

Public Advocate Candidate:

Below is the Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club's Public Advocate Candidate Questionnaire. Please fill it out and return to jimowles@gmail.com

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1. Do you now support or have you ever supported an openly LGBTQ candidate for public office?

Yes. Most recently, I've supported Deborah Glick as well as Tom Duane and then Brad Hoylman in my home State Assembly and State Senate Districts respectively. I supported Cynthia Nixon for Governor. I've also supported various LGBTQ congressional candidates including Danica Roehm and Sean Eldridge.

2. If applicable, what legislation directly affecting the LGBT community have you introduced or co-sponsored? (indicate accordingly)

I have not served in a legislature so I have no introduced or co-sponsored any legislation. However, in 2009 i served as Vice President of Manhattan Young Democrats when we ran a nationally recognized online campaign to pass Marriage Equality in the State Legislature. That year, the bill failed by only one vote in the State Senate.

3. What LGBT organizations have you been involved with, either on a volunteer basis or professionally?

When Middle Collegiate Church ran a homeless shelter for runaway LGBTQ youth I lead many Manhattan Young Democrats community service events there. As a leader in the Young Democrats and Manhattan Democratic Party, I have also partnered with many LGBTQ organizations to push for legislation such as at MENY and HRC. I have also participated in many Jim Owles club meetings and events.

4. If applicable, what LGBT organizations have you allocated funds to?

N/A

5. Do you consider yourself a member of the LGBT community?

I, myself, am not LGBT but I consider myself a staunch ally.

6. Have you marched in Pride? Which marches and for approximately how many years?

Yes, I've marched in every Pride Parade starting in 2009 except for 2016 and 2017.

7. Have you employed openly LGBT individuals previously? Do you employ any currently?

I have not been in a position to unilaterally hire a large number of people, and in instances when I participated in hiring decisions, none of those individuals was openly LGBT to the best of my knowledge.

However, in my organizing work and as a volunteer leader I have promoted and elevated many capable LGBT individuals - such as by recruiting them to run for County Committee or encouraging them to start LGBT caucuses in the Young Democrats. On my public advocate campaign, there are no full-time paid staff members. Only consultant vendors and superstar volunteer leaders. I am proud of the diverse and growing number of LGBT community members volunteering their time and energy for this movement and taking leadership roles on our campaign.

8. If you receive the endorsement, do you agree to identify the club using its FULL name on all literature and electronic materials where you list endorsements?

Yes, enthusiastically.

9. What press conferences, demonstrations, rallies and protests in support of LGBT issues, pro choice legislation, criminal justice issues and the Resist Trump Movement have you attended?

Far too many to list or even remember. If you include the post-Trump civic education workshops I've been teaching as events in the Resist Trump Movement, I've personally organized or co-organized at least 60 in the last two years. One event of note, perhaps: I've participated in the Jim Owles club Candles for Clemency campaign and traveled to Mount Kisco to march on Governor Cuomo's home.

10. Have you ever been arrested? If so please explain why and outcome of arrest.

No.

11. Will you advocate in Albany for legislation to mandate the review of sentences of incarcerated individuals over the age of 55 who have served in excess of 15 years to determine if they warrant release?

Yes. Rehabilitation, not punishment, should be the goal of our justice system. Everyone deserves a second chance and a second look is the least we can promise.

12. Do you commit to visit constituents who are incarcerated in state prisons such as Bedford Correctional Facility?

Yes.

13. Do you believe sincere remorse, risk of reoffending and actions taken while incarcerated should be considered over the original crime in determinations of parole?

Rehabilitation, not punishment, should be the goal of our justice system. When someone faces a parole board, their current character, not their past, should be adjudicated. The court already made a determination as to their violation of the law, the parole board is there to consider whether the person poses a risk to other people in the community; not re-litigate how bad their offense was.

14. Do you consent to having your name added to a letter of elected officials to the New York State Parole Board advocating for the release of Judith Clark?

Yes, as mentioned I've already participated in Candles for Clemency.

15. Have you participated in any demonstrations or protests in relation to the issues of clemency and parole?

Yes, as mentioned, the Jim Owles club demonstrations have been one. Most recently, I have also participated in many Black Lives Matter marches and meetings, several of which dealt with issues of criminal justice.

16. Will you affirmatively seek to hire formerly incarcerated individuals?

Yes.

17. Do you believe in the legalization of sex work?

Legalize and regulate. This is particularly important for refocusing our sex crimes resources on human trafficking and creating an environment in which those who are victims are able to engage with law enforcement to punish modern slavers without fearing for their own safety.

18. What proposals will you advocate for the protect immigrants and the further New York as a Sanctuary City?

There are three critical policies any municipality must adopt to protect its immigrant population:

1. Protect or destroy any data which would allow the targeting of immigrant populations by Federal authorities.
2. Refuse cooperation with Federal efforts to find, detain or otherwise persecute immigrant populations.
3. Ensure that the census is reliably completed, that its results represent the true population of the city including immigrants, and that immigrant populations are protected with a public campaign to ensure the majority of New Yorkers ignore any immigration status question. This will give immigrant populations the resources they need while making census data useless for targeting them.

As State Committeeman for AD66, I authored and passed a resolution committing the State Democratic Party to Sanctuary State policies. My commitment to our immigrant community is incredibly strong.

19. Will you advocate, including introducing legislation, to remove public funding from religious schools?

Yes. Separation of church and state mandates that the government not subsidize any religion or religious institution. Houses of worship, educational or otherwise, already receive tax exempt status.

20. What is your position on Amazon opening their headquarters in Queens?

There have been a lot of heated words over this so let's break down the components:

Non-discretionary: \$1.3B

New York City runs a series of tax credit programs to incentivize certain types of

business development. These have been in effect for years and, while they weren't necessarily passed with Amazon in mind, they were both recently extended. Amazon will be taking advantage of two:

- \$897 million from the city's [Relocation and Employment Assistance Program \(REAP\)](#)
- \$386 million from the [Industrial & Commercial Abatement Program \(ICAP\)](#)

The ICAP program which is meant to encourage commercial construction outside popular Manhattan areas and has been extended to 2022.

REAP, which encourages companies to move jobs to outer boroughs (including from Manhattan) has been in effect since 2005 and was recently extended as well.

These programs are open to any business meeting the published guidelines and Amazon is no exception. If these were the only credits Amazon received, it might be possible to make the case the city's incentive program was actually working. Unfortunately, the discretionary part muddies the deal entirely.

Discretionary: \$1.5B

Over half of Amazon's benefits are coming from special offers made by the city and State. They are:

- \$505 million in capital grants to build a new facility
- \$1.2 billion in State Excelsior credits. These credits are tied to job creation goals. Nonetheless, it means for every dollar Amazon spends on wages, it receives 6.85 cents in kickbacks.

Beyond the simple tax subsidies, Amazon is also getting:

- State takeover of the land involved in HQ2 through the General Project Plan (GPP). This permits the state to evade the City Council's jurisdiction, avoid NYC's land review process and allows for even weaker community input requirements.
- A Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program. Since the State will own the land, the city won't see any tax revenue from property tax. Hence the PILOT. The city estimates payments of \$600M over 40 years; or roughly \$15M a year. Half of these payments to PILOTS will go to the city while the other half will be allocated to infrastructure projects with community input.
- A helipad which will be allowed to operate 120 days per year.

What New Yorkers get:

The city doesn't get nothing out of this deal. It's just not much considering \$3B price tag and that the government can't seem to find \$25B to fix NYCHA or the \$19B to repair the subway.

- \$850,000 annually in rent according to inflation rates.
- \$5M a year from Amazon, the city and State for tech training programs.
- 25,000 jobs with an average salary of \$150,000 and an estimated return of \$27.5B in taxes over 20 years.
- A new school built by Amazon.

Assuming the government estimates are correct, this deal offers a 9:1 payoff - potentially the highest. However, this must be reconciled with the fact that the existing infrastructure around Long Island City is already extremely taxed. LIC is the fastest growing neighborhood in the nation, it's single subway line, the 7, is at capacity and the signals fail regularly.

While the estimated return may sound fantastic (assuming it's accurate), the extra burden on the community will invariably lead to new infrastructure costs, eating into the value of the deal.

Verdict on the deal

Despite a bidding war that consumed the entire country, Amazon chose two of the most expensive localities for its HQ2 - NYC and Washington, D.C. (ok, Crystal City, VA. But it's the DC area). Arguably their decision was driven less by deals and more by their business objectives.

For D.C., that means being close to the nation's political capital (and near founder Jeff Bezos). Amazon is a powerhouse and its decision to locate near DC reflects its political goals, not its cheap land goals.

For NYC, that means being close to the nation's financial and media capital. Amazon, and Amazon Prime Video in particular, are expanding. The access to financial, media and tech talent in NYC is unrivaled in the rest of the country.

Finally, for both places, the type of people who work for Amazon want to be in great cities. In the great competition for talent between the tech giants, that matters. Quality of life matters. And ultimately, the decision on where to locate is more than just a number crunching game.

For our political leaders and their unwillingness to play any kind of hard ball on behalf of New Yorkers (considering \$1.2B was already on the table, no questions asked), both Andrew Cuomo and Bill DeBlasio see themselves as contenders for the Presidency. Each executive bending over backwards to give something to Amazon isn't to make New Yorkers happy, it's to cultivate powerful and wealthy backers for the future.

In the end, if Amazon wants to locate in NYC because it's the greatest city on earth, that makes sense. But in the long run, successful companies and good jobs are attracted by high quality of life, like any other resident. Reducing the friction of business and living can be as much a benefit (including financially) as any tax break. That means things like functioning public services, reliable transportation and a highly educated population. Providing these elevates not just our businesses but our residents, too. Trading simple cash to woo companies at the expense of them is simply bad policy.

What to do for the community

Not surprisingly, I go back to my four programs. They are designed to empower community involvement in city decision making and this precisely what that community needs; especially if Amazon is allowed to move in. Organizing and providing extra resources in the form of staff support, bureaucratic knowledge and research will be critical to allowing the civic institutions to stand up for its needs.

Bringing into conversation with surrounding communities will give it the opportunity to build leverage for concessions from the city/State, allow it to potentially reach deals with neighboring communities to find shared amenities and allow it share its experiences with others who might face similar situations in the future.

Finally, I haven't mentioned the bully pulpit, that doesn't mean being vocal and speaking out about the problems a community faces has no impact. As Public Advocate I would be unearthing and highlighting the issues Amazon's move creates for the community to build political pressure to solve them.

21. Do you support removing the loitting statue from the state criminal code?

Yes.

22. Do you support the legalization of marijuana?

Legalize and regulate.

23. Do you support the establishment of supervised drug consumption spaces?

Yes.

24. Have you ever endorsed any member of the IDC or any candidates who challenged IDC members? Please identify all candidates

I have endorsed all challengers to the IDC in NYC. Including:

- Robert Jackson
- Jasmine Robinson
- Zellnor Myrie
- John Liu

- Alessandra Biaggi
- Jessica Ramos

25. Do you support reform of the CCRB? If yes, please explain.

Yes, the CCRB is meant to provide civilian oversight of the NYPD. While the majority of CCRB structure supports that mission, and was enhanced by the 2012 MOU, all disciplinary decisions ultimately reside with the Police Commissioner. That policy means that civilian oversight is essentially advisory. This is not sufficient in providing the public an opportunity to ensure those given the most power in our society are accountable to the people they serve.

One simple improvement would be to make the Mayor the final arbiter in a situation where the CCRB has rejected a Commissioner's rejection of the board's disciplinary recommendation. The Mayor - an elected civilian in charge of the NYPD - would then be tasked with making the disciplinary judgment, or perhaps determining if an investigation should proceed to trial, not the Police Commissioner.

A better solution would be to allow the CCRB to directly take cases to trial in the event that they chose to overrule a rejection by the Commissioner. The process of a fair trial is a core tenet of American democracy and the only one available to civilians when they are in conflict with each other. If a Commissioner offers a valid explanation for overruling the CCRB's initial determination, charges may be dropped. But if the CCRB believes a Commissioner's response is inadequate, the legal process which serves every other aspect of our society should be welcomed by those committed to its enforcement.

26. Please identify 3 boards on which the PA serves and 3 appointments the PA makes that are of the utmost importance to you.

- Pension Board
- City Planning Commission
- Independent Budget Office

27. What reforms to the powers and duties of the office would you advocate for?

Calls to eliminate the Public Advocate's office due to its amorphous nature are mainly based on the fact that it has almost no responsibility. Without any clear mandate or authority, it is the perfect launchpad for a politician who wants to progress to higher office, as it provides a unique opportunity to agree with everyone but take responsibility for nothing.

It is almost impossible to dislike a Public Advocate because they are always fighting with you until the Mayor or City Council gets in the way -- and then they share your pain. In order to make the Public Advocate a better position it must be given more definition and actual responsibility so voters can judge whether their representative in the role is effective.

The programs I'm proposing -- Civics for All, Power for Communities, and Justice for New Yorkers -- create that definition. They provide real metrics by which to gauge success and defined activities for the office to undertake. Like the bad landlords list, programs that actually provide value for New Yorkers will become institutionalized and come to define the Public Advocate's work. That, then, reduces its appearance and role as a holding pen for ambitious politicians. These programs have the capacity to change the very nature of how we view the Public Advocate and are as follows:

1. Civics For All

Civic knowledge empowers people. I've seen it firsthand teaching civics to thousands of New Yorkers who go on to successfully make their communities heard. Civics For All brings that power to every corner of New York City with workshops, classes, online guides, and a "Political 311" hotline. This will allow New Yorkers to bridge the gap between those who have specific issues and those organizing to solve them. Be in person, online or over the phone, everyone has problems which they need civics to solve. The government owes people answers.

2. Power for Communities

We need to build leverage for bottom up, community driven city planning. Right now, City Hall forces communities to react to proposals it then speeds through approval. The Public Advocate should use its resources to bring together community institutions and stakeholders to develop a shared, proactive vision of how New York should develop. Then it should use its power to support plans which have buy in from all communities in the city. Including holding hearings on agencies which disregard them and introducing legislation to enact their decisions. If our civic institutions - like Community Boards, Education Councils and local advocates - were united in a proactive vision of New York's future, elected officials would have to reckon with their plan. No elected wants to upset every community at once; not a mayor and certainly not any Council Member who wants to be Mayor.

3. Justice for New Yorkers focuses the litigatory work of the office on systemic bad actors who corrupt our political systems and decision-making processes. The Public

Advocate's office has already done a great job calling out and suing bad landlords, but we have more bad actors in New York who need government oversight.

Justice for New Yorkers expands the focus of Public Advocate litigation to major threats like: employers who commit wage theft, a board of elections that illegally purges voters and a city that fails to enforce hard won community concessions: like affordable housing, new schools, emergency centers, and public green spaces.

I also suggest changing the structural role of the Public Advocate as defined in the City Charter by:

- Giving the PA subpoena power to allow the office to conduct serious investigations and oversight
- Moving the Department of Investigations from the Executive Branch to the Public Advocate to empower an independent watchdog and eliminate conflicts of interest within the Executive Branch
- Moving the new Civic Engagement Commission from the Executive Branch to the Public Advocate and better defining the CEC's role as an institution to pilot ideas for ensuring community voices are heard in city decision-making. Like Investigations, this will move the power of the Commission to an elected who has an incentive to do the work and prevent conflicts of interest. The Mayor's majority appointments, including the Commission Chair, is troublesome for many progressives like me. If Community Boards are legally required to use the Commission, among other resources provided to them, these micro-governing bodies should be put at ease that the findings and information being provided to them come from a source that has not been tainted by luxury developers.

Ultimately, a Public Advocate has no authority over the expansion of its role, only over what the office does. I believe that the programs I intend to run will not only bring critically needed services to New Yorkers but also a coherence to the office itself.

28. Will you commit to hiring a member of the LGBT community to serve as a liaison to the community?

Absolutely. The Civics for All and Power for Communities programs are built on the philosophy of the government meeting people where they are. I also expect to hire

LGBT community members for various other functions because LGBT community members are just as competent as any other person.

29. Will you commit to ensuring diverse LGBT representation among your staff?

Absolutely.

30. Who did you support for office in the following races A) Mayor and Public Advocate in 2013 B) President in 2016 C) Governor and Attorney General in 2018

- A) Bill deBlasio
- B) Bernie Sanders
- C) Cynthia Nixon and Letitia James

31. Do you support Habitat for Humanity's proposal for gay-friendly low income housing on Elizabeth Street?

No. I support gay-friendly low income housing but the 121 units proposed on the Elizabeth Street Garden lot don't make a lot of sense. The district, which is home to the garden, has among the least green space in the city. Furthermore, with an alternative site that offers five times the capacity for units, I agree with the idea that it's a false choice between affordable housing and greenspace. Communities need and deserve both, if New York City wants more affordable housing, our government needs to demand more from developers when they build 70 story towers, not tear down the hard work of local residents.

Dividing communities by forcing competition over basic needs is how overbearing electeds enact their plans, and the plans of special interests, over the will of residents. If we are going have a successful city, we must have a holistic plan for development. New York needs new shelters, new housing, new greenspace and so many other things. Pitting these interests against each other is a guaranteed way to lose on all of them. Only by tackling them together can we develop solutions which meet the needs of residents and build the political power required to force politicians to listen.

32. Would you speak in favor of an establishment applying for a liquor license when the opposition is based on Nimby and or unreasonable concerns?

My process is always to consult the members of a community and hear what they have to say. Local communities should be the arbiters of their own destiny and the Public Advocate's office should facilitate their empowerment. That said, the neighborhoods of

NYC are not city states, a Public Advocate must also work to bring communities together in collaboration to build a shared vision of New York that crosses lines on a map to allow for holistic planning.

Insofar as specific liquor licenses, I would always be open to both sides of a debate and work with a community to address their specific concerns. If they are truly unfounded, then they should be addressable through conversation and plans for mitigation by working with municipal government and other community stakeholders. It is not the Public Advocate's place to decide whether community concerns are valid or override local residents. People should be empowered in their own decision making; a good Public Advocate should provide the resources which will allow them to make the best choices.