



## THE VILLAGE REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

### Questions for 2021 Mayor Candidates Responses from Candidate: Kathryn Garcia

#### GENERAL

1. Why are you running for Mayor?

*I'm running for Mayor because I love New York, and our City needs a crisis manager who will be ready to get to work on day one to build back our City better than before. I'm a born and bred New Yorker who has dedicated her life to public service, not politics.*

2. What experience do you have that has prepared you to become Mayor?

*I have the most experience in city government and crisis management of any candidate running for Mayor. Over the last 14 years, I have served as Sanitation Commissioner and Food Czar during the pandemic; Interim NYCHA Chair and Lead Czar; and Chief Operating Officer of the Department of Environmental Protection.*

3. What do you believe are the most important responsibilities of the Mayor?

*Government is about improving the condition of people's lives, and that's what I'm going to deliver. The next Mayor must be laser focused on a recovery that is grounded in equity and provides the necessary support and day to day quality of life investments—clean parks, safe transit, reliable childcare, access to fresh healthy foods—that allow all New Yorkers to thrive. I believe that government should be invisible if it works well—that we should get out of your way and do our jobs humbly, with no ego, and no expectation of praise for a job well done.*

4. Would you seek to change the current Land Use system, including CEQR, the ULURP process and the use of current Mandatory Inclusionary Housing to create affordable housing?

*The ULURP process is too long and cumbersome to meet our urgent housing needs, and it unnecessarily pits communities against desperately-needed affordable housing. It can take between 12-15 months to even start the ULURP process and then projects go through a seven month review with approvals at several levels of bureaucracy and elected officials. We will introduce reforms to streamline the ULURP and environmental review process. Affordable housing projects will have a shorter review to reflect the urgent need to build affordable housing. We will also streamline permit applications and inspections at the Buildings Department and sister agencies (DEP, FDNY, etc.) to reduce red tape and reduce the lead time from project initiation to occupancy.*

#### EDUCATION

1. New York City's public school students are not academically competitive with other major industrialized nations in math and science (STEM). How do you plan to address this disparity?

*We need to focus on ages 3 and 4- when kids are first starting to learn how to read. Right now, students are behind in reading at grade level, which means by second grade when they are reading for information (such as in STEM classes), they will be at a disadvantage that will be difficult to overcome for the rest of their school career. We need to accelerate our Universal Literacy goal to 2023. By equipping teachers with science-backed curricula based in phonics, we'll push for 100% of second graders to read at grade level by the end of the school year.*

2. How do you plan to implement high speed internet access to all school children throughout NYC?

*I believe that the internet is a public good, and we need to build universal broadband, and provide an affordable public option, so that everyone has access to the same resources. During COVID, lack of access to the internet was exacerbated, but even before COVID, not having internet at home was a fundamental barrier to learning and success in the 21st Century.*

3. Less than half of the budget for New York City's public schools reaches the classrooms, while more goes to administrative costs. If you believe this is a problem, how will you correct it?

*Classrooms should be the priority in DOE's budget, which means at minimum the majority of the budget should be dedicated to functions within the school. I will move the budget from Tweed into the hands of Principals so that they can invest in hiring the best teachers.*

*Additionally, our schools are the front line in supporting kids who are experiencing poverty and trauma. We'll increase practical support and funding for the 140 schools where > 20% of the student body is experiencing homelessness to do things such as purchase washers and dryers and provide mental health services.*

4. There are 50+ school districts in the five boroughs, with large staffs, performing largely the same administrative functions. How would you address this in your administration?

*Inefficient administrative costs are a problem across the City agencies- I will eliminate obsolete and unnecessary Mayoral agencies, commissions, offices, and everything in between to make our government leaner and more effective.*

5. Many larger city schools have been broken up into smaller schools, each with its own principal and staff, often in one building sharing a cafeteria, gym, library, auditorium, etc. Do you believe smaller schools can provide the kinds of services available in one larger school, such as sports, art and music, foreign languages, drama and theater, etc.?

*I am supportive of smaller schools, but we must make sure the Principals and teachers have the resources they need to ensure the students receive an excellent and well rounded education.*

6. What are your feelings about the current state of racial equality for teachers? What, if anything, would you do differently from current policy and practice?

*We know students succeed when teachers reflect the classroom. We need to do better in increasing teacher diversity, particularly with hiring Black and Latino teachers. I would set clear diversity goals and hold DOE central staff accountable for conducting outreach to a diverse talent pool. I would also build pipelines from CUNY into public schools, and conduct early communications campaigns to encourage freshmen to consider the profession.*

7. Would you expand specialized schools like Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech, to open more of these programs throughout the city?

*Instead of expanding seats to these schools- which at best will still be a relatively few number of seats- I will build eight new schools for students in the top 10% of their 8th grade class across all neighborhoods. Additionally, I will end middle school screens permanently on a district by district basis in consultation with parents and engage underserved families to make sure they understand how to navigate the system. Parent buy-in is critical for a successful transition.*

*In general, we will expand challenging offerings at all schools. Identifying students for advanced learning opportunities should be ongoing and context specific.*

## **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

1. What solutions do you propose for the increasing number of homeless people in our city?

*We need to address street homelessness as a housing issue, with urgency and compassion, and the right solutions for families, single individuals and people living with mental illness. At the top, we will ensure that homeless services and economic development and housing all report into the same deputy mayor, who will be held accountable to treating housing issues with one comprehensive approach. Currently, DHS and HPD are overseen by two separate Deputy Mayors – the Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services and the Deputy Mayor for Housing & Economic Development. Although preventing homelessness requires multiple strategies, linking together housing and homelessness will focus our affordable housing efforts.*

*My administration will build 10,000 units of supportive housing to provide permanent shelter, services and support for people experiencing street homelessness and those most at risk -- including buying empty or underused private properties for conversion. For families, women and children, we will ensure wraparound services in shelters, including education, health, and job readiness. We will open 10 drop-in centers in key neighborhoods to provide bathrooms and critical services 24 hours a day and begin the engagement process to get homeless New Yorkers into shelter. Finally, we will expand support for the 140 NYC schools with more than 20% homeless students. Before COVID, 1 in 10 students were doubled up, living in a shelter, or unsheltered; we cannot blame teachers for low performance in schools. We need to expand support for these schools and provide practical necessities, like installing a washer and dryer.*

2. "Affordable housing" especially in Manhattan is becoming exceedingly rare. How would your administration address this?

*We will focus City investment where it's needed most and create 50,000 units of deeply affordable housing (<50% AMI). We will also make it easier, faster, and legal for private partners to build more housing. We have added 500k New Yorkers over the last decade, but only 100k units of new housing - we cannot reduce the housing prices without increasing supply. We will end apartment bans and discriminatory zoning, and allow duplexes and triplexes to create more options for families. We will legalize basement apartments, accessory dwelling units, and single-room occupancy (SRO) apartments as a safe, sustainable and efficient means of providing housing to single-adult households--approximately one-third of households in New York City. Finally, we will accelerate approvals for new housing construction, streamline the ULURP and environmental review process as well as permit applications and inspections at the Buildings Department and sister agencies.*

- What is your opinion on adaptive reuse of commercial buildings to create affordable housing?  
*I support conversion of vacant commercial buildings into affordable housing, and believe the City should consider converting any vacant city-owned buildings into affordable housing and shelters.*

- What is your position on rezoning in historic districts?

*I believe in approaching all rezoning responsibly, including approaching development in areas that are transit rich and can support more New Yorkers. The current land use process does need*

*reform, but I also believe that for development to be responsible, we need early buy-in from the community.*

3. Landlords cannot currently evict tenants for non-payment of rent due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are still required to pay real estate taxes, sewer and water fees to the city. What are your thoughts on this?

*Small landlords as well as tenants will both need real and urgent economic relief in the next year so that they both come out whole, and so that our City can avoid foreclosures and evictions. Our partners in the state legislature must work on a long term solution that stabilizes housing and resets debts once our economy is back up and running so that neither landlords or tenants are playing an insurmountable game of catch up.*

4. Do you have specific plans to make NYCHA housing more habitable, efficient, and accountable to its tenants and the city? What is your position on NYCHA infill?

*NYCHA has been an emergency in slow motion for decades, leaving residents to live in deteriorating apartments while the City, state, and federal government point fingers. We need to cut the “planning” and focus on executing badly needed repairs at NYCHA.*

*We will increase investment in NYCHA and make existing dollars stretch to cover more repairs to critical infrastructure, including creating a new authority for capital work that accelerates lengthy procurement rules. We will also leverage substantial federal money available in Section 8 and other programs to fix units so NYCHA residents can be proud of their homes.*

*We cannot let relatively “minor” repairs go unattended. To execute repairs in individual apartments, I believe in returning the original model of on site teams in each NYCHA community, instead of the current centralized process. Each development should have assigned dedicated skilled trade workers such as carpenters, painters, plasterers, plumbers and electricians. The pilot program in Queensbridge, Astoria Houses, and Ravenswood needs to be expanded to the rest of the City ASAP.*

*Regarding NYCHA infill, I support all creative ways to get money into the NYCHA system and repair and maintain its infrastructure- whether that’s infill, RAD, or any other creative solutions.*

## **CRIME/NEW YORK POLICE DEPARTMENT**

1. What are your thoughts on the current number of police officers on the street, and how would you address crime prevention going forward?

*I do not believe in reducing the number of patrol cops. Instead, we must provide resources for community policing and focus on providing resources to underserved schools and jobs pipelines for youth that lead to permanent employment.*

2. How would you deal with Black and Hispanic communities being subjected to allegedly unnecessary and/or illegal police arrests and try to change the culture of our police force?

*We need to change the police culture from a “warrior” culture to a “guardian” one. I would work to overcome the “us vs. them” mindset by implementing the following reforms: (1) Work with the state legislature to require NYC residency for new cops and increase community policing - we need every member of the NYPD to be fully bought into rebuilding the City and fully committed to the community they serve. (2) Increase the recruitment age from 21 to 25--the age at which you can rent a car. Police officers face the most challenging moments of the human condition; we need to make sure new recruits have life and job experiences that bring a mature perspective. (3) Require implicit bias training at all levels, but especially at the mid management level for sergeants.*

3. The NYPD seems top heavy with highly paid personnel and extensive administrative redundancies. Will you attempt to resolve this, and, if so, how?

*As I said above regarding administrative costs at DOE, inefficiencies are a problem across all City agencies. I will eliminate obsolete and unnecessary positions across the board to make our government leaner and more effective.*

4. Is it legally possible and reasonable to require all members of the NYPD to be legal residents of NYC?

*It will require working with our state government to change the law, but I believe doing so is integral to changing the culture of the NYPD and making sure that our new recruits have ties to our communities and feel accountable to our communities.*

## **THE ECONOMY**

1. Due to the pandemic, more than a half million people have moved out of NYC. Many corporations that maintained large office spaces are operating remotely all or in part. How will your administration deal with this? Do you plan to attract new residents and if so, how? How would you entice companies and professionals to lease commercial space in the city?

*I know New York City will bounce back. However, it will take someone with management experience at the helm to bring it back and restore quality basic essential services. As Mayor my top three priorities will be: a strong recovery, economic mobility and fighting climate change. We need to provide the necessary support and day to day quality of life investments—clean parks, safe transit, free childcare, access to fresh healthy foods—that allow all New Yorkers to thrive. That’s why the core of my COVID-19 recovery plan is to support the most vulnerable New Yorkers with meaningful economic relief: free childcare, support for small businesses, a jobs pipeline for CUNY and trades schools graduates, and universal broadband. One important issue we must address is transportation. We need to kick start planning for new transit to create opportunities for new housing and job growth, including the Utica Avenue and expanded Second Avenue subway and new ferry terminals in East Harlem, Inwood, Hunts Point and northern Queens.*

2. Do you expect to raise taxes? If so, on who/what? If not, how will you make up the pandemic shortfall?

*My priorities will be refinancing the debt, working with unions to find productivity savings, and reducing redundancy that has proliferated under the current admin (ie: we don't need a Chief Technology Officer, Chief Cybersecurity Officer, DOITT Commissioner etc). Additionally, the federal government needs to give NY the equivalent of the revenue shortfall related to government closures of business to help make up the shortfall.*

3. What kinds of businesses and commercial activities do you expect to attract to the city? How?

*I plan on taking steps to move NYC to a fully renewable energy economy starting on day one. The core components of our plan are: expanding renewable energy generation and transmission, cutting building emissions from residential and commercial heating, electrifying vehicles, expanding green infrastructure and community resiliency solutions, and achieving our zero waste goal. Our investments into critical infrastructure to achieve this will attract the best in building, technology, and science.*

4. Do you expect your administration to rely more on virtual (remote) activity that could lower or eliminate the need for the city to rent and maintain large office spaces. For example, adjudicating Traffic Court summonses remotely to reduce the need for courtrooms.

*I foresee a hybrid model, where jobs that are productive to conduct from home remain remote. As a result, if we have empty office space that we are renting, we will absolutely move to reduce the cost by downsizing or eliminating it completely if it is unnecessary.*

## **TRANSPORTATION**

1. How will you address the issues of MTA cost overruns, inflated overtime, and inefficiencies?

*I know how to deal with inefficiencies, and as mayor I will make sure to take a scalpel to all agency budgets and find savings through streamlining and eliminating redundancies. When I was at DEP, I identified and implemented more than \$100 million in recurring annual savings over four years -- that's nearly 10% of the utility's operating budget, without a single layoff. We identified opportunities to right-size maintenance practices, more efficiently deploy field staff and use DEP's buying power to negotiate better rates for products used to deliver clean, safe and healthy NYC drinking water. And all of this work happened in partnership with frontline workers and their union representatives — and resulted in no layoffs. We need to take this approach throughout the City, including at the MTA, so that we can achieve our policy goals on a tighter budget.*

2. Do you have any plans for changes to the current transit system, roadways, parking, bike lanes, etc.?

*Yes! We must ensure our public spaces serve the public first. We can do that by creating permanent open Streets that prioritize pedestrians and public use over cars, while preserving access for emergency services and deliveries. We should regulate delivery companies like Amazon to reduce congestion, improve safety and protect workers, and pilot residential parking permits to make on-street parking a privilege, not a right.*

*We must speed up buses and expand and better maintain our protected bike lane network by creating new dedicated busways and bus lanes, expanding offboard payment and all-door boarding, giving our buses priority at intersections, and growing the Express Bus network and Select Bus Service to cut down commuting times.*

*Lastly, I'll work with MTA to create a one-swipe in-city transportation network that integrates LIRR and MetroNorth service.*

## **CAMPAIGN CONTACT**

If our members have any additional questions or wish to get involved, what is your campaign contact information?

Please email [info@kgfornyc.com](mailto:info@kgfornyc.com), and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have!

**THE VRDC THANKS YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSES.**