



## Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2021 CD33 Candidate Questionnaire

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**Name of person filling out this questionnaire:** Stu Sherman and Mathew Felsenfeld

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) If elected, what would be your top priority in your first term? My top priority would be Housing. Initially stopping an epidemic of evictions caused by COVID conditions, creating more affordable housing and converting existing units to affordable units. The city is currently experiencing an unprecedented housing crisis and immediate action is needed

2) What personal and/or professional experiences do you believe make you uniquely qualified to run for Borough President? Attach resume or CV if desired. I am currently a legal aid attorney and provide free legal assistance at hospitals and health centers, including my local public hospital Woodhull. This experience puts me daily on the frontline of the failures of municipal government to provide help for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and provide support for working families. This experience makes me unique among the candidates in my race. Prior to working in legal aid I had extensive experience in government policy. I was the executive director of the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law for five years, where I worked on developing recommendation on health policy for New York, including a pandemic preparedness plan (released in 2015). I also worked for 3 years as the Legislative Counsel for the NYS Department of Health, and two years in the NYC legislature working on health policy and healthcare budget analysis.

3) List all of your endorsements, including but not limited to elected officials, unions, political clubs and community-based organizations. None to date

4) What, if any, groups or industries will you not accept campaign contributions from? If any, please note specifically whose money you will not accept. I have opted into the matching fund program, meaning I cannot accept donations from PACs or corporations (neither can anyone else in the race). I will also not be accepting donations from real estate developers or anyone who profits off fossil fuels.



5) How do you propose helping NYC recover from the COVID pandemic and resulting economic recession, particularly given the projected shortfall in city revenue? Austerity is a myth. While a startling number of New Yorkers lost their jobs, and are behind on rent and at risk for eviction, the stock market is hitting record highs, and those in finance continue to hold a greater portion of the cities wealthy. Through taxing the wealthy, including implementing financial transaction taxes, we can generate enough revenue to help the city recover and become a more fair and equitable place. I would provide assistance to small business to help them cover rental arrears accrued during the pandemic when they were forced to close to protect everyone's safety. I would also fund small business legal aid for businesses to assist renegotiate lease terms and handle other pandemic related legal matters. I would not cut any social safety net programs, and instead, work towards creating jobs programs for the recently unemployed to fix infrastructure and work on green energy projects.

6) What measures would you take to improve educational opportunities for all students in NYC? How do you plan to ensure that all NYC children are able to attend high-quality, integrated schools? Do you support D15's integration plan as it has been implemented? What changes, if any, would you make to the current D15 integration plan? I would push to end using the ShSHAT as the sole determinant of entrance in specialized schools. I would also work towards creating greater economic diversity in New Yorks schools, so the difference created by PTAs abilities to raise vastly different amounts to support supplemental programs wouldn't be so great. I support the D15 integration plan, which so far has shown to be successful (though COVID upended the entire NY education system). I think any changes to the plan should be made with significant community input. This was a parent led effort and I believe that they should be

7) How would you have handled the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 academic year? How will you prepare for a second wave of this pandemic? How would you propose to ensure that the needs of highly vulnerable children with special needs, who are homeless, come from poor families, and/or live in households without adults who could aid their learning are not left further behind when remote learning has to be relied on? I think the immediate closures in the Spring of 2020 while cases were rising and deaths were high was the correct move given the knowledge at the time given the risk and our knowledge of COVID. I would have closed schools sooner (and advocated to do that). I think during the closure there should have had better assistance with remote learning for low income students. Right now we're in the second wave of the pandemic. The CDC has found that schools can be opened safely and other public health knowledge has revealed that schools are not linked to major outbreaks. However, safety of teachers and students should be a priority, so ensuring proper ventilation in schools and distancing is essential. The city should be providing free wifi in all shelters and public housing, and technological resources to all students that need them. They should also be covering wifi costs for low income students not in these settings.



8) Do you support allowing non-citizen New York City residents to vote in City-based elections? Why or why not? Yes. They are New York City residents, contribute to the city taxes, and are part of the fabric of New York. If they can't vote, politicians will never be held accountable by immigrant communities.

9) Do you support any campaign finance reforms for NYC? If so, please describe. NYC campaign finance system does a great deal to increase the fairness of elections. I have no reforms at this time.

10) Now that the State government has passed the Reproductive Health Act, what steps would you have the Council and City Hall take to increase reproductive healthcare access, including maternal healthcare, and to do so equitably?

Protecting and expanding sexual and reproductive health in New York City is of vital importance to me. My wife and I are the parents of a two month old girl, but prior to that, we have not had the easiest birth journey. We have had to manage the complexities of a miscarriage and an abortion. I understand the importance of sexual and reproductive health for my family, for my daughter, and for women across the city. Expanding and protecting access depends, in part, on the population in question. For wealthy new yorkers with high quality private insurance, access is easier than for lower income women. Restrictions of reproductive rights tend to harm women of color and women of lower economic means much harder.

One of my focuses will be on getting all teenagers in New York access to safe and effective, sexual and reproductive health, where they can feel secure and protected. Evidence has shown that NYC's School-Based Health Center Reproductive Health Project is effective in reducing pregnancies, abortions, and births. (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31840909/>) . I would like to see this program fully-funded and expanded to more schools in New York City.

I think in the past few years we've seen great strides in giving young women in New York access to Feminine Hygiene Products and contraception regardless of economic means, including at schools, but this needs to be expanded to all women. Free Feminine Hygiene Products and contraception should be available for any woman receiving any form of public assistance or who would be eligible for assistance but aren't because of immigration status. In general we need more funding and support for undocumented women who are ineligible for public health programs like Medicaid so they can have access to sexual and reproductive health.

In many ways, in a state with laws that protect reproductive rights, economic factors play a big role in impeding access. Not only through the cost of care, but access. Things like childcare, bureaucratic/administrative barriers, and time off of work impede proper access. As my work has shown (see page 49 - <https://nysba.org/NYSBA/Publications/Section%20Publications/Health/PastIssues1996present/2014/HealthJrnSumFall14.pdf> ) we must eliminate these barriers in order to give all women access.



Racial inequity in maternal mortality is a very important issue to me that I would want to address in city council. Black women are eight times more likely to die in childbirth in New York than white women. The maternal mortality for black women is unacceptable for a developed country, and especially for a city with as much wealth and high quality healthcare as New York. This is a function of systemic racism in medicine, where studies have shown doctors consistently show racial bias in pain assessment, and are less likely to listen to black patients' self-assessments. And this inequity is not class based, but consistent across income brackets. If Serena Williams can almost die during childbirth, the problem is not access to high quality care, but treatment of black women by medical doctors and institutions.

11) The MTA is facing a significant revenue shortfall and many parts of the city lack access to reliable public transportation. What measures would you implement and/or enforce, to promote safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options for mass transit users, pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers in Brooklyn?

I am a proponent of alternative transportation and public transit. As a bike commuter myself, I want safer roadways for cyclists and pedestrians. I support the expansion of open streets, but believe the city department of transportation needs to make infrastructure changes to facilitate open streets, instead of relying on community members who are threatened and harassed. As a volunteer at my local open street, I have seen how wonderful they can be and where they are lacking.

*Regarding bike safety, too often, politicians tout all the “new miles” of bike lanes, which just amount to cans of green paint and no increased safety. I think we need to build bike lanes that are safe enough to increase ridership of working class New Yorkers. Right now, ridership is mostly young individuals with a high risk tolerance. I have a titanium rod in my legs and several pins and screws throughout my body from bike accidents. All of them occurred in bike lanes. I would not recommend biking in New York to anyone who is worried about getting injured, because the city has not done enough to make biking safe for all. We have only succeeded at making biking a viable mode of transportation when middle-aged and older workers, including workers of color, view biking as a safe and efficient way to commute.*

*As for public transportation, the MTA is currently in a crisis, with year-to-year ridership down significantly. There are threats of massive service cuts, including eliminating overnight transportation. But with MTA outside of control of city government it is difficult for citizens of the city to democratically control their public transport. Control of the cities transportation system should be in the hands of the citizens.*

12) How would you ensure fairness in employment, salary, workplace conditions, and promotion? What is



your position on strengthening and increasing access to union membership? What do you think about the unionization push by City Council Staff?

Unions are essential to protect the rights and safety of workers, to enable them to bargain for a living wage that compensates them for their work, and to stop “at will” employment so people can’t get fired without cause. I do not feel it is the job of unions to protect bad actors and to defend them if they endanger (or kill) their fellow workers or people they interact with. I think police and other carceral unions should not be in a position to support officers that abuse their position to endanger and end Black Lives. Nor should they be in a position to advocate for (or against) laws and regulations meant to protect the community.

I'm in my legal aid organizations union. It is the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW 2325). We unionized a little over a year ago and I was part of the unionization efforts, meeting in secret before we announced our intentions to management. It was very exciting and a big victory for us when we won the vote to unionize by a wide margin. In addition, we not only unionized the attorneys, but the administrative staff as well, despite management’s efforts to divide us. For my union I have participated in actions like protesting the reopening of courts and fighting to keep our attorneys safe during COVID. I’ve also had discussions about helping union leadership with legislative efforts, like increasing pay for right to counsel attorneys.

I think at will employment creates an environment that facilitates unfair and abusive working conditions. I will do everything in my power to eliminate at will employment and support unions. I am 100% behind the City Council staff unionization.

13) How would you ensure that underserved communities receive fair and equitable treatment from city government? What policies do you support that would level the playing field for historically marginalized groups?

Implicit bias often leads to discrimination in hiring which it makes it harder for women and minorities to gain employment. The city can require employers to use hiring process which blind demographically identifiable characteristics of prospective employees.

In addition, certain fields rely on unpaid interns and when it comes time to hire for jobs, hire from this pool of interns. Often this makes it difficult for people without the means to work for free in their youth from breaking into fields. Also, familial or scholastic connections play a role in these internships, so the hires tend to be homogeneous. Requiring all internships to be paid minimum wage, and blinding of the applicant pool for internships can help level the playing field.

Housing discrimination has a long insidious history, from restrictive covenants to discrimination in home loans. After I was once illegally denied an apartment because I worked as a public interest attorney, I was told by the real estate agent that I was lucky, because “people regularly refuse apartments to black applicants and it’s just the way it is. You’re lucky you’re white and will be able to find an apartment.” I was so appalled by this statement that I



reported him to the New York City Commission on Human Rights and he was fined and forced to take classes on housing discrimination. The commission on human rights needs to have an expanded role that doesn't rely on people just reporting discrimination, but also auditing suspected housing discrimination and investigating it. A system of enforcement that relies on people reporting wrongdoing will leave a situation rife with abuse.

14) What policy and practice changes are needed for NYC government to ensure sufficient quality housing that actually is affordable for existing residents in Brooklyn neighborhoods?

Affordable rent is set at 30% of gross income. However, "affordable apartments" can end up costing tenants up to 50% of their take home pay, which makes them rent burdened and stretches their other expenses severally. As a renter in a rent stabilized apartment, Affordability should be set at 30% of take-home-pay. And while affordability is determined at the federal level, the city should be lobbying our congressional delegation and the Biden administration to amend this so New Yorkers are less rent burdened. To create more units I would require that any residential rezoning to be for the creation of 100% affordable housing and the city stop relying on for-profit developers to create affordable units, but instead should use mission driven non-profits.

15) What policies would you pass or enforce to ensure public housing/NYCHA repair, upkeep and security, and access to alternate housing and services when lacking essentials such as heat, gas and hot water? What is your position on "privatization" of public housing/NYCHA, and on City government sale of public housing "open areas" (outdoor seating & recreation plots) and air rights to private developers? NYCHA needs significant reform to how repairs are tracked and how repair work is held to account. Currently the city waste enormous resources by sending people to apartments that never make repairs. The NYCHA ticketing system is severely broken. I do not support the privatization of public housing. It abandons the city's responsibility to public housing tenants and increases evictions. Housing advocates fought for years to get a mold ombudsman and to privatize would undo that important work.

16) Given the City's Covid and post-Covid economic crisis, how would you approach your role in addressing the city's carceral system, including the plan to close Rikers?  
I support the closer Rikers and think the city should be releasing non violent offenders to protect them from contracting COVID in a congregate setting. I also support vaccinating prisoners. I would eliminate solitary confinement and continue efforts to reduce the prison population.

In addition, Rikers is the third largest mental hospital in the nation. Many low income New Yorkers don't get any mental health care until they are arrested. We need to move away from carceral mental health treatment and implement long term solutions to our mental health crisis.



16) Describe your vision for public safety in New York City? What, if any, functions would you like to see removed from the police department? What agencies assume the functions removed from the NYPD?

A lot of solutions fall into one of two buckets. First, there needs to be actual accountability and enforcement when officers cross the line and injure or kill the people they're supposed to protect. Second, we need to stop relying on the police as the primary source of public safety, by increasing the number of non-police crisis response services that can be dispatched, like mental health first responders and homeless crisis responders. By investing in these programs we can reduce the number of situations where police are involved in where they don't have the expertise to deescalate, and usually make the situation worse.

There are a number of changes that can be made that improve accountability. First, qualified immunity should end. Second, cops, and prosecutors who work closely with cops and the police department, should not be responsible for oversight. Independent prosecutors need to be appointed when cops are the defendants, and the Civilian Complaint Review Board should be able to directly punish cops, not merely provide guidance that the police department is free to ignore. We should also enact an elected Civilian Complaint Review Board

I would transfer traffic control to DOT, remove any role in schools, transfer homeless response to the Department of Homeless Services, and put mental health crisis response under DOHMH,

17) Do you support changes to the ULURP process and to other NYC zoning mechanisms? If so, what specific changes do you support? NYC rezoning for residential zoning (upzoning or conversion) should be for 100% affordable housing. ULURP should also consider the tax on local resources in the review, including school seats and transportation capacity.

18) Do you have a plan to reduce and prevent homelessness in Brooklyn and NYC? Explain your plan.

My plan to build affordable housing and to convert existing housing to affordable units is aimed at eliminating homelessness in New York. In addition, in the interim, improving shelters so they are no longer congregate settings, permitting co-sheltering, increasing access to resources, and making it easier to get into shelters without having to travel around the city.

