

VID Candidate Survey: City Council

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Jenny Low

In which Council District are you running? *

City Council District 1 ▼

City Council District 1

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

I can't support the rezoning proposal as it is now. I wholeheartedly support additional affordable housing in Noho/Soho but my concerns are: 1) 800 units of affordable units are not enough; 2) additional tenants with children would stretch already overcrowded schools; 3) additional families would stress social services networks; 4) additional residents would increase crowding on sidewalks and make area less safe for all pedestrians; and 5) removal of restrictions on ground-floor use may open space to big box retail stores. We can achieve a better zoning proposal where we aren't just looking at the addition of affordable units and retail space. We need to be mindful of what the additional density would mean to all the City services required for this neighborhood.

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

No. We need to close Rikers because it is an inhumane institution that is emblematic of the systemic racism of our criminal justice system. But we should not simply replace one big jail with four small ones.

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

In the SoHo/NoHo neighborhoods, we need more open green space and we need more affordable housing, especially for seniors to age in place. It is a shame that we are being forced to pit green space against affordable senior housing. While I may not be able to rectify past situations, I am in favor of keeping green space and increasing affordable housing. We can have both if we don't limit ourselves to City Council District lines. The needs of New Yorkers are not separated by district lines. As Council Member, I will collaborate with neighboring Council Members and residents to find space where we can keep Elizabeth Garden as is and build affordable housing for seniors in Lower Manhattan who sorely need better housing to age in place with proper services.

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

I don't support the Two Bridge development that was approved by the City's Planning Commission in December 2019. I support smart development where there is complete transparency from proposal, to planning, to implementation. Each step must have real input from impacted stakeholders, especially the residents of the neighborhood of the proposed project site. In order for the community to have full participation, we need to modify the ULURP process, providing more time for the residents and local the community board to review and weigh in. Any new development should include at least 30% affordable units.

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? *

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? *

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? *

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? *

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? *

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 am in favor of the hiring freeze and eliminating the NYPD budget for overtime. I am committed to taking a scalpel to the NYPD budget and support headcount reduction and re-direct funds from the NYPD to social and economic programs that help to build community trust and establish relationships between residents and the police precincts, especially in the Black community, as well as continuing to invest in adding mental health professionals to teams responding to incidents involving individuals struggling with mental health issues. I also support immediate removal of officers who are reassigned for modified duty particularly if they exhibited blatant abuse as part of disciplinary action.

The deaths of many people of color and specifically those in the Black community, due to police brutality have gone on for far too long. Aggressive policing is unacceptable and we must end it! We must hold officers accountable for abuse of power. I support changes in the NYPD training and policing guidelines starting with banning aggressive crowd control tactics like kettling where police would surround groups and use excessive force to make arrests. And I strongly support more oversight of the NYPD as it's the only agency that polices themselves. We need to enhance the ability of the existing independent CCRB for enforcement and prosecution. CCRB should be the oversight agency that determines disciplinary action upon conclusion of investigations. I want more transparency of NYPD budget and not for soundbites but we need to fully see and understand the budget. This is the only way to see how the money is distributed so we can adequately make decisions about redistribution of funds to other communities and social programs.

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. *

New York City must adopt proactive policies to maintain, preserve and expand affordable housing units. But all rezoning proposals must include the voices of all the community and cannot be rushed. I am not accepting money from real estate interests, lobbyists and police unions. Here is my proposals on increasing affordable housing and creating permanent housing for homeless individuals and families:

1. Increase capital spending and invest in Community Land Trusts
2. Increase operating subsidies
3. Mandatory inclusionary zoning with required 30% affordable units
 1. (a) Increase the City's capital budget to expand subsidies for construction of affordable housing and to purchase land while prices are dropping during the pandemic economic downturn. Invest in Community Land Trusts across the city that would prioritize affordable units in perpetuity; (b) increase incentives for owners of vacant hotels to convert to permanent affordable housing; and to provide subsidies to landlords who carve out existing housing for homeless individuals and families.
 2. The City must expand operating subsidies that complement capital subsidy programs. This will ensure new construction and preservation of affordable housing to serve low-income New Yorkers.
 3. Any development project that seeks any form of government subsidies or zoning variance must have a minimum 30% of affordable housing units.

We must expand and create permanent affordable housing to end homelessness. One major concern is the effect of the 2017 tax overhaul passed by Republicans that has negatively impacted low-income housing development. I will work with our Congressional delegation to amend or repeal sections that undermine the construction and repairing of affordable units. Washington must do its part to provide incentives for developers to take on affordable housing projects. In addition to the above strategies we must also: (a) extend eviction moratorium; (b) expand State's renter assistance program and change eligibility criteria so more renters can qualify; (c) expand voucher programs to enable homeless individuals and families find permanent homes; (d) provide legal assistance and right to counsel for tenants who face harassment and eviction; and (e) work with developers who are seeking subsidies to include units for individuals and families who are transitioning out from homelessness. The bill passed by the City Council in December 2019 that required a minimum of 15% units set aside for homeless individuals and families is a good first step.

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? *

I support a millionaires tax on the wealthiest New Yorkers. The city already has a "mansion tax" for home sales of \$1 million and greater. We should create a "multimillionaire's tax" as recently proposed by a former BlackRock executive, Morris Pearl. To further leveling the playing field, I would support an "inheritance tax" that requires wealthy heirs to pay income and payroll taxes on the inheritance they receive above a sizable lifetime exemption. We should explore any other progressive tax methods that can work toward making sure that the wealthy pay their fair share. Additionally, I support cutting funding from the NYPD and shifting it into programs that serve vulnerable populations and disadvantaged communities, which certainly would include investing in human service providers.

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? *

Racial and socio-economic segregation is a reality in NYC. We know that integration benefits all children and we must do the hard work to address this problem now. But what the Mayor and Chancellor have done is pitting one community against another and that is not what I support.

Fair Student Funding - New York City's public school system is the largest in the nation, yet it is the most segregated system. Schools in Black and Brown communities often do not receive equitable funding. We must ensure fair student funding goes to schools in Black and Brown communities. The City Council should not have to fight each year to get fair student funding during the annual budget negotiation process with the Mayor.

Gifted & Talented Programs - Since the Bloomberg Administration's change in the admission process for gifted and talented programs across the school system in the early 1990s, a majority of the schools in low income and Black and Brown communities no longer have G&T classes. Over the years, the number of Black and Brown students admitted to the City's top high schools, Specialized High Schools, dwindled. When I attended Brooklyn Technical High Schools in the late 1970s, the school was diverse and had over 50% Black and Brown students. We must restore G&T classes in every school and in every grade starting in kindergarten. This will enable students who are able to take on challenging and rigorous materials begin to do so as early as in kindergarten.

Elite Schools - In order to meet demand of the increased pipeline of students graduating from G&T programs from across the school system, we must increase the number of elite high schools with rigorous curriculum to seat every student.

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 real criminal justice reform that enables those who were incarcerated to reintegrate into society successfully. We need to close Rikers because it is an inhumane institution that is emblematic of the systemic racism of our criminal justice system. But we should not simply replace one big jail with four small ones; we must fundamentally change our approach to criminal justice and move away from the incarcerate-first mentality that has destroyed so many lives and harmed our communities. Instead, we need to look much more at root causes of crimes, whether it's poverty, lack of community support, lack of mental health care or addiction treatment, and give people the tools they need to become productive members of their communities. We do not need or want a jail built in Lower Manhattan; let's stop de Blasio's 4 borough jail plan and focus on helping communities rise rather than finding new ways to keep them down.

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? *

New York City can and should lead on Climate Change. One of the proposals I agree with under Mayor Bloomberg was his ambitious policies on a sustainable NYC. Climate change is real and we have already seen the negative impact in our city, especially in Black and Brown communities where there is a significant high rate of asthma, just to highlight an example. While the current administration in Washington DC rolled back many sound environmental protection regulations, we in New York City can take control of our own destiny in the fight against the negative impacts from climate change. I support the City's Climate Mobilization to cut emissions from buildings – the majority of which come from natural gas heating systems. I opposed the Williams Pipeline project because we can't combat climate change if we have fracked gas infrastructure that will increase emissions output.

As Council Member, I will support:

1. Requiring new construction and buildings undergoing renovations to be fully electrification-ready, so that they do not need to rely on fossil fuels to provide heating and cooling needs. This includes targeting renovations at all NYCHA properties.
2. Brownfield revitalization to remove environmental hazards to reuse properties and promote better health by reducing exposure to environmental contaminants. But this must be done with local communities so we are not displacing residents and invite gentrification
3. Commitment to send zero waste to landfills by 2030
4. Expand on Speaker Corey Johnson's Master Streets plan to have a future where walking, cycling, and shared transport are how the majority of New Yorkers move around our City. Community supported bike lanes and pedestrian plazas will add towards zero emission mobility, resulting in less congestion and less pollution.

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? *

As a former banker who, for 14 years, made first time bank loans to many entrepreneurs and MWBEs starting their businesses, I'm keenly aware of the hurdles that these business owners face. Among the support that we can provide a MWBE to help them succeed include: startup capital, mentorship, technical support, and training on how to navigate regulations that govern their industry and the procurement process for MWBEs. We need the City's Small Business Services to proactively provide expanded education with multi-lingual materials on (1) how to become a certified MWBE; having an application on their website is not enough! And (2) how to navigate the procurement process in government agencies as well as in private corporations.

In addition to strengthening the consistency of services provided technical assistance, we need to make access to capital much easier for MWBEs. Besides traditional banks, SBS, SCORE and SBDCs need to proactively engage with lending sources like CDFIs (Community Development Financial Institution) that are making loans to small businesses. Having worked with the aforementioned entities as a banker, I've helped countless MWBEs become successful businesses.

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? *

In my 29+ years career in financial services, I worked in areas of the institution that were dedicated to corporate social responsibility, making first time bank loans to entrepreneurs, MWBEs and small businesses, and managing a multimillion dollar grant portfolio supporting nonprofit organizations working towards improving the lives of low income New Yorkers. After the 9/11 tragedy, my team and I worked with the SBA and NYC EDC to make disaster recovery loans to small businesses downtown and help them get back on their feet. When the private, public and nonprofit collaborate, we can conquer many hurdles and help revitalize our community.

Growing up in a low-income neighborhood, I have a deep understanding of how the disparity of wealth and power negatively impacted everyday New Yorkers. I am a strong proponent of smart growth and development - that incorporates local residents and community input from the beginning of the planning process. This can only be achieved if community, developers, and the city meet on equal ground, equally invested with a stake in the development. Otherwise, developers would be telling us what we need, i.e. giving away the only supermarket in the neighborhood like the Pathmark on Cherry and Pike Streets in the Lower East Side. We cannot have any development without local input. Every stakeholder must have a real voice in the decision-making process.

In addition, the current system favors developers making land use changes. That has to end. We must have collaboration and full participation of local communities along with the City and the City Council for new development interests. We must look beyond monetary and housing interests with new development plans. The city must also adopt guiding principles as what we want in our neighborhoods which should include racial equity and gentrification impact.

Since early April when COVID19 was surging at an alarming rate, I started volunteering with the nonprofit, ReThinkFood NYC, delivering free culturally sensitive meals to seniors and families in Chinatown and the Lower East Side. I am really proud of being part of the volunteer crew who have delivered over 2 million meals in the City and specifically 750,000 meals to the Chinatown/LES community. More importantly, ReThink partners with local restaurants to provide these meals so these struggling restaurants can remain open and keep workers employed. It will be a priority for me to elevate these programs citywide to help sustain local restaurants and grocers so workers continue to be employed. We need to also put more resources into the city's Restaurant Revitalization program to subsidize unemployed and underemployed restaurant workers.

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

I am running for City Council to fight for equity for working class New Yorkers, particularly those in District 1, who need a Councilmember to deliver fair recovery aid to the District. People have been asking me to run for years because I've been a District Leader for 25 years, served for 30 years on the board of the East Coast's largest Asian American multi-social service organization, and for 10 years, I serve on the board of the Eleanor's Legacy. I am currently the Director of Administrative Services at the City Council in the Office of Speaker Corey Johnson.

It has been heart warming for me to receive a strong outpouring of support in contribution as well pledges to support. As an elected District Leader since 1995, I have been working with leaders in the community to expand political participation of immigrants and working families and raise their voices on issues of concern to our community. In working with Democrats across the City and in Lower Manhattan, I have helped elect numerous progressive candidates to offices at local, state and federal levels. As such, I have built a network of leaders and colleagues who share my progressive values and will be part of my team of volunteers to reach voters about my bold and inclusive vision for the District. Since the pandemic, I've met countless devoted volunteers helping distribute PPEs and free meals. They recognize the same passion and enthusiasm in me to help our most vulnerable and have signed on to my team of volunteers to help with voter outreach.

I'm eager to share my progressive plans with the voters in District 1.

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