



THE VILLAGE REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Questions for 2021 City Council District 3 Candidates

Responses for Candidate (name): Leslie Boghosian Murphy

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

We need voices in City hall that reflect our residents. I believe we must get involved to have a say in how government works. I am an EMMY award winning investigative journalist for over 20 years. I traveled the world uncovering corruption, demanding accountability and giving a voice to those who don't have one. Many of those same qualities make for a good representative.

After my 8-year old daughter was born, I began to look harder at what my community needed and got more involved. My role grew organically, first as a member of my block association then as a volunteer at our local family shelter and now as an member of the Hudson River Park Task Force, our district's Budget Task Force and as an executive member of our Community Board.

I am a problem solver and value action over talk. This past summer I created the Student Teacher Virtual Learning Initiative getting live distance learning to our most vulnerable students for free. When I read that the docked cruise ships at the Manhattan West side cruise terminal were emitting the equivalent of 34,000 idling tractor trailers, I brought together ConEdison and the EDC and now we are taking our first steps to getting electric shore power.

There is no problem too big. I identify problems and join with my community to solve them.

My journalist background, my community work and my drive make me the perfect candidate to help my district rebuild after COVID-19.

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

First and foremost, a NY City Councilmember must be an advocate and representative for the residents, businesses & organizations in her district. Yes, a Councilmember must work for the greater good towards principled ideas but representing the voices of my neighborhood is paramount. I intend to identify the most pressing issues and through an

open dialogue with the constituents, work hard to fix these issues, no matter how micro they might be considered.

I intend to use the power of the office to give everyone a seat at the table and to oversee policy and projects that directly affect our neighborhoods.

I plan to keep a strong check & balance on our developers, police precincts and big businesses while coming together to find workable solutions that benefit my district as a whole.

And, as is a thread throughout my platform, I plan to promote and foster broad-range community involvement and commit to holding monthly town halls open to all.

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

1. Affordable Housing - I believe in all neighborhoods sharing affordable housing, across all income bands. We cannot keep creating these islands of poverty. When affordable housing is spread out, it helps bridge the economic, educational and cultural divide. Our district will be in a unique situation over the next few years with the next City Councilmember presiding over three new affordable/public housing projects. I intend to keep to the Hudson Yards Point of Agreement our elected officials negotiated with the community and will promote balanced income bands for the DEP & MTA new housing sites.

I also want to examine a return to the SRO model for transitional housing. Some of these small buildings and boutique hotels will be up for sale and we have an opportunity to move the needle on this. SROs are most successful when they are small scale in limited capacity buildings. That's how the model is set up to be most effective. If we spread these locations out in a thoughtful and balanced way, with adequate social services, we can provide a good number of transitional housing units in our district.

2. Small business recovery - Small businesses and restaurants have been hit particularly hard by the COVID pandemic. This recovery could take years, but business owners can't plan beyond the next month. We need to lift up small business owners and provide them with the resources they need so that our neighborhoods retain the diversity and vibrant storefronts that make NYC unique. In addition to fighting for our fair share of federal and state funds (which are the bulk of financial assistance needed), we can do this through capping third party delivery fees, eliminating DOB expeditors, disincentivizing empty storefronts, and suspending the Commercial Rent Tax for the duration of the pandemic.

3. Education - Education is a foundation block of my platform. As a member of the Education Committee on my Community Board, I work closely with the schools and superintendent's office in our district and will continue to do so to push forward a successful progressive agenda.

Desegregation of schools is sociologically intertwined with group economics and affordable housing. This will only be successful when we first address the educational compromises schools in lower income and immigrant communities are forced to make due to lack of finances.

- PTA sharing. Right now many subjects beyond common core such as music, drama, dance, SEL lessons and environmental science are subsidized by parent donations. This is creating a learning gap from the very beginning. I want to close loopholes in the DOE contracts that disallow PTA sharing.
- Community organization involvement. We have wonderful nonprofit and for profit organizations in our community that have the resources and to strengthen our local schools. We have to use them to the best of our ability. I can make those connections.
- Budget assessment.

4. Public Safety/Quality of Life - These two intertwined issues are having a major impact on the Hell's Kitchen and Chelsea areas of our district. One example: During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city moved over 800 single men into a one block radius in Hell's Kitchen. When they moved, their services did not move with them. Many of these men are dealing with mental health issues, chemical dependencies, and other social issues. They have little to no support and the providers have evaded accountability. It has created an untenable and unsafe situation for all residents and businesses in the area.

I will identify problems and correct them. I will fight for the residents and businesses in my district. I will make public safety and quality of life a priority because that is the only way our neighborhoods will restore balance and vibrancy.

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?

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next City Councilmember presiding over three new affordable/public housing projects.

I promise to keep to the Hudson Yards Points of Agreement the city made with the community. In addition to our lowest AMI income bands, we need more moderate/middle income (working class income) affordable housing. A spread across the board will maintain diversity and balance in our neighborhoods.

There has to be a very strong argument to change the zoning in historic areas. I believe the character of a neighborhood matters. Preserving that character matters. It makes the pockets of our district unique and avoids the cookie cutter nature of development. We must preserve this. There are other options, such as adaptive reuse, to look at before we make drastic changes in historic districts that we cannot reverse.

- 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?

Yes, I support adaptive reuse. This approach retains the character of a neighborhood without giving in to giant, new development. The approach and financing will be similar to new builds with income band percentages across the board including market rate units.

The change in business landscape due to COVID-19 is presenting up with an opportunity to take advantage of the adaptive reuse model.

- 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?

MIH is the quickest way to gentrification and unless there can be a greater assurance of affordable units, MIH's greatest advantage goes to big developers. I would support using MIH only with the appropriate FAR and favor new as-of-right development.

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

AMI bands are determined by the federal government which is part of the problem. We need a NYC specific AMI with even specific AMI adjustments per neighborhood. This may be detailed but it will be accurate. I believe in multi-level AMIs and it is up to lawmakers to determine the qualification points, regardless of official AMI levels. We control what level(s) is targeted.

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?

We have over 20,000 adults over the age of 65 in our district, many who need home and community based services. Older adults should be supported to age in place with access to care managers for medical visits, transportation assistance and support for family caregivers. Access to care and social connectedness are especially important today with COVID-19 forcing many of our elders inside and into isolation. I support more options for affordable, intergenerational housing. This allows consideration for two of the groups most in need of affordable housing, the young and the old. Studies have shown this model of living is beneficial to both groups and gives the elderly freedom how they choose to live in their later years.

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.?

In addition to my answer above regarding the desegregation of public schools, I would look to make the following changes:

Providing school space should be a standard requirement for all new builds over a certain size. Period. New school builds should be a requirement whether or not the development is in an overcrowded area or not. If there is no land for a new school build, the developer should either finance or assume responsibility for renovation of current schools. I would also consider removing the "impact fees" out of concern many developers would take the easy route out and pay a fine they can easily afford. If the impact fee cannot be ruled out entirely, I would tie it to renovations and repairs as I mentioned above.

Specific to my district, as part of the Hudson Rail Yards Points of Agreement (Hudson Yards development), the developer is responsible for building a 120,000 sqft. P.S./I.S. with 750 total seats. We are still waiting and as the next Councilwoman, I will make sure that is a priority in our district.

Class Size

I want to concentrate on reducing class size and securing TAs in every class. We cannot keep stuffing our classrooms and then expect teachers to deliver a high quality educational experience while also catering to a high-stakes testing prep. Who thinks this is a formula for success? Class sizes must be reduced not only for education quality but for SEL, as well.

To strengthen our school system I would examine:

Social workers for each school

Early screening and specialized teaching for dyslexia and other special learning needs

Fresh and healthy food for all schools

Incorporating environmental education and field trips for all elementary and middle schools

Incorporating culturally responsive lesson plans and curriculum

Incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum

COVID related

Prioritizing attention to the Learning Bridges program

Strengthening virtual, synchronous learning

Free wifi for shelter, transitional housing and affordable housing

Device and device maintenance*

Digital libraries*

Classroom libraries*

Enrichment programs

**I advocated these programs be included in the District's Budget Priority List for next FY.*

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

To make serious cuts to the NYPD budget we first have to untangle the responsibilities now under the purview of the police department. Policing should be limited to matters of public safety. Transferring oversight of homeless services, for example, will both reduce the budget and provide a more proper response. I support the pilot program due to start next month to have mental health professionals and crisis workers dispatched through 911 for mental health emergencies. The 911 component is very important because until now, people have been directed, unless it's an immediately violent episode, to call 311. 311 is not an immediate response platform so bad situations were not remedied. Last year NYC estimated 911 received one mental health related call every three minutes.

I want to reexamine the units in the NYPD most susceptible to corruption: VICE, Strategic Response Group, B&B, and Anti Crime.

I also will propose a higher percentage of civilians in the NYPD. This may not create deep budget cuts (though civilian replacements are less expensive) but it

does achieve many goals. Now, police officers often spend much of their time behind a desk doing paperwork. There are also many precinct roles now filled by trained cops when they could be filled by civilians. Filling these clerical jobs with civilian administrative aides will,

1. Decrease the police force
2. Make the "paperwork" system more efficient and error-free
3. Save money
4. Create more community-based jobs
5. Create a natural community/police relationship

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

Yes absolutely, as a member of Community Board 4, I know how important resident input is. Our Community Boards are the boots on the ground of the districts and they are a great resource for knowing what a community needs and doesn't. As a general rule, my campaign is based on greater and valued input from our community.

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?

We need comprehensive, safe bike lanes; safe not just for bicyclists, but for pedestrians as well. I have spoken with more than one resident who was injured by an electric bike with no recourse for their injuries because the bikes are unidentifiable. I strongly support licensing and insurance requirements for e-bikes and motorized bikes. I also support fair enforcement of bike lanes. Now, stepping off the curb can be a dangerous proposition for many, especially when there are some bicyclists that ignore right-of-way, traffic lights and turn signals.

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 believe that we need to eliminate waste across the board. Our capital projects constantly go over budget and over schedule. And now we're just used to it. But waste is waste and we need better auditing.

We also have to reduce the use of outside consultants for agencies across the board which NYC spent over \$160 million on last year.

This is one point where I stand out from the rest of the candidates in our race. The next few years will be discussions and negotiations down at City Hall over what gets cut and why.

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 do support rent relief and a tax and mortgage freeze for landlords, as well as a freeze on co-op and HOA fees. Everyone is struggling, these are not disparate groups with different needs, we all need to pause these payments until the pandemic has ended.

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

Campaign manager information:

Merrill Kaye Arens

314-780-3298

merrillkaye@lesliefornyc.com

Visit www.lesliefornyc.com for more information about my campaign. You can also follow me: www.instagram.com/lkburphy www.twitter.com/LeslieBMurphy and www.facebook.com/LeslieForNYC

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