

Abstracts

Ballot Question #1: Add a Statement of Values to Guide Government

This proposal creates a preamble to the New York City Charter.

A preamble is a statement at the beginning of a legal document that explains its purpose or goals. The New York City Charter does not currently have a preamble. Adding a preamble would allow New Yorkers to adopt a vision and statement of foundational values intended to guide City government in fulfilling its duties.

The preamble to the New York City Charter would read:

Preamble

We, the people of New York city, declare that our city is a multiracial democracy, and that our diversity is our strength. We honor and respect the cultures, languages, and histories of all who call and have called this land home, and we celebrate their revolutionary imagination, courage, and resiliency.

We strive to be a city where the value, talents, and contributions of every New Yorker are recognized and embraced, and where equity and inclusiveness, community empowerment, accessibility, and opportunity for every New Yorker are the unwavering standards to which we are held accountable in all aspects of governance, business, and service delivery.

We endeavor to ensure that every person who resides in New York city has the opportunity to thrive with:

- (i) A safe, healthy, and sustainable living environment;
- (ii) A resilient neighborhood served by quality and accessible infrastructure and services as well as a robust local economy;
- (iii) Vibrant and welcoming public spaces throughout New York city, where everyone belongs and can move freely;
- (iv) Resources necessary to prosper economically and build wealth;
- (v) Safe, secure, and affordable housing;
- (vi) Quality and culturally-relevant child and youth supports, including early childhood and pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade education;
- (vii) Compassionate and culturally-responsive health, trauma, and mental health care;
- (viii) Access and opportunity to participate meaningfully in government decision-making; and
- (ix) Humane, empathetic, and respectful treatment.

We recognize that New York city sits on the traditional territories of the original inhabitants, the Lenape, and we endeavor to honor their stewardship of the land by protecting our environment and all living things.

We acknowledge the grave injustices and atrocities that form part of our country's history, including the forced labor of enslaved Africans, the colonialism that displaced Indigenous people from their lands, the devaluing and underpaying of immigrant workers, and the discrimination, racial segregation, mass incarceration, and other forms of violence and systemic inequity that continue to be experienced by marginalized groups, including, but not limited to, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and other People of Color, women, religious minorities, immigrants, people who are LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities. We also recognize that these systemic injustices are at the foundation of so many of society's structures and institutions, and have caused profound physical, emotional, social, and psychological harm and trauma to individuals, families, and communities. They have also resulted in widespread loss of economic opportunity and intergenerational wealth. The effects of these harms are deeply engrained, systemic, and continuing. We are ever mindful that vigilance is required to prevent the recurrence of past or worsening of continuing harms. We must act intentionally to remedy these past and continuing harms and to reconstruct, revise and reimagine our foundations, structures, institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers.

The collective values set out in this preamble will guide the operation of our city government and inform and shape how the city carries out the duties, obligations, and authorities, and upholds and protects the rights set out in the charter.

We, the people of New York city, united in our resolve to build a just and equitable city for all, recognize the efforts of those New Yorkers, past and present, who fought for racial equity and social justice, honor the contributions of those New Yorkers who have suffered in the name of freedom, and acknowledge all who fought, struggled, and dreamed for a better life and a better city. Together, we stand on their shoulders as we move boldly toward a brighter tomorrow for ourselves, our children, and future generations.

The proposed preamble would be used to guide City agencies and officials in carrying out their duties related to planning, program reviews and audits. It would not create a direct or indirect right of action to enforce its terms or the terms of any other provision of law. It would take effect upon certification that the electors have approved such amendments to the Charter.

Ballot Question #2: Establish a Racial Equity Office, Plan, and Commission

This proposal would create an Office of Racial Equity, require a citywide Racial Equity Plan every two years, and create a Commission on Racial Equity to represent communities' needs and publicly review the citywide Racial Equity Plan. Racial equity means the achievement of equity with a particular emphasis on race and intersecting characteristics and includes a process of closing gaps in wellbeing between racial groups, with the purpose of greater equity for all.

New York City's government does not have an agency that specifically focuses government on creating and promoting equity, with an emphasis on racial equity. This proposal establishes a framework for planning and evaluating City government efforts to advance equity.

Office of Racial Equity

The proposed amendment would create an Office of Racial Equity, led by a Chief Equity Officer appointed by the Mayor, at the level of agency head or deputy mayor. The Office would be available to work with every City agency to train and provide technical assistance on racial equity. Every two years, each City agency, with guidance from the Office of Racial Equity, would develop an agency Racial Equity Plan. The Office would incorporate the agency Racial Equity Plans into a citywide Racial Equity Plan. The Office would establish standards for agencies regarding the collection and reporting of data to measure gaps and differences in wellbeing at the level of racial, ethnic, or other groups and communities. The Office of Racial Equity would identify "priority neighborhoods" to be highlighted in Racial Equity Plans based on identified disparities in equity, health, or socioeconomic burdens, or the neighborhood's potential to be disproportionately impacted by future events that could exacerbate those disparities.

In addition to its role in the Racial Equity Plan development process, the Office of Racial Equity would establish a Citywide Access Design program to increase equitable access and reduce barriers to City programs, services, communications, and decision-making. The Office of Racial Equity would also support agencies in prioritizing the development and implementation of policies and practices to address "marginalization" of individuals or communities, which could include work to limit the use of criminal history and background checks, establish alternatives to punitive enforcement, improve equitable hiring and promotion within the City's workforce, create equitable distribution of resources across neighborhoods, and reduce or eliminate wage or occupational segregation.

The proposal would also codify the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity, which was created in 2020. Under this proposal, the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity would be located within the Office of Racial Equity and be headed by one or more chairpersons appointed by the Chief Equity Officer in consultation with the Mayor and other members appointed by the Chief Equity Officer in collaboration with their employing agencies. The Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity would provide policy advice to the Chief Equity Officer and coordinate governmental efforts to increase racial equity.

Racial Equity Plan

The proposed amendment would require the Mayor to create a citywide Racial Equity Plan and agencies to create agency Racial Equity Plans every two years. The citywide Racial Equity Plan and the agency Racial Equity Plans, as described above, would identify and communicate publicly the goals and strategies, both short and long term, for improving racial equity and justice. The Plans would also have data indicators, including neighborhood-level metrics, to measure the extent of progress on racial equity work and show the effect the work is having on wellbeing and disparities. That progress would be included in a biennial progress report. The racial equity planning schedule is structured to inform the budget planning process.

Timeline and Schedule

A draft of the first Plan would be delivered no later than January 16, 2024, with the final plan delivered no later than April 26, 2024, along with the Mayor's preliminary and executive budgets. The short-term strategies would address the upcoming two fiscal years. The first full progress report would occur in September 2026. This timeline is designed to encourage agencies to put together their equity strategies while they are putting together their budgets, and in doing so, allow those equity strategies to inform both the expense and capital budgets.

Commission on Racial Equity

The proposed amendment would create a Commission on Racial Equity composed of 15 residents of New York City, intended to bring the perspectives of New York City communities into the decision-making process. The Commission would identify and propose community priorities to inform the racial equity planning process, and review and publicly comment upon agency and citywide Racial Equity Plans, including what data should be collected. The Commission would also publicly track agency compliance with the racial equity planning process, and could receive complaints about agency conduct that may be exacerbating racial disparities.

Commissioners

The Commission would be led by a chair who is jointly appointed by the Mayor and City Council Speaker. The Mayor would appoint seven commissioners. Five commissioners would be appointed by the City Council Speaker, with a representative from each borough. One commissioner would be appointed by the Comptroller, and one commissioner would be appointed by the Public Advocate. One Mayoral appointee and one City Council Speaker appointee would be required to represent the perspectives and concerns of New Yorkers under the age of 25.

In making appointments, each elected official would be required to consider, among other considerations, appointees who are representative of, or have experience advocating for, people who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and all People of Color; immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, students, youth, elders, people who are LGBTQ+, people who are justice-involved, recipients of public

benefits, residents of public housing, and others. People who have expertise in racial equity or racial justice shall also be considered.

Ballot Question #3: Measure the True Cost of Living

This proposal will require City government to develop and report, beginning in 2024, an annual “true cost of living” measurement of what it costs to live in New York City without consideration of public, private, or informal assistance. The proposed measurement is intended to focus on dignity rather than poverty, by considering the cost of meeting essential needs including, but not limited to, housing, childcare, child and dependent expenses, food, transportation, healthcare, clothing, general hygiene products, cleaning products, household items, telephone service, and internet service. The “true cost of living” measurement would be reported in addition to standards that are used to measure poverty or set eligibility for public benefits. It would not create a direct or indirect right of action.