

Christopher Marte has been on the frontlines of the major issues in Lower Manhattan for the past 8 years, especially when it comes to overdevelopment and displacement. He has worked with his community to stop the development of luxury towers, which could displace thousands of tenants and small businesses. He has built coalitions to stop the building of a new jail, and push for restorative justice reforms. He has worked with parents and students to prevent illegal and toxic contamination from dangerous construction sites. Since COVID started, Christopher has worked to create a network of donors and volunteers to distribute food and PPE to homebound seniors and low-income families and workers. The district has extreme wealth disparities, but Christopher has a track record of bringing communities together with a common purpose, and will continue that mission in the City Council.

VID endorsement questionnaire

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

No, I do not support the Mayor's rezoning of SoHo/NoHo. The current proposal is flawed because it makes no commitment to building affordable housing, or examine the potential displacement of surrounding low-income and rent-stabilized tenants. SoHo and NoHo do not exist in a vacuum as they closely border the working-class and immigrant communities of the Lower East Side and Chinatown. Luxury development in SoHo will raise the property values of its neighboring communities, which leads to the displacement and harassment of low-income tenants as their landlords realize they can charge higher rents.

There is no plan for the protection of current JMWQA tenants in SoHo and NoHo, nor the preservation of the historic districts. The current proposal gives a loophole to developers who are facing financial hardships or can't feasibly finance the development to apply for an exemption to Mandatory Inclusionary Housing. During a pandemic, even luxury developers can claim financial hardship and will likely exploit this language to build 100% market-rate housing.

I do believe in a rezoning of SoHo, but this rezoning should be community-based. There are changes that need to be made to the zoning in order to protect the existing artist community, create a better balance between residential and commercial, and even convert empty offices into affordable housing. The loft tenants of SoHo have a long history of community activism, and a depth of knowledge on the intricacies of the neighborhood's existing zoning. They will be my partners in a rezoning process, not developers trying to profit off the community these tenants created.

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

I am against the new mega jail in Chinatown and have organized my neighbors and a

lawsuit to temporarily halt its construction. New jails do not end mass incarceration or advance criminal justice reform. The City violated its own zoning procedure in order to fast track a plan that would have built the tallest jail in the world. I co-founded Neighbors United Below Canal (NUBC) and worked with tenants, small businesses, and community leaders to ensure that Chinatown was not left out of the planning process. We advocated for greater transparency and accessibility so that this immigrant community could have a say in the future of our neighborhood. Together with thousands of neighbors, we led the largest march in Chinatown in over 40 years, with thousands of new and old tenants demanding, "No new jails!" We are at a pivotal moment in our City's history where we can close Rikers without building new versions of it. I explain this further in the 9th question.

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

I support saving Elizabeth Street Garden, especially as open green space has become so necessary to the health of our communities during this pandemic. When we first started fighting to save the garden, it was not guaranteed to be senior or low-income housing. Our advocacy pushed the Councilmember to sweeten the deal, but even now, the housing will not be permanently affordable. A handful of affordable units should not be the cost of destroying a garden. The community proposed several alternate sites that are empty lots, and yet the City has completely ignored these opportunities to build even more senior housing. Our district, like most of the city, is facing an enormous affordable housing crisis. Instead of fighting to build one building on top of one garden, I will use community-based rezoning plans to protect tenants and build greater amounts of permanent and deeply affordable housing. I will run a campaign and a Council office that unifies neighbors instead of pitting them against each other, and will implement housing plans that preserve open space and create new affordable apartments.

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

I do not support the luxury mega-towers in Two Bridges. I worked with residents and neighbors to create the “No Towers, No Compromise” campaign which hinges on the demand that we must not only stop luxury development and displacement, but pass a community-based rezoning alternative. We collected 5,000 petition signatures against the towers and delivered these to City Hall in a community-wide march last January. I also helped build the strategy for the lawsuit that won the work stoppage against the developments, which is now pending an appeal.

Our fight in Two Bridges has been successful not just because of what we are fighting against, but because we are fighting for a positive and equitable vision for our neighborhoods. The Chinatown Working Group Rezoning Plan was created by over 80 community organizations and provides comprehensive zoning to end real-estate speculation, preserve rent-stabilized apartments, keep NYCHA public, and build permanent deeply-affordable housing. Many of the same zoning protections already exist in the East Village, but must be extended down to District 1 if we are to stop the displacement of some of the last immigrant and working class communities in Lower Manhattan. The Chinatown Working Group unanimously endorsed my campaign for City Council because of my commitment to this plan and to the responsible protection and growth of this district.

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 will use my office as a strongarm against over-policing and police brutality. In addition to standing with victims of police violence, I will advocate for a charter revision to allow the City Council to vote on the next Commissioner of the NYPD. Councilmembers would be able to voice their constituents’ concerns about the state of policing, and get on-the-record answers on what kind of leader the Commissioner would be. This added

level of accountability and transparency could check the enormous discretionary power of the Commissioner. I will also support a charter revision to create an Elected Civilian Review Board so that there is a public process for what happens to bad cops. The ECRB should also be allowed to make binding decisions, instead of just recommendations to the Commissioner.

However, democratizing how the NYPD functions does not go far enough. I support cutting NYPD funding, and expanding the funds for programs that address the systemic issues that cause crime. I would not vote for a budget that continued to weaponize our police force with military-grade weaponry and technology, and a senseless amount of funds for helicopters. The role of police officers on public transit, schools, and shelters should be given to social workers and trained professionals in other agencies. Many students feel stressed and surveilled by police officers, which does not make for a productive learning environment. People experiencing homelessness should not be criminalized for not being able to afford rent. Those who seek shelter in the subways should receive the caring aid of a social work professional, and not the prodding of an armed officer. Reallocated funds can go to afterschool programs that help keep at-risk kids off the streets and the Summer Youth Employment Program which helps students get paid internships at local nonprofits and companies. Safe injection sites and free addiction counseling require adequate funding, but are proven to help neighborhoods stay safe and healthy. There are many better ways to invest in the safety of our community that don't require inflating the budget of the NYPD. Especially after the violence we witnessed this summer against innocent demonstrators, there is no excuse for a City Councilmember to continue to enable an unchecked NYPD to spend tax-payer dollars on brute force against our neighbors.

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. *

I am running for City Council because of its ability to control what gets built in our neighborhoods, and who it is built for. I am committed to creating truly and permanently affordable housing on a large scale, and prioritizing set-asides in developments for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. The status quo of the City paying through the nose to put up homeless people in hotels is immensely wasteful, and not a permanent solution. After 9/11, many former office spaces in the Financial District were converted to housing, including affordable housing. With even more empty office space and many companies realizing their employees can just work from home, we have a great opportunity to expand this conversion model. Throughout SoHo, Tribeca, FiDi, and even along the Lower East Side, empty office and commercial spaces can be converted into affordable housing. While not a lot of vacant space remains in Lower Manhattan, there are many empty lots that have been vacant trash pits for decades. Most of these are privately owned, but I will advocate that these sites be purchased by the city because of the neglect of their current owners, and used to build 100% affordable housing. Examples of these sites include a pit on Hester Street between the Bowery and Chrystie, an empty site on Rivington Street between Orchard Street and Ludlow Street, and many others.

When a project goes through the Uniform Land Use Review Process, I will use the Council's power over land use to drive a hard deal with developers who are not committed to affordable housing. We have enough empty luxury apartments downtown. I will not vote to approve any developments that have out-of-touch levels of affordability, as many in District 1 do not have enough of an income to even qualify for the little "affordable" housing that does exist. As mentioned in previous responses, I will implement the Chinatown Working Group Rezoning Plan to end the speculation of real estate interests that purchase rent-stabilized buildings to either demolish them for hotels or convert them into high-end condos. I will not accept any money from the real estate industry, just as I did not accept any real estate money in 2017 for City Council or 2018 for State Committee.

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. I support the Tax the Rich campaign, and hope the billionaire's tax and State Senator Hoylman's pied-a-terre tax pass in this next session in Albany. We do not have to be afraid that raising taxes will drive these tycoons (and their tax dollars) out of the City, because already New York taxes are much higher than surrounding states, and yet still the 1% choose to live here. I will leverage my office to be a strong advocate for more equitable taxes from Albany, and for a comprehensive recovery plan here in our district.

Locally, we need to ensure that the 80% of New Yorkers who are employed by small businesses have temporary incomes and jobs to go back to when the pandemic subsides. Any stimulus package from President Biden should prioritize the most vulnerable workers, tenants, and small businesses. However, we need proactive leadership to ensure that those in need have documentation ready and organized to apply for aid. As a candidate, I have already helped small women- and minority-owned businesses apply to PPP loans through local banks. As a Councilmember, I will continue to use my office as an organizing office to not just advocate to create new financial aid programs, but to ensure that those most in need have equal access to them.

While many businesses are closed, there are other sectors that are looking to expand. Census and pollsite jobs helped many New Yorkers make ends meet over the summer. Many nonprofits who are on the frontlines of relief efforts could have used support from the City's Summer Youth Employment Program, but instead its budget was severely cut in June. Our most urgent needs create some of our biggest opportunities. Our vulnerability to the next climate disaster deserves long-term investment to keep future costs down. A coastal resiliency project could put thousands of people to work, while

keeping Lower Manhattan safe. We need to build new affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness, and we need the construction workers, social workers, and site managers to make sure the housing is safe and supportive. In the Council, I will lead the effort to cut wasted money on inactive task forces, shady contracts, and an over-inflated NYPD budget. I will be ready to work with other Councilmembers to support our small businesses, and create sustainable jobs to improve the economic and environmental health of our city.

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? *

I support desegregating schools. The lines between City Education Council Districts 1 and 2 draw racial boundaries that lead to vast inequality in our public schools. I would advocate for new census data to be used to redraw these lines to be more racially and socio-economically diverse.

The SHSAT gives some students an opportunity to receive a great public education, but it unquestionably creates vast racial inequalities. I support repealing the Hecht-Calandra Act and returning the power over our public schools back to the city. We are the only city in the country that makes public high school admissions dependent only on one test, which is not based on the public school curriculum. The City and its students, parents, teachers, and administrators, should have the power to make decisions about city admissions, not Albany.

During COVID, we are seeing the pitfalls of admissions screens that advocates have long been calling attention to. We cannot base admissions on attendance when there are still thousands of children without access to internet for remote learning. Many colleges and graduate schools waived standardized tests for this admissions cycle because the technological, economic, and mental impact of the pandemic was too much of a burden for potential applicants. There are many students in our public schools who

lived under financial and emotional stress even before the outbreak, and it was these students who fell through the cracks even during “normal” times. We should use this opportunity to re-evaluate the vast inequities that screens create, and find more student-centered and holistic evaluating metrics to help students get access to an education that fits their learning styles, abilities, and needs.

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?

I support closing Rikers and not building four new jails. When the Tombs were built in Chinatown, they were also hailed as state-of-the-art facilities that would change the experience of incarcerated people. That did not happen. The Mayor’s jail plan seems doomed to make this same mistake: improving the physical structure does little to end mass incarceration if we are not changing why and how people are incarcerated, and what the conditions are like inside jails and prisons. The state’s bail reform was a big step forward, and should not have been partially rolled back. Ending cash bail is essential to reducing our prison population, and protecting the rights of those who are innocent until proven guilty. There are currently just 4,000 people who are in prison in New York City, fewer than at any point in history. In Los Angeles, the city started to move forward on building a new prison -- but grassroots activists fought hard and got those funds reallocated to build a state-of-the-art mental health center. If we continue to move forward to invest in building four new jails, instead of spending this \$11 billion to get to the root of the systemic issues that cause the criminalization of many marginalized communities, New York City will further embed itself into a carceral system instead of looking at proven alternatives.

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 need a comprehensive coastal resiliency plan. If a storm like Hurricane Sandy hit again tomorrow, the only part of our district that would be protected by seawalls is Battery Park City. Our elected officials and agencies have failed to coordinate the four separate resiliency plans that have been in the works to protect this district for years. I am ready to fill in this leadership void to make these plans work together and get implemented with the urgency they require.

We must reduce the carbon footprint of our city, and that will not be achieved by building more pipelines. I support breaking up ConEd and National Grid, replacing them with a publicly owned and operated utility that rapidly transitions to providing 100% renewable energy. Currently, the City hasn't met any of its climate benchmarks. The Climate Mobilization Act's carbon caps are set to take effect in 2024, to address the 30% of emissions that come from buildings. While this legislative package goes a long way, we must anticipate that many large real estate portfolios will choose to absorb the fines rather than retrofit their buildings. I would introduce legislation to suspend all building and work permits for buildings out of compliance with the Act to make sure that this deadline isn't just another that passes us by.

New York City may be leading the state in its climate change policy, but I am afraid that we are far behind other cities across the country and around the world. Denver and Chicago had robust green roof policies before our City implemented them last year. We have an opportunity with almost an entirely new City government to start to make this city into the leading force it should be through stronger legislation, climate infrastructure projects, and comprehensive green land use zonings.

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?

Contracts and procurements can become a blackhole of City funding. The clearest example is the hunter green that all scaffolding and boards are painted is trademarked by one company, who receive city funds for the licensing of this color. At best, there is little transparency and accountability surrounding contracts and procurements. At worst, these deals are made to enrich the friends of elected officials, appease donors of political leaders and drain the City's funds. Prioritizing women- and minority-owned businesses implicitly breaks up the corruption because these companies are much less likely to have institutional relationships with political elites. Chinatown still has many thriving manufacturing, lumber, metal work, and food supply companies that operate out of tenement garages, warehouses, and storefronts. I will demand that agencies support these local and immigrant-run small businesses when their services meet the needs of city projects, and advocate for small business training and support to help women- and minority-owned businesses build the professional networks that white male-owned businesses have an easier time attaining.

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 need lower rents, renewable leases, fairer fines, and a robust support system to bring our small businesses back. The Commercial Vacancy Tax, Small Business Jobs Survival Act, and a kind of commercial rent control should have been implemented before the pandemic, when so many of our small shops were already stretched thin. I will use my office to help organize small business owners, as I have in previous community campaigns, to lobby Albany to pass the Commercial Vacancy Tax, and will vote for a Speaker who is committed to the SBJSA and a progressive version of commercial rent control.

We have to make sure that the businesses that are open now receive interest free loans and federal grants packages which can refund and cover their rent while we are in the

pandemic. In addition, we have to give them relief from unnecessary regulations and arbitrary fines. Repealing the item pricing law, where bodegas have to individually price every item in their store, even if there is a price listed on the shelf, is just one example of an overly burdensome fine that any mom and pop can easily get slapped with.

There is a city agency meant to help small businesses survive in a tough climate, Small Business Services. However an informational website and occasional town halls are not enough to help small business owners who typically don't have enough time in the day to search through city websites for the information they need. I will advocate for a budget that gives SBS the staff and technology it needs to proactively build relationships with small stores and restaurants. I will pass legislation to bulk up the services this agency provides, so that the City can start to take action and accountability for the precarious market of small businesses. Part of these reforms will include funding community canvases administered by SBS, where multilingual representatives can provide on-site advice on how to comply with the complex bureaucracy of rules and restrictions before getting fined by other agencies.

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

If you have any questions, comments or want to reach out to our campaign, please feel free to email me directly chris@votemarte.com.