also think that the Board's budget should be subject to greater oversight and should be published in a way that it is easy for New Yorkers to access and understand how money is being spent.

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?

Two former aides to the incumbent I am challenging in the 45<sup>th</sup> council district recently pleaded guilty to embezzling \$145,000 in city funds out of grants requested by the councilmember himself. I immediately called for the councilmember to resign, arguing that he either knew what was going on, in which case he is criminally liable, or he was asleep at the wheel while nefarious acts on the part of his staff were taking place, in which case he is unfit to serve as a guardian of the public trust. Clearly there is a council-wide problem with member items. Councilman Yassky's website which publishes all council member items is a good start towards allowing the public in to how council money is allocated. The city should institutionalize this practice so that all citizens can look at where their tax dollars are going. Included in this publication should be the names, addresses, and employers of all key players in the organizations receiving funds, in something akin to the City's "Doing Business Database," used by the CFB. I also think that any organization receiving member items should have to undergo a basic vetting by the agency through which the funds are passing to ensure that the organization has bookkeeping systems in place, is properly incorporated with the State, and other provisions that would help to avoid at least some of the scandals from recent years.

I want to stress, though, that while I support increased transparency for member items, I also support member items. These grants are often the lifeblood for small community



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## **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**

1. Affordable Housing. I promise to fight for the rights of renters and homeowners at a time when costs continue to rise even as incomes decline. First and foremost I will work with colleagues in City and State to repeal the Urstadt Law and to repeal High-Income and Vacancy Decontrol, so that we can preserve the affordable units we have. I will continue to fight for inclusionary zoning in new development. I will fight to restructure the Rent Guidelines Board so that it actually represents renters and not just big real estate interests. And I will look for every way possible to help distressed borrowers hold on to their homes.
2. Schools and Programs for Youth: I will work to find underutilized land on which to build new schools in order to reduce overcrowding. I will work to bring resources into the district for youth and afterschool programs in order to help underprivileged young people stay off the streets, stay in school, and find their way into decent jobs and a decent life.



3. Services for Seniors: I will fight to protect vital senior services, such as meals at senior centers, Meals on Wheels, and Visiting Nurse Service.
4. Immigration: I am the child of immigrants and as such I understand how difficult it can be to adjust to a new home. New York must be a welcoming place to people around the world, regardless of what language they speak or what traditions they observe. We need to make sure there are sufficient translation services available for all city services, especially in schools, law enforcement, and public benefits. We need to make sure that ESL programs are well funded. And we need to stop discriminating based on immigration status. I will fight for these, which are the basic rights of all Americans.
5. Health and Wellness: A disproportionate number of individuals and families in my district suffer from maladies such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, hypertension, sickle cell anemia, and obesity. I will work to ensure that information is available to all New Yorkers about everything from healthy habits to resources in the community that are available to them. I will also work to make sure that HHC hospitals do not face budget cuts, and that community clinics and other health facilities receive the funding they need.