

Downtown Democrat Club Candidate Survey: Borough President

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Elizabeth Caputo

Borough President • Section 1

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? *

The events of recent months and years have demonstrated that our City needs reform of the police department. I spent over a decade working in municipal infrastructure finance and budgeting. I support reallocating funds to non-policing forms of public safety and community support, such as family and social services, healthcare, youth programs and other community resources and benefit all New Yorkers. One of the best ways we can better integrate our police force into NYC is to actually have them live in our borough – which would result in more middle class and affordable housing to be provided not only for our police but for our teachers, healthcare workers and others who preserve a quality of life for our citizens.

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 Manhattan grows, it is clear that we need an increased number of affordable units. 44% of all New York households are rent burdened, meaning that they pay more than 30% of their income towards rent. We're a city of islands and cannot develop out, so we must develop up. Changes to zoning that allow higher density construction are part of the solution to our affordable housing crisis.

I do not support purity tests when it comes to accepting contributions from all people who work in a specific industry, including real estate. While some of my opponents now claim to not accept any money from real estate, they have, in many cases, built their careers accepting big checks from developers and other special interests.

We need elected officials who reject the type of implied quid pro quo that has become commonplace in city government, regardless of the interest, industry or donor. We will accomplish this with ethical leadership and a people powered campaign.

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? *

All New Yorkers must play their part. I support a Green New Deal revitalization program – focused on a jobs program that puts people to work, upgrading city infrastructure, generating long-term savings in energy efficiency and resilience against the impacts of climate change.

As Borough President, I will increase outreach to small businesses and the tech community. Small businesses fell behind when they faced difficulties applying to the Paycheck Protection Program, and other state and federal aid programs. I will use the office to provide outreach and help navigate federal, state, and local bureaucracy.

New York City needs to be on the forefront of tech innovation. As Borough President, I will reach out to Data NYC, Tech NYC, and the Roosevelt Island tech hub to streamline functions of the office, and reform the budget priorities and district needs review process.

2 of 6 1/10/21, 2:04 PM

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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? *

To further desegregate our schools, we need a simplified, streamlined process, with easily accessible assistance for those families who need it in the school application process. We need to support redistricting of catchment districts when the economic disparity between neighboring districts is high, while not politicizing the issue or villainizing parents who just want the best education for their kids.

In my capacity as Chair of Manhattan Community Board 7, I supported the redrawing of PS 199's catchment district, improving the range of economic distribution of students in Upper West Side public schools. I supported City Councilmember Helen Rosenthal's District 3 Middle School Diversity Plan, which prioritized 25% of seats for low income students in middle school admission.

We need a Manhattan Borough President that understands public education. Both my parents were educators – my mother was a kindergarten teacher at PS 166 and a UFT member. I attended public school my entire life from K-12. As Borough President, my appointees to the Community Education Councils (CEC) and appointee to the Panel for Educational Policy would be educators and reflect the diversity of our city.

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? *

The closing of Rikers Island has been delayed for far too long. I believe that New York needs each borough to do its part in building smaller, smarter facilities that support inmate rehabilitation.

I support bail reform and was extremely disappointed at the partial roll back. Far too many people have their lives negatively impacted, detained for months for crimes they did not commit or should not have resulted in jail time. This is not an equitable or humane system.

3 of 6 1/10/21, 2:04 PM

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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? *

New York City needs a #CorpsOfTheBigApple, a program that puts motivated young people to work, with the support of subsidized housing. I am particularly inspired by the CUNY Service Corps program. A Green New Deal will create thousands of good jobs for New Yorkers, while also saving the City millions of dollars in landfill and waste costs, as well as avoiding the tragedy and recovery process of climate change-based natural disasters.

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 Borough President, I will dedicate significant time and energy to improving the procurement and contracting process so that local and small businesses have a fair shot at contracts and work from the city government. I believe that supporting and continuing to improve upon the office of M/WBE is essential to increasing economic opportunities for Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises. Prioritizing this will enable them to be competitive with all other businesses in the procurement and contracting in the city and Borough.

When cutting waste within government spending, it is incredibly important that in doing so, we are not additionally cutting essential services that provide significant benefit for the greatest number of New Yorkers and particularly, New Yorkers that are most in need. As Borough President, I will work to reduce non-essential city expenditures. Having spent over a decade working in municipal infrastructure finance and budgeting, I am confident that I have the experience to not only cut waste within the government, but ensure that the budget is properly allocated to essential programs and services.

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? *

Small Businesses are the backbone of New York and have taken an incredible hit due to Covid-19. Now more than ever small businesses need the support from the city government. As Borough President, I will increase outreach to small businesses and the tech community. Small businesses fell behind when they faced difficulties applying to the Paycheck Protection Program, and other state and federal aid programs. I will use the office to provide outreach and help navigate federal, state, and local bureaucracy. I have a direct relationship with the NY Hospitality Alliance and other groups where we have been discussing innovative solutions to bring back our restaurants, nightlife, and small businesses.

4 of 6 1/10/21, 2:04 PM

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President • Section II

How do you plan to use your office as more than just a bully pulpit? What are some concrete things you plan to do, other than vocally support and oppose policy decisions made by others? *

At this moment in our City, the role of the Borough President – as a bridge – could not be more important. My entire career of 25 years of civic, business and government life in Manhattan has been as a bridge – between global and local, public and private, and neighborhood to neighborhood – from the days following 9/11, to working at the NYC Fund for Public Schools, through decades of work in infrastructure finance, and now helping our City through this historic global pandemic.

The job of Borough President requires management and leadership – it is not a legislative job and tweets and press releases don't do the job. As Borough President, my first priority will be a management one - to make sure we appoint nonpartisan, qualified members of our 12 Community Boards – and prioritizing the economic and racial diversity of our Manhattan neighborhoods. This needs done not just in the appointment process but in who is selected to be a Committee Chair or a Board Chair.

I will increase transparency with the district managers, meeting with them regularly. At the same time, I plan to increase the responsibilities for, and accountability from district managers, given their status as public servants and ambassadors for their neighborhoods. There must be standardization across the different boards.

I will host each monthly Borough Board meeting in a different district each month, drawing attention to each neighborhood throughout the year – when I did this as Chair of CB7 it led to dozens of new applicants for Board positions and showed that we were not just stuck in a Board office, but truly out in the community. I will expand the use of the uptown 125th office, as I firmly believe that the borough president needs to be present all over Manhattan, and not just downtown at One Centre Street.

How will you utilize and empower community boards to better serve their communities? *

I support term limits for Community Board members, and an outreach program to neighborhood residents to make more equitable appointments reflecting the demographic makeup of the communities they represent. There needs to be reform in the selection process. I intend to prioritize the participation of NYCHA residents, as well as that of tenant's groups and renters.

5 of 6 1/10/21, 2:04 PM

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

We need a Borough President who is willing to speak with everyone to build our City and Manhattan back. After 25 years of building bridges between public and private, global and local and neighborhood to neighborhood - I will be your champion for those who live and work in this amazing Borough. Many thanks for your consideration and I hope to earn your support.

I have called New York my home for my entire adult life, bringing decades of experience to serving my neighborhood and the City. I have lived and worked in Manhattan through its toughest days – during 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, Hurricane Sandy, and now, amidst a global pandemic where New York City has been at the epicenter. Throughout it all, I have brought together Manhattan communities and will bring my commitment and energy to local government as New York city recovers and rebuilds.

I am a problem-solver at heart, and I understand what it takes to lead in New York City. With my extensive background in municipal finance supporting local infrastructure projects for the City and the country, my decades of work with cities locally and around the world, running DL21C and as the longest-serving Chair of Manhattan's Community Board 7, I am uniquely qualified for this role, and ready to be your champion for the borough we all love. Let's work together to make it happen.

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