



CITIZENS UNION

2011 NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

As an independent, nonpartisan force dedicated to promoting good government and political reform in the city and state of New York, Citizens Union serves as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good. We work to ensure fair elections, clean campaigns, and open, effective government that is accountable to the citizens of New York. Citizens Union is committed to ensuring that the following measures are implemented and urges the appropriate branches of city government, agencies and public entities to successfully address the following issues:

ELECTION REFORM

- **Establish a top-two election system**, a more open alternative 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.
- Advocate for a **new elections governance structure** that eliminates as much of the current bipartisan structure as practicable. Create a Chief Local Elections Officer and a Board of Canvassers with limited jurisdiction mirroring similar reforms at the state level that would create a Chief Elections Officer responsible for major policy decisions and a Nonpartisan Elections Board responsible for standardizing state election procedure and other quasi-judicial functions.
- **Improve accountability and transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York** by advocating for timely release of required annual post-election reports; inclusion in the preliminary and final versions of the Mayor’s Management Report; and providing additional public disclosure of City Board meetings (including webcasting of meetings), operations, and election statistics.
- Ensure the Board’s plans to **place sample ballots online** are realized.
- Require the Board to send **email notifications of election dates, deadlines and ballots** to voters providing emails.
- **Expand recruitment of poll workers** to ensure that each county has an adequate number of qualified workers.
- Work with local election boards to **improve poll worker training**.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Curb further 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.

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Improve webcasting of council proceedings** to ensure full public access and further improve the legislative search tool and Council website to make it 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.
- Ensure a more **equitable distribution of council resources** to each council member and their respective district that is not based on political considerations.
- **Limit stipend allocations** to leadership positions and require **greater financial disclosure** by those who earn income outside of their council positions.

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 a specific effort **to transfer prosecutorial power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board** over substantiated claims of police misconduct.
- Improve the City's redistricting process by creating a new, **more independent redistricting commission** that is fairly chosen to draw council district lines to not favor any incumbent or political party and that employs even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups.
- **Eliminate the Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC)** and transfer its major duties and responsibilities into the Public Advocate's office.
- **Transfer lobbying and reporting oversight responsibilities** from the City Clerk's office to the Campaign Finance Board to create a more independent and effective system of enforcement.
- **Restore the quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review** in 2011.
- Monitor the effectiveness **of reforms to the education governance structure** to ensure that concerns surrounding parental involvement, effective governance, accountability, results and transparency of operations are adequately resolved.

GOVERNMENT OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Improve access to city agency data and administrative proceedings**, including webcasting of hearings and public meetings.
- Make recommendations to the commission recently appointed **to study and improve the effectiveness of the lobbying reform bills** passed in 2006.
- 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, the Department of Records and Information Services website and NYC Data Mine to allow for ease of public use.
- 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.
- Require the **full City Record to be published online** and available to the public at no charge.

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 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 hiring.

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.
- **Standardize responses** from various entities providing input as part of the **ULURP process** so feedback is more meaningful and can be more usefully considered.
- 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.