



CITIZENS UNION

2012 NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public. We are New Yorkers from diverse backgrounds and political beliefs, connected to our communities and united in our commitment to put the city's long-term interest ahead of all special interests. Principled and pragmatic, Citizens Union is an independent force for constructive reform, driving policy and educating the public to achieve accountable government in the City and State of New York.

Citizens Union in 2012 will continue to work to make government more accountable and transparent. We will also principally work to improve public oversight of police misconduct, bring about better election administration and voter participation before the 2012 election, further reform the discretionary funding process, and ensure the City Lobbying Commission completes its work and its recommendations are put into law. Presented below are our positions on these and other issues to create a government that better serves New Yorkers. Citizens Union urges the City Council and the Mayor to successfully address the following issues:

ELECTION REFORM

- **Advance the establishment of a top-two election system**, an alternative open system consisting of two rounds of voting, to replace the current closed partisan primary system. In the first round, all candidates regardless of party affiliation would run, and all registered voters would be eligible to choose among all the candidates. The top two vote-getters would then advance to the general election or "round two", with the voters again casting ballots to determine the ultimate victor.
- **Improve accountability and transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York** by advocating for inclusion of performance data in the preliminary and final versions of the Mayor's Management Report, webcasting City Board meetings, and hiring an Executive Director to fill the long vacant position.
- **Improve election administration by creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program and enabling applicants to apply online** to work on Election Day.
- **Expand voter education and encourage participation by broadening the Voter Guide** to include all contests occurring in the city such as state and federal elections in addition to **providing voters email notification of upcoming election dates, deadlines and availability of sample ballots.**
- **Ensure city agencies comply with pro-voter laws that require they provide opportunities for voters to register to vote** when receiving their routine services.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

- **Improve oversight and effective adjudication of police misconduct claims** to instill public confidence in the process and the city's police force, including **transferring prosecutorial power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board** for their substantiated claims of police misconduct.
- **Establish the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) as a permanent commission** in the City Charter while **empowering the CCPC to issue subpoenas.**
- Improve the city's redistricting process by creating a new, **more independent redistricting commission** that is fairly chosen to draw council district lines and that **employs even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines** that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups and do not favor or disfavor any incumbent, candidate or political party.
- **Reconstitute the Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC)** or transfer its major duties and responsibilities to the Public Advocate's office.
- **Restore the quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review.**

GOVERNMENT OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Ensure the Lobbying Commission completes its report to the Council** and build support for Citizens Union's recommendations which would **make more lobbying activity transparent to the public**.
- Require the **proactive publishing of city government reports and data** that are currently publicly available under law in a singular web portal by building off of and combining existing city government websites such as NYCStat and Data Mine to allow for ease of public use.
- **Improve access to city agency data and administrative proceedings**, including webcasting of hearings and public meetings.
- **Air Council proceedings in real time**, including stated meetings, committee meetings, and press conferences on NYCTV gov (also known as Channel 74).
- **Publish an updated Green Book, the city's official directory**, online if not on paper **for the first time since 2008**.
- Require the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications **to publish a Public Data Directory** listing the computerized information produced or maintained by city agencies that is required to be publicly accessible.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Further curb the outlay of public funds** to candidates facing minimal opposition.
- **Lower campaign contribution limits**.
- **Establish a more stringent "war chest" restriction** to limit the transfer of funds raised in one race for use in another.
- **Prohibit contributions bundled by lobbying organizations or lobbyists from receiving matching funds**, and **ban placement agents from bundling contributions** for any elected official directly or indirectly influencing decisions granting pension business.
- **Prohibit participants in the city's campaign finance program from using public matching funds to purchase strategic campaign consulting services** from firms that also provide lobbying services.

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- Ensure a more **equitable and needs-based distribution of expense and capital discretionary funding** to individual councilmembers, and provide for **greater transparency of all discretionary funds**.
- **Improve webcasting of council proceedings** to ensure full public access and further **improve the legislative search tool and Council website** to make them more user-friendly.
- Create **stronger and more independent council committees** by empowering all committee chairs to set their own agendas, schedule votes, and participate more fully in the hiring and firing decisions for committee staff.
- **Reduce the number of council committees by half** and redistribute their roles and responsibilities for greater effectiveness and efficiency so council members are not spread too thin across too many committees.
- **Limit stipend allocations** to leadership positions and require **greater financial disclosure** by those who earn income outside of their council positions.

BUDGET REFORM

- Establish **independent budgeting** for the borough presidents, Conflicts of Interest Board, the public advocate, and community boards.
- Make the **budget process more transparent** by more clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size so they are less than a majority of an agency's budget. Release the non-property revenue projections prior to Council hearings on the Executive budget.
- Create a **more active role for City Council members, committees, and the public** in the budget review process.

COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

- Provide a **pool of urban planners available to community boards** outside the auspices of the borough presidents' offices.
- Professionalize and open community boards to the communities they serve by creating a **formal standardized and transparent process for filling community board positions** including extensive outreach for applicants, written applications, interviews, and timely appointments.

LAND USE

- **Change the appointment process for the Board of Standards and Appeals** to include additional representatives from the borough presidents and the public advocate.
- Improve the process to **better integrate 197-a plans into strategic planning** so, at a minimum, plans are acknowledged and addressed when other planning is in conflict with 197-a plans.