



2025 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

GENERAL INFORMATION

Candidate info

Name	Benjamin Wetzler
City Council District #	4
In which primary	Democratic
Age	35
Education	BA in Political Science and Government from Johns Hopkins University
Current job, position, or occupation	Assistant Director for Policy and Program Analysis at New York State Homes & Community Renewal

Previous jobs or positions

Democratic Party District Leader for the 76th Assembly District, Part A
Senior Public Policy Specialist at New York State Homes & Community Renewal
Senior Policy Analyst at New York State Homes & Community Renewal
Analyst, SAGE Commission for NYS Governor

Campaign contact information

Website	https://www.voteben.nyc/
X	https://x.com/bd_wetz
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/votebennyc/
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/votebennyc/
Bluesky	https://bsky.app/profile/voteben.nyc

INTRODUCTION

1. What are your top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected?

Promise 1: Housing affordability - Housing must be tackled through a combination of robust enforcement of our tenant protection laws and a long-term, comprehensive plan to address the City's housing shortage.

Promise 2: Public safety - Public safety requires coordination with the police department on data-driven strategies so that officers are deployed to high-crime locations and can tackle disorder in a way that is effective.

Promise 3: The conditions of our streets, sidewalks, and public places - Improving conditions in public spaces means modernizing our trash collection processes, changing laws governing sidewalk sheds, and improving enforcement of the traffic laws.

2. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce? Why is that your top priority? If you are an incumbent, please also state what legislation you have passed which you are most proud of.

A requirement that the City Planning Commission create a long-term housing and infrastructure plan for the City, with amendments to the charter to require corrective action when the plan's targets are not met. For too long the City's housing needs and planning processes have been done in an ad hoc manner driven by individual applications with little thought for how they connect to neighborhood infrastructure or whether they are keeping up with projected citywide needs. A forward-looking and comprehensive approach that treats the City as a single, interconnected body and anticipates its future needs will serve the public much better.

3. In your view, what are the major needs of your district's constituents?

Reducing the cost of living such that every New Yorker has a home that they can afford and fits their needs, improving quality of life through smarter and more accountable policing and sanitation policies, and expanding our public school facilities so that students are able to attend a quality school close to their home.

4. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running, and do you have any achievements or involvement in your neighborhood you are particularly proud of?

I am a lifelong East Sider. I grew up on the Upper East Side, where much of my family still lives, and in 2017 I challenged the long-time Democratic District Leader for the Lenox Hill neighborhood. I won the election in an upset and spent the next six years leading efforts to reform and strengthen the Democratic Party, connecting grassroots volunteers with campaigns outside the city and using my housing policy expertise to advocate for an aggressive affordability agenda for NYC.

I now live in Stuyvesant Town with my partner, and we hope to stay here for the rest of our lives. I believe every New Yorker deserves to live in a community like Stuy-Town—affordable, accessible for families and seniors, walkable, with lots of green space—and I'm running to bring the things that make it great to every neighborhood.

I served on the board of the Four Freedoms Democratic Club on the Upper East Side and am proud that both they and the Eleanor Roosevelt Independent Democrats in Midtown/Murray Hill/Kip's Bay are supporting my candidacy in this election.

5. What experience have you had with good government and reform issues? (e.g., voting and election reform, campaign finance, ethics, police accountability, government transparency). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

During my time as Democratic District Leader I championed transparency and accountability within the Manhattan Democratic Party, the Board of Elections, and the State Legislature. In 2017, I co-authored a series of amendments to the Manhattan Democratic Party's rules to make the Party more responsive to rank-and-file members, reduce the chair's power to choose nominees in special elections, and block paid lobbyists from serving in leadership positions within the Party. In 2018, as the result of my and other reform-minded leaders' efforts, all of the amendments with (unfortunately) the exception of the lobbying ban were adopted.

In 2019, I campaigned in support of the charter amendment that brought ranked choice voting to NYC primaries and in 2021 led online information sessions for voters to teach them about the new system. In 2019-2020, I served in a volunteer capacity as an Upper East Side district coordinator for the NYS Fair Elections Campaign, mobilizing local activists and elected officials in the neighborhood to support the expansion of public matching funds to State races. In 2021, I and other local NYC Democratic leaders worked with the legislature and the Party to craft, pass, and implement the Gender Inclusive Ballot Act and associated changes to the NY and Manhattan Democratic Party's rules to eliminate gender-specific Party offices in favor of new criteria that maintained the Party's historical commitment to gender diversity in leadership while also including non-conforming and transgender New Yorkers.

6. What do you think the role of the City Council is in city government this upcoming term?

The Council must work to restore trust in government in light of this year's ethics scandals and improve service delivery to the public. This will mean improving efficiency, maintaining a balanced budget in a responsible way given anticipated reductions in federal spending, and addressing cost of living through citywide, comprehensive housing plans.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

7. Do you support moving New York City's elections from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, and will you co-sponsor a Council Resolution supporting that measure?

Yes

Voter turnout in New York City elections is exceptionally low, as they are held "off-cycle" in odd-numbered years. To boost local voter turnout and reduce participation gaps, the Legislature passed and Governor Hochul signed a law that moves county and town elections to even-numbered years, and lawmakers are supporting a constitutional amendment that would do the same for city elections, including New York City's. Citizens Union is [leading a coalition of groups advocating](#) to move New York City's elections to even-numbered years, and the City Council is considering a [Resolution in support](#) of that shift.

8. The New York City Board of Elections (NYC BOE) has been a source of frustration for voters and candidates for years. The City Council appoints NYC BOE members and has the power to appoint commissioners who are committed to reform, but the most recent commissioners have been appointed behind closed doors. Do you commit to request a public hearing for BOE nominees, and to only vote for individuals who are publicly committed to reducing party-based patronage and supporting open hiring practices?

Yes

9. Do you support maintaining the use of Ranked Choice Voting in New York City’s elections?

Yes

10. New York City is one of the few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the primary election. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of completely open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in one primary where the top two candidates, regardless of party, move on to the general election?

No

Comments (optional)

While I, like many New Yorkers, feel that the current primary structure disenfranchises many voters and reduces turnout, our primaries are often crowded, with many candidates running, and a top-two system could have the effect of eliminating candidates who had significant community support through “vote splitting.” I would prefer to extend ranked-choice voting to the general election as a means of increasing the influence of voters not registered with a party.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve elections and voting in New York City.**

I feel strongly that New York’s boards of elections should not adopt voting technology that does not leave a paper record and I resisted attempts to adopt this technology while serving as Democratic District Leader. Touch screens have the potential to confuse and frustrate voters and do not provide the same level of security and confidence that paper ballots do, and should only be used in the context of a ballot marking device that leaves an auditable paper trail. If elected, I will continue to oppose the use of such machines in NYC.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

11. Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by “bundling” donations from other people. Do you support limiting bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?

Yes

12. Are you a supporter of the City’s public campaign matching funds program, and do you commit to protecting the independence of the program and ensuring that the Campaign Finance Board has sufficient resources to run the program?

Yes

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve New York City’s campaign finance system.**

I was proud to be the first candidate in my race to “max out” on the matching funds program, with the highest percentage of both small donations and in-city donations of any District 4 candidate. I believe that the most important thing we can do to improve the City’s campaign finance system is appropriately staff and manage the CFB. In many cases CFB audits take more than 4 years to complete, and a potential violator could be running or even have won reelection before violations of the law are detected and proven. This cannot be allowed to happen.

ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

13. The recent pattern of indictments and resignations surrounding City Hall has exposed serious ethical problems in City Government. Please describe how you will maintain the highest ethical standards in office.

I am committed to good government, ethical policymaking, and transparency, and will conduct myself and my office with those principles in mind. I am not raising money from interest groups with business before the City in my campaign despite the unexpected increase in our spending cap and believe that this will serve me and my constituents in office, as the public can be confident that I have no potential conflicts of interest.

14. Incoming public servants must sever ties and divest from companies or other interests that have business dealings with the City, but they are not required to recuse themselves when working on matters involving their former business partners, clients, employer, etc. Do you support forbidding public servants to work on matters relating to their former business partners, clients, employers, and other interests for a set period of time?

Yes

15. Some campaign consultants also work as lobbyists. Do you support restricting campaign consultants from lobbying the candidates they served for two years after the candidate won elected office?

Yes

16. Do you support moving lobbying oversight and enforcement from the City Clerk’s Office to another agency charged with ethics issues, like the Conflicts of Interest Board?

Yes

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics standards in New York City government.**

As an employee of the State, I have regularly had to take ethics trainings and abide by strict legal and ethical standards, which rightly increased when I ran for political party office and now for the City Council. I am always shocked at the lack of comparable standards for more explicitly political actors such as consultants and elected officials. If elected I will work to ensure that everyone engaging in political and public service activities are held to the same standards and that the appropriate enforcement agencies are staffed with professionals capable of enforcing the law.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

17. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? (i.e., Place the final decision with the Police Commissioner; the Civilian Complaint Review Board; the Mayor; the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety; or another individual or entity).

The Police Commissioner, provided that if, in the most severe cases (e.g. ones with the potential for termination), their decision deviates from the recommendation of the CCRB, the Board should be empowered to appeal the decision to the mayor or a deputy mayor.

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve police accountability in New York.**

I believe that the CCRB needs to be strengthened, both in terms of the resources at its disposal and its ability to act as an independent prosecutorial body. Lying to the CCRB should carry a severe penalty, and the CCRB should be empowered to pursue its own cases without the need for a civilian complaint.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

18. The Mayor currently has the power to block charter revision ballot questions (proposed by the City Council, other charter commissions, and citizen petitions) by establishing their own Charter Revision Commission. Do you support removing this Mayoral power?

Yes

19. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and be put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?

Yes

20. Please provide your views about the New York City Council's "advice and consent" powers. In what cases, if any, should a mayor need the Council's approval for an appointment of a high ranking Mayoral official, such as an agency commissioner?

I believe that nearly all agency commissioners should require advice and consent by the Council. The one exception would be for appointments to boards or commissions where multiple elected officials are each given a representative, as those bodies have internal checks on mayoral authority and are often designed with a specific decision-making process or policy area in mind.

ADDITIONAL INFO