



GENERAL INFORMATION

Candidate info

Name

Vanessa Aronson

City Council District #

4

In which primary

Democratic

Working Families

Age

40

Education

BA, Political Science from the University of Chicago; Master in Public Policy from Harvard University; Master of Arts in Teaching by Relay Graduate School of Education

Current job, position, or occupation

Senior Director of Strategy at the ASPCA (2018-present)

Other positions or offices

New York County Democratic Judicial Delegate  
New York County Democratic Committee  
Member, Ethics Committee, New York County Democratic Party  
President Emeritus, Lexington Democratic Club

Previous jobs or positions

Work History:  
Senior Advisor to the President, Hunter College 2018  
City Council Candidate, District 4, 2017  
New York City Public School Teacher, Math and Science, MS319, 2014-2017  
U.S. Foreign Service Officer, U.S. Department of State, 2009-2014  
Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellow 2005-2009

Volunteer positions:  
President, Lexington Democratic Club, 2023-2024  
Vice President, Lexington Democratic Club, 2021-2023  
Executive Committee Member-At-Large, Lexington Democratic Club, 2016-2021  
Chair, Youth Education and Libraries Committee and Chair, Technology Committee, Manhattan Community Board 8, 2019-2023  
Chair, Tikkun Olam Committee, Park Avenue Synagogue, 2017-2019

Campaign contact information

Website

vanessafornyc.com

X

not active

**Instagram**

@vanessataronson

**Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/VanessaTaronson/>

# INTRODUCTION

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

Promise 1: We are in a housing affordability crisis. We must protect the current stock of affordable housing, hold the Department of Housing Preservation and Development accountable to deliver the affordable units that our community needs, convert commercial to residential wherever possible, and build modern middle class housing by working with non-profit and other developers who prioritize affordable housing.

Promise 2: As a former public school teacher and current public school parent, I have both the context to understand the complex issues facing local schools and the commitment to deliver results for families and the future of our city. My priorities are ensuring school entrances have well-functioning security cameras to keep students safe, implementing data-driven programs to combat bullying, safeguarding funding for free school lunch, and protecting students from ICE raids. I am also committed to fully funding CUNY, a public university system providing top-tier education for all. At a time when our federal government is actively against public education, I commit to supporting stronger local protections for public education and standing up against threats to public school resources.

Promise 3: Elected officials are public servants. My top priority will be listening to the needs of constituents and representing those interests on the Council. I will solicit input from my constituents, listen to the needs of the community, maintain open dialogue about priorities and progress, and reassess and recalibrate as needed.

## 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.

I will introduce legislation to stop big donors buying elections by lowering contribution limits for non-participants in the NYC Matching Funds Program at parity with current contribution limits for participants. This will give more power and influence to small donors resident in New York. We saw the impact of lowering contribution limits in the 2021 elections when candidates had a choice to opt into the newly updated system which increased the matching amount from six to eight, but also lowered contribution limits. The majority of the candidates opted in to the new system and larger donations dropped. At a time when we are seeing the impacts of corruption and money at City Hall and voters have become even more distrustful of government and politics, we have to protect the NYC Matching Funds program, which serves as a beacon of hope of what politics across the country could look like if we stem the tide of big money in elections.

I truly believe that government can and should be a mechanism for good in people's lives, but we need to restore trust and integrity in elections to earn back the public's trust. Continuing to curb the impact of big donors is a first step.

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

Affordability, safety, education, accessibility, and sanitation are top issues facing my community. I served on Community Board 8, where I chaired the Youth, Education, & Libraries committee and the Technology committee and was a member of the Land Use and Women & Families committees. I previously served as a Delegate on my City Council Member's Participatory Budgeting Committee to bring infrastructure and technology upgrades to local schools, libraries, and transportation across the district. I also worked on all of the above issues as an advocate in my capacity as the President of the Lexington Democratic Club. As a Member of the City Council, I will fight for a brighter future for our city and community. I will protect existing affordable housing in my community that is too frequently illegally deregulated and fight so that middle and low income tenants have access to stable, affordable housing. I will ensure that there are truly enough 3K and Pre-k seats for all, which is not the current reality in my neighborhood. I will work tirelessly to ensure sidewalks and curb cuts and public transit are accessible for people using wheelchairs, scooters, strollers, or carts. I will fight antisemitism and Islamophobia and work with local businesses and the Department of Sanitation to make sure our streets and sidewalks are clean, safe, and accessible.

### **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?**

In my community, I'm a leader and mobilizer in Democratic politics and activism. I ran for the District 4 City Council seat in 2017 and am proud to be returning to run for this open seat again, this time with significantly more name recognition and community support. I was appointed to Manhattan Community Board 8 by Council Member Keith Powers in 2019 and served until 2023. While another candidate has served in the capacity of a public member of a CB8 Committee, I am the only candidate in this race with experience serving as a full community board member. In this capacity, I co-chaired the Youth, Education, & Libraries committee and the Technology committee and was a member of the Land Use committee, Women & Families committee, and Communications Committee. Under my committee leadership, CB8 addressed the below critical issues: literacy, class size caps, mental health and school counselors, 3K/PreK admissions and programs, the ongoing fight against library budget cuts, school accessibility, early childhood education, school safety, and the NYC Early Intervention Program.

Through all of the work in our community described above, I've built a strong coalition of local supporters and volunteers. I am a New York County Judicial Delegate and Democratic Committee member, avidly recruiting to integrate more community members into these foundational roles in the political process.

### **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.**

I am currently one of five elected members of the New York County Committee Ethics Committee. The committee was formed in response to an ethics complaint filed in April 2024 on behalf of 23 members of the Manhattan County Committee regarding an incident at the 2023 County Committee Organizing Meeting in October 2023. The committee itself has been marred with conflicts of interest and suffered numerous resignations over the past year. The current chair mismanaged the investigation process and drafted a report with findings that I could not, in good conscience, support. Alongside another committee member, we drafted and submitted a minority report, which will be reviewed by the county executive committee at its next meeting on Thursday, March 27, 2025.

I have served as a member of my City Council Member's Participatory Budgeting committee for three cycles. I have also rallied and testified at the City Council for consumer protections and transparency. I also authored an op-ed about the City's Matching Funds program that was published in City and State in December 2024.

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

As a City Council member, it will be my job to represent the interests of my constituents to my colleagues in the City Council and to the Mayor's Office. I will listen to my City Council colleagues' ideas and negotiate and collaborate with them on proposed legislation. I will always consult stakeholders such as community leaders, advocacy groups and organized labor when considering legislation and public positions. While I hope the next mayoral administration chooses a collaborative approach with the Council, our body is an independent one and will provide the oversight with which we're charged by the City charter and our voters.

# 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

**Comments (optional)**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessaafornyc.com/issues](#)), I support implementing independent screening panels for BOE commissioner nominations to ensure qualified, non-partisan leadership and require commissioners to conduct nationwide searches for top executive staff to enhance the quality of election administration.

**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?**

Yes

**\* 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.**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I advocate for the following proposals to improve elections and voting in New York City:

End Patronage at the Board of Elections: Vanessa will support implementing independent screening panels for BOE commissioner nominations to ensure qualified, non-partisan leadership and require commissioners to conduct nationwide searches for top executive staff to enhance the quality of election administration.

Enhance Poll Worker Recruitment and Compensation: Vanessa proposes increased pay, modern recruitment strategies, and technological tools to improve the voter experience and strengthen election integrity.

Curb Mayoral Power of Charter Revision: Vanessa supports removing the Mayoral 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.

## 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

**Comments (optional)**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I pledge to will work to ban campaign contributions, bundling, and Independent Expenditures from individuals or entities doing business with the city. This will prevent contractors from using political donations to buy influence.

**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

**Comments (optional)**

There is a candidate in my race who has refused to participate in the matching funds program, resulting in a significant increase in the spending cap for this race. I believe that this spending increase has caused a detrimental impact to the intent of the program, forcing participants with less means to enter a financial arms race. As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I advocate for lowering contribution limits for non-participants in the NYC Matching Funds Program at parity with current contribution limits for participants. This will give more power and influence to small donors resident in New York.



**\* 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.**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I support bringing an end to Pay-to-Play Politics through the following proposals:

**Ban Contributions from City Contractors:** Vanessa will work to ban campaign contributions, bundling, and Independent Expenditures from individuals or entities doing business with the city. This will prevent contractors from using political donations to buy influence.

**Extend Contribution Restrictions:** Vanessa supports extending restrictions on contributions from contractors and lobbyists for at least one year after their city business concludes, to end “thank you” donations.

**Stop Big Donors Buying Elections:** Vanessa advocates for lowering contribution limits for non-participants in the NYC Matching Funds Program at parity with current contribution limits for participants. This will give more power and influence to small donors resident in New York.

**Restrict Foreign Influence:** Vanessa will advocate that NYC follow the lead of other U.S. cities in preventing corporations with 1% or more foreign ownership from contributing to political spending in city elections.

**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.**

As indicated in my priorities, I plan to focus on transparency and responsive government in the City Council, which will naturally promote the highest ethical standards. My Ethics Platform is rooted in my dedication to restoring trust and integrity to City Hall. I am committed to ensuring that every policy, every dollar spent, and every decision made is in service of New Yorkers, not political insiders or wealthy interests. Together, we can build a city government that is transparent, accountable, and truly for the people.

**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

**Comments (optional)**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I support restricting consultants from lobbying their former clients for a period of two years after their client has won elected office.

**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

**Comments (optional)**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I advocate for centralizing and strengthening ethics regulation by shifting lobbying oversight and enforcement from the City Clerk’s Office to the Conflicts of Interest Board to create a more effective system.

**\* 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 part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I advocate for the below proposals to enhance transparency and improve ethics standards in New York City government

Open Lobbying Calendars: Vanessa will require all Council Members and city agencies to disclose lobbying meetings twice a year. This will provide a transparent view of how lobbying influences city decisions.

Stop the “Revolving Door”: Vanessa supports extending the ban on former city employees and public servants lobbying City Council Members.

Restrict Consultant Lobbying: Vanessa supports restricting consultants from lobbying their former clients for a period of two years after their client has won elected office.

Prevent Insider Hiring: Vanessa will advocate for restrictions that prohibit city agencies from hiring individuals who have lobbied them within the past year.

Leverage COIB Expertise: Vanessa advocates for centralizing and strengthening ethics regulation by shifting lobbying oversight and enforcement from the City Clerk’s Office to the Conflicts of Interest Board to create a more effective system.

## 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 Civilian Complaint Review Board should have the final decision on NYPD discipline to ensure proper civilian oversight of the department and the highest possible level of accountability. This would also serve to improve trust between the NYPD and members of the community.

## 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

**Comments (optional)**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I support removing the Mayoral power to block charter revisions by establishing their own Charter Revision Commission.

**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 strongly in the New York City Council's responsibility to exercise and even strengthen its powers of advice and consent. I would support requiring all agency commissioners being subject to Council approval to ensure necessary oversight and accountability, especially after the chaos we've seen from the current administration's lack of basic standards.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve the system of checks and balances in New York.**

As part of my ethics platform (found on [vanessafornewyork.com/issues](https://vanessafornewyork.com/issues)), I support the below proposals to enhance the City Budget process and improves the system of checks and balances in New York:

Establish an Independent Discretionary Funding Oversight Board: Vanessa supports establishing an Independent Discretionary Funding Oversight Board composed of nonpartisan experts, community representatives, and ethics officials. This will reduce political favoritism by ensuring funding is based on merit, not relationships, and increase public trust in the funding process.

Publish Post-Budget Reports: Vanessa supports mandatory publication of post-budget reports detailing funding allocations and recipient outcomes.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

**Please provide any other info you would like us to know about you and your candidacy.**

I am a former New York City public school teacher with deep roots and strong community support in my district. Growing up in a middle-class family as the daughter of a school nurse and a computer analyst who died suddenly when I was nine, I learned early on about both resilience and the importance of community support.

As a former NYC Math and Science teacher, I experienced firsthand the transformative power of our public schools and understand the critical support they need. And as a former U.S. diplomat and negotiator at the UN, I learned how to bring people together to solve complex problems and get things done.

I have the experience and acumen to build effective coalitions, develop practical solutions, and make a real difference in people's lives – from improving accessibility and infrastructure in our neighborhood to ensuring a budget that prioritizes good governance, transparency, and education.

I worked at Hunter College, in the heart of my community, and have spent the past 6.5 years as the Senior Director of Strategy at the ASPCA, a national animal welfare organization founded in 1866.

Our broad coalition includes the district's home Democratic club, the Lexington Democratic Club, Run for Something, the New Majority, and the Working Families Party. This is a coalition big enough to fit voters of many backgrounds and ideas. All are welcome as we work to restore trust in government.

I live on the Upper East Side with my husband, and two children, 4-year-old and 9-month old.