



## **21 BRIDGES**

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**Twenty-one policies  
for the future of  
Manhattan**

## Introduction

I have lived and worked in New York City for almost three decades and have spent my entire adult life helping our Borough come together to solve problems both big and small. As we begin to turn the corner on a difficult year, I will be a leader who can work in a non-political way across sectors – from our arts and nonprofit communities to our small businesses and corporate institutions – to find common ground. I will bring a fresh perspective rooted in my years of experience working in our community. Together, we can ensure our Borough emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic safer, cleaner, and greener.

## Bringing Back Manhattan

What would New York City and our nation be without Manhattan, its bustling engine? To regain the quality of life that puts Manhattan at the core of the greatest city in the world, we need a whole-of-Borough effort to support the businesses, artists, and communities that enliven our city. That means getting our children back to school, making it easier for businesses to roar back to life, and finding creative ways to support the cultural communities that make our city tick.

### End COVID-related school closures

I have been the only candidate standing with our public school parents from the start. Remote learning has become disastrous for students, who have lost over a year of instruction and social interaction. Internet learning has disproportionately hurt students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and students of color. Keeping kids home has also created immense burdens on parents.

Working mothers have borne the brunt of this shift to remote education, exacerbating gender inequality in our city. Over the last year, more than 2 million women left the workforce in the U.S. alone. Mothers of young children have been particularly affected by the shift to remote instruction. One commentator noted that the “biggest issue of gender equality in 2021 may well be whether schools return to near-normal this fall.” Our city’s parents and children have been failed by our local leaders. Now, we must both look forward with an eye toward full in-person instruction in the fall, while also demanding transparency and accountability so the mistakes of the last year do not persist and are never repeated.

I will work to ensure New York City Public Schools have all the resources and policies in place they need to return to five-day a week instruction for all students this fall, including frequent free testing for all students, teachers, and staff. If necessary, I will work to secure additional outside facilities for schools if that helps ensure adequate social distancing.

## Direct payments for small businesses and workers

New York City is due to receive \$6 billion from the American Recovery Act, with an additional \$6.5 billion allocated to the MTA and \$4 billion to our public school system. The City must use these funds to directly help New York's hardest-hit sectors, like hospitality and tourism, recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Direct payments for individuals from the federal government have stimulated the economy. Now is no time for red tape. We must use a large portion of our recovery funds for direct payments to current and former workers in struggling industries and our hardest hit small business owners. This will help rent-burdened small businesses from going under, and help prevent New Yorkers from losing their homes.

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## Refund small businesses for COVID costs

On top of an economic crisis, business owners have had to incur extra expenses to COVID-proof their shops and restaurants. These expenses are disproportionately greater for small businesses, which are unable to rely on the resources of large corporations.

As Manhattan reopens, we need to do all we can to help our small businesses recover and thrive. I will support a program to reimburse businesses for COVID-related expenses – including sanitizing supplies, air purifiers, and PPE – as well as future improvements restaurants will make to ensure safe indoor and outdoor dining.

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## Create a safety net for the arts and gig workers

The arts are central to Manhattan's vitality and economy. They represent one in every eight dollars spent in New York City. Unfortunately, the arts and entertainment sector has been decimated by the pandemic. The 90,000 New Yorkers who were employed in the arts have paid a steep price in the pandemic, with employment down 66 percent from 2019 to 2020. While many arts unions have come to agreements with theaters and production companies, many players and backstage workers have not. The agreements that have been brokered don't include freelance artists.

Saving New York's arts sector will require a long-term strategy and substantial investment. The State Comptroller says government intervention will be required. Workers need a long-term solution specific to them, especially as they return to our city's stages and theaters.

A community that is so crucial to Manhattan's essence and economy deserves our support. I propose establishing a civic fund that would provide an emergency safety net for workers in the arts for when current arrangements fall short. I would also explore the possibility of creating a city-backed, opt-in 401k-style retirement program for freelance

artists, which could serve as a pilot for a similar long-term program for gig and freelance workers.

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## **Free same-day PCR test results**

While we are making great strides toward herd immunity through vaccination, we will be living with COVID-19 for the near future. Easy and accessible testing will be key to pinpointing outbreaks and new variants, and will facilitate travel and other currently restricted activities. While New York City already offers free PCR and same-day antigen testing, we must get our testing capacity to a place where we can offer same day results of PCR tests, considered the gold standard for testing, to any New Yorker who wants or needs them. This will prevent future outbreaks and keep New Yorkers safe.

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## **Create a jobs corps for young Manhattanites**

More than 75,000 young people benefit from New York's Summer Youth Employment Program, but the program was cut during the pandemic, hitting a population already suffering from a disproportionately high unemployment rate. I support reinvigorating and expanding the program, with an increased focus on supporting green jobs. Sustainability-related jobs young people could perform include tree maintenance, converting pedestrian plazas, helping with coastal resilience projects, and painting roofs through the CoolRoofs program, with the potential to expand this to other large infrastructure projects.

## **Creating A Safer Manhattan**

Like many cities, New York City has seen a rise in crime in recent months. With fewer people in commercial districts and offices, transit ridership at historic lows, and employees just now returning to in-person work, Manhattan feels more vulnerable than it has in a long time. But as we've seen, the answer is not simply more police, but more creative policing and public safety delivery rooted in neighborhoods and focused on communities that don't always feel served by police, like communities of color and women.

### **Localize crime prevention interventions**

New York City has had some success with interventions like the Crisis Management System, which deploys teams to mediate street conflict and connect individuals to city services, and other supportive services, like school conflict mediation, mental health and legal services, and other social programs. I support increasing funding for these programs and working with the City to better tailor them to the Manhattan neighborhoods and blocks where they are needed.

Providing more access to supportive programs for at-risk youth is not enough. I will work with Manhattan businesses and nonprofits to connect teenagers with summer jobs that give them a positive (and paid) alternative to engaging in activities that would risk leading to trouble with law enforcement.

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## **Pilot program for “cop boxes” in our neighborhoods**

Following the racial justice protests last year, it is apparent that there is a gap in understanding between police and many of the citizens they serve. While the NYPD serves Manhattan selflessly every day, there is ample room to improve community relations.

I will support a pilot program for a ‘cop box’ initiative in Manhattan. Based on the Japanese *kōban* concept, a ‘cop box’ is a small neighborhood police kiosk staffed by one or two officers that can serve as a focal point for friendly police-neighborhood interactions. The LAPD has found great success using cop boxes.

Cop boxes would lower tensions by taking often fraught public-police interactions away from random sidewalk encounters without taking police out of neighborhoods entirely. Functions might include providing maps and directions to tourists, serving as a neighborhood lost & found, taking police reports for minor crimes, and as emergency dispatch.

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## **Ensuring A More Affordable Manhattan**

A more affordable Manhattan is a better Manhattan. Rent costs are down in many parts of the Borough, but for many hard-working families and individuals paying rent is a struggle every month, and often living in Manhattan is a pipe dream. We need to create more affordable units. Given the impact of COVID-19 on our business districts, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address the housing crisis and homelessness without the need for development projects that, quite literally, put our neighborhoods in the shadows. With more than a decade of experience as a Community Board member and Chair, I am uniquely qualified to navigate our Borough’s legislative process, so that we can ensure all New Yorkers are treated with dignity and respect while maintaining the iconic character that makes our neighborhoods special.

## **Convert more commercial space into affordable housing**

New York City – and especially Manhattan – has long faced a housing shortage. Any new housing helps alleviate the housing crunch, so we must be more flexible about what can be considered housing, especially when the pandemic has made so much commercial real estate vacant. We can’t afford to let whole neighborhoods sit empty

and buildings go unused. The vast majority of Manhattan's unhoused live in shelters, because there is simply no available housing stock they can afford.

I support reducing the limits on zoning and making it easier for new developments of housing of all types to go forward. This includes considering novel housing types like modular housing.

We can make it easier to convert commercial spaces into housing. In January, Governor Cuomo proposed legislation that would temporarily allow both hotels and commercial property to be converted for residential use. I support this legislation and will work to create a local version of this law to safeguard the program in case the Albany legislation fails to pass. Unlike the state bill, I would ensure any local iteration of the rule is permanent.

I support direct measures focused on the unhoused population, like creating more Single Residency Occupancy (SRO) units, and I will lobby for adding capacity to address the youth homeless population.

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## **Create early Uniform Land Use Review Procedure warning system for community boards and new developments**

Community Boards and the Borough President play a crucial role in land use decisions as the first and second points of review for projects in Manhattan. If a project is recommended by both, it then goes before the City Council and Mayor's Office. While the Community Board has 60 days to review a proposal, its members and the public do not always get the full plans to properly review them in a timely manner. As Borough President, I will push to create a warning system that would alert Community Boards and the Borough President's office of upcoming projects, so that they can adequately anticipate and prepare to review them.

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## **Commercial and residential vacancy taxes**

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened an already devastating pre-pandemic increase in commercial storefront vacancies. In Manhattan, the commercial vacancy rate reached 15.1%, up from 11.1% in 2019, a twenty-year high. These vacancies are not just a blight on Manhattan's streets; one or more vacancies often creates a local spillover effect. Once vacancies reach a critical mass, they can zap entire streets and neighborhoods of their vitality.

I support a levy on owners of commercial and residential units that have been vacant for more than six months, based on both a unit's square footage, existing rent, and length of vacancy. The levy would not apply in instances of renovation or improvements (or after a fire or natural disaster), and would be waived for nonprofits and nonprofit landlords who provide supportive housing. It would apply to tenants who sublease and likewise fail to keep a storefront or residential unit occupied.

These measures would improve affordability and keep local stores open for business by incentivizing landlords to lower rent rates to meet demand, rather than keeping them artificially high or holding a unit unoccupied.

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## **Secure more NYCHA funding through a preservation trust**

Ensuring each Manhattan resident has a secure and healthy place to live is a matter of public safety and public health, but despite controlling the nation's largest system of public housing, NYCHA has long failed to meet tenant and community needs. Buildings in disrepair signal an urgent crisis and as Borough President I will prioritize widespread reform to NYCHA.

Reforming NYCHA requires our immediate attention. Not only are our neighbors living in overcrowded, sometimes decrepit accommodations, but every year we wait adds an additional \$1 billion to the already-lofty price tag of \$40 billion needed to reform our public housing system. I support the plan proposed by NYCHA Chairman Gregory Russ to secure the much-needed funding to expand and renovate all NYCHA housing through a [Public Housing Preservation Trust](#). The Trust, which would be created through State legislation, provides the necessary funds by pooling resources and generating revenue via bond sales. I will champion this proposal and work to ensure every Manhattanite has a safe and healthy place to live.

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## **Improving Quality of Life**

Manhattan is a global Borough within a global city – a beacon of diversity, individuality, and progress. New Yorkers are fiercely loyal to their city – but that doesn't mean they should accept inconvenient trade-offs without question. The events of 2020 dispersed scores of New Yorkers across the country. The small things add up, and if we want residents to return – and bring with them the next generation of innovators, artists, business leaders, and activists – we have to take a neighborhood-by-neighborhood, block-by-block approach to improving our Borough.

## **Make free public restrooms available across the Borough**

Public urination was decriminalized by the City Council in 2017 as part of an effort to reduce interactions between New Yorkers and the police. While summonses for public urination have declined since then, public urination and defecation remain a significant problem, especially in Manhattan. The City has not taken the relevant steps to eliminate the underlying problem of restroom access. We must increase the number of public restrooms available. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the restaurants and bars Manhattanites typically used to access a restroom have closed temporarily or

permanently. This combined with the strengthening of rules regarding who can use the restroom at many establishments has aggravated the issue.

As Borough President, I will work with Community Boards to pilot a free public restroom network, as has been successful in Japan and Europe. Restrooms would be placed in communities according to need and with local input, and funded by sponsors and philanthropy, with the ultimate goal of a widespread network of free, clean, and accessible public restrooms throughout Manhattan. I will lobby for the City to create an app that maps publicly-access restrooms, including this network.

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## **Make open streets, outdoor dining and drinks to go permanent**

Our city's pandemic response was rife with missteps, a lack of transparency, and some marked failures. Even so, some COVID-era policy changes and adaptations were notable successes, like the Open Streets initiative and the temporary legalization of to-go cocktails. I support making permanent, improving, and expanding those adaptations that have borne fruit during a devastating time.

The Open Streets program was a success for Manhattan residents and businesses, and it should be continued. I will advocate to make the program permanent. I will also work with the Department of Transportation to implement measures to make it safer and more successful, including providing permanent and more durable signage, barriers, and traffic calming measures; creating a program to provide support to the neighborhood groups; and making a more transparent process for community feedback.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Manhattan's restaurants and bars to be more creative in serving their customers. One such experiment has been offering cocktails to-go. This has been a welcome boon to establishments and patrons alike – serving as a lifeline to hospitality businesses hindered by COVID-19 restrictions. Cocktails to-go has also offered New Yorkers a taste of their favorite drink at home.

Many of New York State's long-standing laws around alcohol are sensible; barring the sale of to-go alcohol from licensed establishments is not one of them. With no evidence that this policy is leading to increased public drunkenness or other quality-of-life-related issues, there is no reason to discontinue it. I will lead the charge to keep this regulation undone.

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## **Reforming Our Community Boards & City Appointment Processes**

As the longest-serving chair of Community Board 7, I saw firsthand the impact Community Boards make in Manhattan. But as with any institution, Community Boards need reform if they are to fully deliver results for their constituents. The chief role of any Borough President is to



oversee Manhattan's twelve Community Boards. As your next Borough President, I will use my years of local experience to make our boards more responsive, accessible, and representative than ever before.

## **Make the Borough President's office and Community Boards more responsive than ever**

As a former three-term Chair of Community Board 7, I introduced transparency and accessibility through social media accounts and live streaming Community Board meetings. As Borough President, I will work to ensure that all Community Boards use technology and social media to the fullest to reach our constituents. This includes:

- Live streaming all Community Board meetings once they resume in-person.
- Setting consistent minimum expectations for Community Board online presence
- Making proposals under Community Board consideration available online for public debate and comment before, so that the public has ample opportunity to weigh in on planning decisions.

I commit to making the Borough President's office the most responsive in its history. All constituents will receive a response to queries within 24 hours of contacting my office.

My staff and I will harness all forms of media to reach Manhattanites where they are. From print and email newsletters, to in-person and telephone town halls, to social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, I will share up-to-date information with Manhattanites, and they will have a direct line to share ideas and feedback. I will visit constituencies across the Borough to hear directly about constituents' concerns, needs, and preferences.

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## **Bring the Borough President's office to more communities**

Currently, the work of the Borough President and twelve Community Boards is geographically consolidated near City Hall in Lower Manhattan, which houses both the staff who support the Borough President and Community Boards and hosts monthly meetings of Community Board chairs led by the Borough President.

I will change that. I pledge to move the Borough President's office from Lower Manhattan to East 125th Street in the heart of Harlem, a more central and accessible location for my constituents.

I also pledge to rotate the location of the monthly meeting, so that it is held in a different community district each month and every district hosts one meeting per year.

## Increase diversity on Community Boards

I know from personal experience that most Manhattan Community Board members are knowledgeable, dedicated, and committed to improving the Borough. However, despite some efforts at inclusion, Community Boards broadly do not represent the wonderful diversity of Manhattan.

This is not a mere issue of optics. I saw firsthand that when Community Board 7 was comprised of residents from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including communities of color and residents of public housing, it made better decisions and more effectively addressed issues that directly affected these underrepresented communities. Even when boards have diverse membership, representatives from underrepresented communities often end up out of leadership positions.

As Borough President, I pledge to recruit boards that represent the communities they serve – and to elevate diverse members into leadership positions on Boards and in committees.

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## Preparing Manhattan for the Future

From our start-ups and universities to our theaters and restaurants, the world looks to New York's innovators to find the next big thing. Living on the cutting edge has amazing benefits, but it also makes us more vulnerable. In recent years, global crises – from 9/11 to the financial crisis, to Hurricane Sandy to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis – have disproportionately impacted New Yorkers.

As we bring Manhattan back from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also make it more resilient to current and future threats. Fighting climate change, for example, can create jobs while investments in technology and infrastructure now will make Manhattan a hub for the industries of the future.

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## Universal WiFi for Manhattan

New York has made great strides in making WiFi internet access more available in public spaces, including in subway stations, at LinkNYC kiosks, and in some of our parks like Central Park.

The past year shows us this is insufficient. More than 800,000 New Yorkers live in households without internet access, including 38% of low-income households and 100,000 school-age children. An additional 12% of New Yorkers access the internet exclusively through mobile providers.

Access to fast and reliable internet is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity in today's economy, especially for children doing classwork online. A lack of internet access should not be a barrier to doing schoolwork, accessing services, or finding a job.

I will work to blanket the Borough in WiFi, starting with all public housing (NYCHA) facilities. I will also work to create community WiFi hotspots throughout Manhattan where the public – especially students – can work comfortably and safely.

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## **Implement congestion pricing**

For almost a decade, I have focused my work in the private sector on bettering urban transportation and infrastructure. I understand that effective local oversight of our city's transportation systems can make them more efficient and improve our quality of life. Congested roads impact people driving into the city, parking garages, ride-sharing drivers and users, and even those who ride our subways and buses. The issue of congestion has only worsened since the onset of the pandemic with more workers from on and off the Island choosing to commute via car rather than public transit.

While congestion pricing for Manhattan was approved in 2019, implementation has been delayed because of funding problems and the COVID-19 pandemic. At the current pace, the system might not be installed and fully operational until 2023. I will champion congestion pricing and make sure it is implemented quickly and responsibly. I recognize that congestion pricing uniquely impacts Manhattan, especially in the Upper West Side and Upper East Side. As the City implements the system, I will work to represent those communities to ensure that their neighborhoods do not become disproportionately congested as drivers aim to avoid parking in the Central Business District. I will also carve out exemptions for people who commute to Manhattan, but do not have reliable access to public transportation.

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## **A coastal resilience plan for all of Manhattan**

During Hurricane Sandy, we learned just how vulnerable Manhattan is to storm surges and sea level rises. Focusing resilience projects in Lower Manhattan, which bore the brunt of the damage during Sandy, is an important, but insufficient, step in the right direction.

Studies show that sea levels could rise in New York City by 11 to 21 inches by the 2050's and, in a worst-case scenario, by as much as 9.5 feet by 2100. Over \$100 billion in property is at risk in New York City – \$38 billion in Manhattan alone.

It is clear we need a comprehensive Borough-wide climate resilience strategy for all of Manhattan. This includes completing the Lower Manhattan Climate Resiliency Plan and creating separate neighborhood resilience plans across the Borough. While seawalls are important, such a plan should focus on coastal resilience measures that mitigate not

only storm surges (the priority of the Army Corps of Engineers), but also sea level rise generally.

While many resilience projects are and will remain funded by the federal and state authorities, I will advocate for a comprehensive resilience plan that includes members of our community throughout the development and building processes. I will also advocate for other community-focused measures, including the possibility of buyouts for vulnerable homeowners and programs to help residents take steps to make their homes more resilient to climate crises.

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## **Accelerate phase-out of dirty fuels**

Buildings are a leading source of climate emissions, and make up an especially large proportion of air pollution in Manhattan. While the City has taken positive steps by phasing out dirty heating fuels and mandating sustainability retrofits that make buildings more efficient, more can be done to lower buildings' climate impact.

The current administration has announced plans to ban natural gas hookups in new buildings by 2030. While this is a good starting point, I will lobby the City Council to establish a more aggressive target of banning all fossil fuels by 2025. I will also support accelerating the phasing out of heating oil number 4 from 2030 to 2025.

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