

# VID Candidate Survey: City Council

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Aleta LaFargue

In which Council District are you running? \*

City Council District 3 ▼

City Council District 1

Do you support SoHo/NoHo rezoning? Is there a version of it you would support? \*

Do you support the borough-based jail in Chinatown? \*

Do you support replacing the Elizabeth Street Gardens with the proposed senior citizen development? \*

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Do you support the Two Bridges developments? What changes would you make to them? \*

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City Council District 2

Do you support the phased closing of East River Park for the current coastal resiliency project? If not, how would you ensure LES and EV residents are safe from future storms and flooding? \*

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Do you support the move and downsizing of Beth Israel by Mount Sinai? Have you considered the effect on your constituents and do you have a different proposal? \*

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City Council District 3

Would you support upzoning parts of the Village to create affordable housing? What is your plan to protect existing affordable housing and create more, in the Village specifically? \*

Up-zoning has proven to be a boon for investors and developers leaving affordable housing in the lurch. \*In 2019 Chicago's upcoming efforts served only to increase the prices of existing housing units and found no impacts of the reforms on the number of newly permitted dwellings over 5 years. There are environmental concerns. increasing carbon footprints and threatening important green spaces. The number of apartments for rent in Manhattan tumbled in September with nearly 16,000 apartments sitting empty. The vacancy rate in Manhattan which is typically 2-3% is now just under 6%. This gives us an opportunity to negotiate deals with landlords and propose incentives for section 8, Mitchel Lama and other housing candidates. Luxury high rises have been havens for foreign investors who do not give back or participate in our community by paying taxes, sending their kids to our schools or shopping in our stores.

Many residents of District 3, particularly our elderly and people with disabilities, have complained that lax bike rule enforcement, increased outdoor dining, and other factors have made the Village less walkable and more dangerous for elderly and disabled pedestrians. What would you do to improve the situation? \*

I believe we need to conduct a survey and study to find efficient alternatives and accommodations for these problems that benefit all parties involved but prioritize the safety of our seniors and those with disabilities. The main goal of this should be to find a comprehensive, safe solution.

There have been several clashes between NYPD and protesters in past months. How would you work with the NYPD to ensure that peaceful protesters are not subject to kettling and other police practices that are harmful to the protesters? \*

The use of kettling against peaceful protestors must be banned. Human Rights Watch has released an extensive report detailing the NYPD's use of kettling against BLM protesters this past summer. The 99 page report concluded that the NYPD carried out serious human rights violations: excessive use of force, violations of rights to free expression, peaceful assembly, arbitrary arrests and detentions and cruel and degrading treatment of detainees. Despite Mayor DeBlasio and NYPD Commissioner Shea's accusations that protests were violent, HRW found no evidence of violent behavior from protestors. Furthermore the taxpayer cost is now in the several millions for the police resources used and the subsequent civil lawsuits that have been filed against the NYPD. This report also found that kettling "often led to violent clashes with the police." These policies come from the top down and require our officers to implement them. We should be moving our police force toward peace keeping and the policies I would create and support would reflect that.

How would you use this position to improve policing in New York? Do you support cutting NYPD funding in order to reallocate funds towards needed services and social programs? Where would you reallocate the funds, if so? What concrete policies would you advocate for to improve policing in NY? \*

I believe police funding needs to be rerouted and invested into improving police training, but we cannot and should not stop there. If elected to City Council one of the committees I would appreciate being placed on is the Public Safety Committee currently chaired by Queens Borough President Elect Donovan Richards. What other way to identify problems and hold NYPD top brass accountable than to sit on the very committee that provides oversight?

Within that committee, in conjunction with the Progressive Caucus and the Black, Latinx, and Asian Caucus council needs to hold a hearing or hearings on what improvements in quality of life our most vulnerable New Yorkers would receive by advancing reform in police training. These hearings should focus on the role of police in our communities, specifically how investigations are executed and on the rights that are infringed upon during those investigations. Concurrently we need to examine how de-escalation techniques can be used to save lives. Tragically we have seen time and time again in our City's history the need for these tried and tested reform programs as New Yorkers are left physically and mentally scarred and in the worst case scenarios have lost their lives.

It is clear that we should shift funds to the following:

Community building programs like the Police Athletic League (PAL);  
Cure violence organizations;  
Reentry programs that address job training, mental health and chemical addiction treatment for people recently released from the prison system;  
Youth programs that employ our City's most vulnerable youth, keeping them off the streets;  
Social worker programs that are woven into the NYPD crisis de-escalation;

These programs work when they are properly funded, I know, because my peers and I were the beneficiaries of many of them. Once we reallocate funds from the NYPD to these social programs we can then begin to imagine what the NYPD would look like as our communities push to get out of this racist, dehumanizing, Jim Crow model.

For some time now the State and the City has existed in an unaddressed opioid epidemic that has seen spikes in violent crime in some of our most vulnerable communities. While this is a Health Committee issue it still very much falls under the purview of Public Safety and it must be addressed in council. Even if only to result in a letter to state and federal leadership or in the form of a resolution supporting progressive minded legislation in Albany.

The NYPD's enormous public relations/media budget this should be partially reallocated to fund community outreach programs, school programs and youth/police relations programs. As a tenant association president for 3,500 souls I have been successful at including and introducing the police from our local precincts to our community members, creating opportunities to connect and bond. But the most egregious spending that needs to be cut is the practice of procuring equipment that further militarizes the NYPD.

Here are a few policy positions I firmly believe need to be considered for legislation:

There should be no reversal on the choke hold ban that killed Eric Garner. PERIOD;  
I will not back legislation that has the potential to cause over policing on communities of color;  
Regulating the NYPD's use of drones and cyber surveillance, including but not limited to facial recognition AI;  
NYC needs to become the first municipality to draft and adopt the prescriptive purpose of the NYPD so all New Yorkers firmly understand the role of police in society. Protect and serve who? This must be clearly defined.

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How would you go about creating more affordable housing in New York? What about permanent housing for New York's homeless population? Where would you put it? How would you make sure it's actually affordable and sustainable? Would you ever support upzoning in order to create it? Will you accept money from real estate interests? Please be specific on your proposals. \*

As a council member, I would fight to create more affordable housing by ensuring they have priority over luxury development to provide for ALL New Yorkers.

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Do you support taxing the wealthy? What specific tax policy changes would you support in New York State and New York City to increase State and City revenue? How will you, at the same time, restore NYC's economic health, employment, tax base, and small businesses, both short-term and long? \*

Yes, this is long overdue.

First, enacting a "pied-a-terre" tax through the state that would target absentee homeowners and investment properties while encouraging developers to build units closer to the middle and lower-income ends of the market.

Communities of color are most frequently the victims of aggressive deed fraud schemes, wholly because of the City's current method of assessing property values, leaving seniors and their family members in severe tax arrears and desperate for financial relief. We have to find a new model before our historic black and brown communities can only be visited in a Ken Burns' style documentary. Additionally we need to pass an ultra-millionaires tax that adds new, higher rates on marginal incomes above \$1 million. We should also adopt a new luxury sales tax on items of excess.

Nicotine is nicotine no matter how an individual consumes it; there is no reason why traditional cigarettes should be taxed at one rate and e-cigarettes be taxed at a lower rate. The state needs to address this now. How can we tax a black man in Harlem one rate for his Kools when a 21 year old NYU student vaping gets taxed at a lower tier? This is a no brainer, as it addresses a gap in tax revenue and a racial disparity.

Big box retailers and conglomerate dining organizations like CVS and McDonald's are currently replacing our NYC workforce with computers and robots. As employers they are no longer paying into our unemployment system while actively creating a new generation of unemployed New Yorkers. If this practice is to continue, as these multi-billion dollar companies threaten to fire an entire workforce if the city moves to increase the minimum wage to \$15, an employment tax must be paid to supplement the loss of funds to our unemployment system and be jointly used to retrain New Yorkers for the 21st Century workforce in demand today as well as in 10, 15, and 20 years from now. Think of it like the old gas station 'take a penny, leave a penny' program. If you remove a job from your floor you should still be paying an employment tax and unemployment tax for five years after that action.

In New York State we need to legalize recreational marijuana and ensure that the bill passed and signed in Albany has advanced opportunities for women and minority owned businesses seeking to receive a dispensary license.

I would also support implementing UBI (Universal Basic Income), especially during the pandemic and reassess its success in 2023. We must ensure that the loopholes to avoid paying taxes are eliminated so that the wealthy are forced to pay their taxes. A healthy economy is not one that just spends but includes citizens who have the ability to save and not live in debt.

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How should we desegregate our schools? Do you support eliminating the SHSAT? Do you support admissions screens? What concrete changes would you make to our public school system? \*

If neighborhoods are segregated, the schools will in turn be segregated. Red lining directly affects the racial and economic make-up of a school. The federal government's turning a blind eye to the use of restrictive housing covenants, the denial of federally backed loans for minority homeownership, and the segregational actions of Robert Moses are still felt today by our City's public school students. If we need to reimplement the practice of bussing we should do so. If we need to reassess how school district lines are drawn to address inequity I will back a city-wide commission to do so, only if the council is able to select an equal number of members to the board as the next mayor. People will argue against this by insisting on making better primary and middle schools in depressed neighborhoods; however, separate but equal is not the answer.

The SHSAT should be eliminated, but with what? And what happens to our specialized high schools that focus strictly on STEAM? And what happens to Asian American students (a minority group that suffers from low income but finds their children as the highest represented minority group to enter these schools)? This is a heady topic that does not have a one-size-fits-all solution. The mayor often tries to apply broad-stroke solutions to the City's problems and fails.

Admissions screens consider so many points of criteria that are selected by white leadership and subjugated upon minority students. Our City's public school systems educate a majority minority student population. As a woman of color I know this to be an unfair application meant to deny students of color quality public education. Students with poor attendance come from troubled homes. How is it fair for an otherwise A-grade capable minority student to be denied access to a top school because of attendance? Are we funding country clubs or a public model that ensures New York City students are able to actualize their full potential? What I want for the public school education my son receives in Hell's Kitchen is what I want for every single child of the five boroughs.

The school construction authority is broken, and budget spending restrictions are creating a market for charter schools. We need to address how the SCA identifies building new public schools, and we need to loosen expenditure restrictions on our schools' individual leadership.

What is the path forward on corrections reform? Do you support closing Rikers? Do you support constructing new, borough-based jails? In all boroughs or just some of them? Do you support bail reform? Did you support the recent partial roll back of bail reform? \*

What we need to be discussing are massive culture changes within the NYPD and Corrections. Simply locking up "criminals" has not proven to keep our streets any safer. If we manage detention in a way that includes true rehabilitation, mandatory education/skills training, therapy, anger management etc. the chances of recidivism will decline, and successful reintegration into society as contributing tax paying citizens will increase.

Rikers needs to close; it is a human rights nightmare. I haven't heard a single story of someone who went into Rikers coming out as their old self or reformed. Rikers broke the very essence of their being. However, do I believe that the allocation of funds towards the construction of these borough based jails addresses the racial inequities that created the school-to-prison pipeline New Yorkers of color live in? No. How can a white mayor and a white speaker begin to claim victory when they have not lived a day in the shoes of a Black, Latinx, or Asian American man?

How does the City intend on reducing incarceration rates if the first instinct of leadership is to build new prisons rather than address and reform the society that got us Rikers Island in the first place? The deal made with the white cis representative of Queens to expand the footprint of a male population prison in another borough for the promise of a "yes" vote was a farce.

I support bail reform because cash bail is a method commonly used to force individuals out of having their day in court. It forces the accused to consider one of two options: immediately plead guilty or spend time in prison while they wait for their delayed hearings in a system that is currently inundated with criminal cases.

What the partial bail reform rollback showed me was that very little funding has gone into changing what "corrections" truly means in the years leading to the passage of bail reform in Albany. It revealed to me that the State and the City have failed to fund social programs that would keep an individual out of a life of crime.

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How can New York lead on climate change? Are there any green energy projects we can pursue? Do you support any of the existing pipeline proposals? How can we leverage our financial and economic power to encourage other jurisdictions to be better on the climate? \*

We must create a universal composting initiative. In addition, we must provide solar energy in low income communities and public housing to spur job growth and lower costs.

I would fight to propose a deal that incentivizes partnerships between the city, real estate developers and green energy companies to implement green energy as a contractual obligation for acquiring air rights in cases where rezoning is being considered

Any natural gas pipeline that will adversely affect our restored Hudson estuary should be opposed by the full council. Proposals currently made by the City to alternatively use Rikers Island as the largest urban solar farm are integral for our City's position in the world and increasing access to alternative energy resources will benefit future generations of NYrs. Solar panels green roofs should be incentivized.

How will you improve procurement and contracting? How do we cut waste, and how do we make sure women- and minority-owned businesses get a fair shake in the procurement process? \*

At the moment there are no real incentives to hire women and minorities besides PR unless we create legislation to implement affirmative action and dictate a percentage of MWBE that should be followed. Mayor Dinkens implemented this program 30 years ago and yet we still see such a lack of inclusion. It's up to leadership to shine the light on this important issue.

What is your plan to save small businesses? How do we make sure, when we come back from COVID, our local businesses are still here? And how do we make sure the enormous amount of commercial vacancies get filled, and not just by big chains snatching up cheap leases? \*

We give subsidies to giant corporations, we need to do the same for small and middle sized businesses. We can offer loan relief. We have to create BIDs and Merchant Associations actively during the pandemic so small business owners have a voice. What does come back from COVID mean? The economic repercussions of COVID-19 will be felt for a generation. Small businesses will not recoup their losses for at least a decade if they are lucky to be open for that long. Small business grant receivership as proposed by some local leaders should not be predicated on some twisted Survivor like concept. We do not live in a 'Lord of the Flies' scenario. We live in the United States of America. Expanding our State's revenue model, adjusting our City's tax model, and making our small businesses whole again right now is the only way to ensure that they will be there when we come back from COVID. The City relies on the State for its annual funds and the State cannot legally go into deficit because of an act of Congress. Both houses of Congress need to act now to provide a stimulus that will prevent the closure of the small businesses we love.

How do we stop big chains from snatching up cheap leases? We need to incentivize landlords to support the goals of BIDs, business diversification efforts, and supporting silicon alley start ups. Since March the City's service industries have seen the largest percentage of layoffs while the tech industry has only seen a 7% reduction in its workforce. As your City Council Member I will build a district cabinet that addresses the need for business diversification that aids stable employment growth while working with agencies like Go NYC and the Chamber of Commerce to rebuild service and hospitality jobs.

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

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