



THE VILLAGE REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Questions for 2021 City Council District 3 Candidates

Responses for Candidate (name): Arthur Z. Schwartz

1. Why are you running for City Council and what experience prepares you for this job?

I am running because I care. I am running because I think that our District and our City is suffering from an enormous lack of leadership in a very perilous time, and will continue along this path for another year, and that experienced, forceful leadership is needed, that I am best prepared to offer. Good times are not just around the corner. Local businesses are decimated, large numbers of residents are out of work and have not been able to pay their rent. Police-minority community relations are back to a low point. School children have suffered in under-funded schools and repairing that damage will require so much. I have been an activist for 52 years. I have been a District Leader or State Committee Member since 1995. I served 24 years on CB2 and chaired a Committee much of that time. I have successfully led fight after fight in our community. And I have a big mouth, the biggest of any candidate. I am a parent, a business owner, a spouse, and someone respected, even if feared, by the political power structure. No one else can say this.

2. What do you believe are the most important responsibilities of a Councilmember?

There are two sides. First is to legislate. To champion bills which will make life better in New York City, whether it be housing, taxes, schools, protection and expansion of health care, improvement of mass transit, fixing and expanding public spaces, and making the City safer.

Second is to provide services. To protect tenants being evicted, address the difficulties residents have dealing with City agencies, highlighting local inequities, getting funding for local projects, addressing noise problems, garbage problems, and the like.

3. What do you believe are the major issues facing this district and how would you address them?

I think housing is the most important issue. Our district, which goes all the way to 65th Street, is far too expensive place to live. Existing Government programs do not work. Part of this also involves the two NYCHA developments in this district, developments which need to be entirely rebuilt without forcing residents to give up their rights or their housing.

Second are schools. They are terribly underfunded, and the programs are often handled inequitably. Parents do not have enough say so. I miss the days of people like Sophie Gerson having power to address the problems in the schools her kids attended.

Third is healthcare. I have been involved in efforts to keep Beth Israel Hospital from closing and that threat must be put to an end. The cost and availability of preventative health care must improve exponentially.

Fourth is mass transit. I want to work towards buses being free and subway fares greatly reduced.

And then there is rebuilding our commercial core. Reviving local businesses with commercial rent control and rescue programs. They are key to local economic life, and local safety.

4. What policies do you support to increase the supply of truly affordable housing in the district?

- What are your thoughts about changing the zoning in historic districts?

Our historic districts are what make our district special. Zoning changes must be undertaken in a way which does not allow destruction of that character. There will be lots of spaces available in the district for housing, closed hotels, empty office buildings.

- Do you support adaptive reuse/conversion of existing offices and hotels (all or in part) to achieve affordable housing? If so, how would you implement and fund this?

I totally support this idea, which has been proposed by the Governor. I believe the City needs to borrow, or seek Federal grants, to buy and refurbish these buildings. And if they can find \$10 billion to rebuild the bus terminal, they can put that refurbishment off for 10 years and use it on a project like this and other capital projects to build affordable housing within 10 blocks of the Bus Terminal.

- Do you support using MIH with FAR incentives to create affordable housing stock? If so, where, and how would this be implemented? If not, what would you do instead?

I do not support use of MIH to achieve housing goals; even to the extent that it is useful to tap private development dollars, they are better spent using programs like Section 8, which results in building which are 100% affordable, and where tenants pay rent in line with their income. Again, in this era when government can borrow money at such low rates, we should also engage in a massive capital program to build housing, not relying on private developers at all.

- How would you determine affordability, AMI bands, etc.?

AMI should be a city-wide number. Recent AMI numbers for midtown "affordable housing" require a minimum income of \$71,000 for a one bedroom apartment. That is not affordable. Using a city-wide number will integrate communities, and result in a far lower level of majority poor communities.

5. Would you expand services for seniors? If so, what services would you expand, how would you fund them and who would provide the services?

Seniors get barely anything from local government. I propose a special "Senior Corps" made up of civil service workers and volunteers who visit every senior (who needs it) at least once a week, make sure that food is in the fridge, homes are clean, illnesses are being addressed, bills are being paid, and landlord harassment is not occurring. I believe that government organizing of volunteer services now offered by entities like Visiting Nurses can be strengthened by such a program. Money should be City budget operating funds. Seniors make up a large, underserved sector of our population.

6. Would you change anything about public schools in the district? What are your thoughts on charter and private options, including funding, co-location, etc.?

Schools need more funding, and as a council member I would make loud noises, in frequent visits to Albany and Washington to get that money. I am not against the concept of charters, but charters which become mini-empires, with executives making \$500,000 or more a year, with little accountability for mistreatment of kids (I just won a case where Success paid out \$2.5 million dollars after mistreating 5 kindergarten and first graders who they feared might have learning disabilities). I oppose school vouchers (that money should go into public schools). Co-location of charter schools with public schools is wrong if it takes away space needed by those public schools. I think co-location of smaller public schools is fine; I think the program which created smaller schools was and is sound; smaller schools mean more individualized attention, which is so, so important.

7. Would you seek to change policing in the district? If so, how would you enact the changes?

The City just adopted a program where Community Councils would choose a commander. That is a great step in the right direction. I think officers need to be held more accountable for misconduct. I have represented many local residents who have been assaulted by members of the 6th precinct who went unpunished. One even punched a 90 year old man in the face and broke his eye socket. Another arrested a Bank Street resident walking his dog at 11:30PM on Perry Street for "jaywalking" and then cuffed him and damaged the resident's wrists when he could not produce a wallet (he was in sweatpants he threw on for dog-walking). That stuff has to stop. We also need to free cops up from having to deal with mental health issues, and from handling the homeless.

8. Will you be supportive of Community Board recommendations on issues such as land use, licensing, etc.?

Absolutely. 100%. I was on CB2 for 24 years!

9. While recognizing the needs of bicyclists, what will you do to help ensure the safety of the public - especially our senior citizens? Would you be in favor of a licensing and insurance requirement for electric bicycles that can exceed NYC speed limits and why/why not?

I think electric bicycle riders should be licensed and the bikes should have plates and be insured, and they should not use bike lanes. They should ride with car traffic.

10. The next few years may see a drastic decrease in the amount of funds which the City Council will have to allocate. How will you ensure that constituent needs are met?

I am a big supporter of Invest New York, a program being debated in the State legislature which will see new revenue from stock transfers, will raise taxes from top earners, will allow special taxes on pied a terres, etc. These programs need to be extended to NYC and will produce funds for NYC. I also think that if non-criminal offense responsibility funding is shifted from NYPD to mental health professionals and social workers, several billion dollars can be shifted from the NYPD to other needs.

11. What are your positions on rent relief and considerations for landlords who are still paying the full amount of taxes owed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

I have no problem with # Cancel the Rent. But for every dollar of rent a landlord does not get they should be able to deduct the money from their real estate taxes.

12. Please provide contact information for questions, to get involved in your campaign, etc.

My web site is www.arturformyc.com. Questions can go to info@arthurformyc.com. Arthur can be reached at arthurforNYV.com.

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