

East Bay Housing Organizations Oakland City Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire 2024

EBHO is a member-driven organization working to preserve, protect, and create affordable housing opportunities for low-income communities in the East Bay by educating, advocating, organizing, and building coalitions.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to educate and inform communities on each candidate's stance on the housing issues directly impacting them, and does not indicate endorsement. All candidates for City Council have been invited to complete the questionnaire.

Candidate Name: Please give a brief introduction of yourself. (50 word limit)

My name is Baba Afolabi, a second-generation Nigerian immigrant and District 3 resident for 26 years. As a father, small business owner, and both a property owner and renter, I bring a unique perspective on housing issues. With a Criminal Justice degree and an MBA, I'm committed to advocating for sustainable growth and positive change.

Questions: (200 word limit for each response)

1. Everybody needs a place to call home, but for too many people, the private market is failing to meet that need. Some advocates argue that the City should focus on removing regulatory restrictions to speed up development of market-rate housing, thereby expanding supply to lower the cost of housing for everyone. Others argue that the market has produced plenty of housing for above-moderate income households, and the City should prioritize housing affordable to those with low incomes. Where do you stand on this, and what actions would you take?

Answer: We could enhance affordable housing by softening the regulatory restrictions, introducing a new program that links rent to the minimum wage, rather than relying on the complex Area Median Income (AMI) system. The current AMI-based system often requires ongoing management, funding, and eligibility criteria that create barriers for many. A rent-to-minimum-wage model could make housing more accessible, ensuring that anyone with a job or stable income can afford a basic home without undergoing the lengthy and competitive qualification process tied to affordable housing. Learn more about Minimum Housing Program on my [website](#)

2. What current sources of affordable housing funding would you increase or expand? Now that the Regional Housing Bond is no longer on this Fall's ballot, what new sources would you support? Please identify both one-time and ongoing funding streams.

Ans:

- 1- **Explore International Investors:** I will actively seek international investment opportunities that are not tied down by the complexities of Oakland's affordable versus market-rate housing challenges. Attracting foreign capital can open new avenues for growth and development.
- 2- **Strengthen Impact Fee Collection:** Currently, Oakland has the potential to collect \$90 million in impact fees but has only secured \$27 million. We need to overhaul and streamline our collection process to ensure we are maximizing these resources for our city.
- 3- **Vacant Property Tax (VPT):** The VPT should be a mandatory fee, with loopholes closed. However, rather than penalizing landowners, I will encourage landlords to build by reforming the VPT to incentivize development. This will help address housing shortages more constructively.
- 4- **Affordable and Minimum Housing Bond:** I propose an Oakland-specific bond initiative to fund the construction of 2,000 to 4,000 new housing units every two years. This bond would directly target affordable housing and ensure that we meet the growing demand for living spaces in our community.

3. What is your position on Proposition 5, and why?

ANSWER: Yes! I support Proposition 5 because it is crucial for addressing Oakland's pressing housing and infrastructure needs. By lowering the voter approval threshold for affordable housing and infrastructure bonds, Proposition 5 streamlines the process for securing much-needed funding without excessive bureaucracy.

Additionally, with built-in mechanisms like independent audits and citizen oversight committees, Proposition 5 ensures transparency and accountability in how the funds are allocated and used. This allows us to meet our city's demands effectively while maintaining trust in how public resources are managed.

4. In the previous Housing Element cycle (2015-2022), Oakland permitted seven units of market-rate housing for every low or moderate income unit, producing double our assigned need for market-rate but only one-third of our affordable housing need. What do you consider to be the greatest barriers to development of affordable housing in Oakland, and what strategies will you take to remove those barriers to ensure that Oakland's housing production is more balanced and at least proportional to the City's stated needs?

ANSWER:

- I. **High construction costs**, including land acquisition, permitting, and labor, which drive up the overall price of housing developments.
- II. **Cumbersome approval process**, which causes delays and additional expenses for affordable housing projects.
- III. **Lack of sufficient funding** to support the construction of affordable units.
- IV. To address these challenges, the solution is clear:

- V. We need to increase funding for affordable housing by exploring new avenues in addition to bonds and tax sources.
 - VI. Simplify and accelerate the permit and approval process and incentivize both domestic and international investors to build affordable units.
 - VII. Additionally, we can mandate that the city's leadership, particularly the mayor, commit to building a specific number of affordable housing units each term.
5. Oakland has a number of policies to protect renters from unaffordable rent increases, arbitrary evictions, and other forms of displacement. Which programs do you think are most effective? What changes would you support? Are there new tenant protection and anti-displacement policies that you would pursue?

ANSWER:

- 1- RAP
- 2- Just Cause
- 3- Tenant ordinance

Change:

Expand Legal Support: Launch programs that engage local colleges and universities, encouraging law students to volunteer as legal aid for tenants, providing free guidance and assistance in housing disputes.

Amend Costa-Hawkins: Advocate for changes to the Costa-Hawkins Act to reflect Oakland's current housing challenges, making rent control more effective.

Leverage Technology: Introduce technology solutions to strengthen communication between landlords and tenants, reducing the likelihood of disputes and preventing unjust evictions.

Advance Eviction Reporting: Mandate a 30-day notice for all evictions, ensuring transparency and providing tenants with sufficient time to seek help.

6. What measures will you support to prevent at-risk households from becoming unhoused, and what would you do to provide housing for those who are already experiencing homelessness? Please discuss both short-term and long-term strategies. What steps should the City take to prevent criminalizing homelessness, particularly after the Grants Pass decision and the Governor's executive order, and to focus instead on solutions for unhoused people?

Answer:

Short-Term Strategies:

- 1. **Expand Temporary Housing Solutions:** Utilize our empty parking space underneath the I-880 by collaborating with Caltrans to implement an environmentally sustainable community with 24hrs professional management by providing employment to

unhoused individuals living in the community. I will support increasing access to shelter beds, transitional housing, and Safe RV parking sites with wraparound services like mental health support, job placement assistance, and healthcare located within the community. The goal should be to minimize how many of our community members end up in this kind of housing at the end of the day.

2. **Rental Assistance and Eviction Prevention:** Oakland needs stronger emergency rental assistance programs and mediation services to help at-risk tenants stay in their homes. I will propose or strengthen subsidizing rent for teacher, city workers to encourage them to live in the city, police officers and our first responders. We often lose out of these critical professions because it is so expensive to live in Oakland. I will also advocate for expanding legal aid services to assist tenants with navigating the eviction process and protecting their rights by partnering with our local colleges and university legal study students.
3. **Address Immediate Needs of the Unhoused:** Support the state initiative to end encampment but do it in the best humane way possible.

Long-Term Strategies:

Permanent Supportive Housing: Oakland has 4,000 empty lots and unused homes that can be transformed into permanent supportive housing for our chronically homeless residents. Many community members, visibly in need of mental health and medical care, would benefit from localized wellness centers offering comprehensive services. I propose establishing case management programs that utilize our local universities, where students can support professional caseworkers. This collaboration fosters both community engagement and workforce development. By building a wellness culture, we can address homelessness proactively and provide sustainable care for those in need.

☑ **Affordable Housing Expansion:** To prevent homelessness, Oakland must prioritize the construction of affordable housing. This requires leveraging bonds, taxes, state, and federal grants, while also encouraging international investment in affordable housing projects. Streamlining approval processes and offering incentives for private developers to build affordable units alongside market-rate housing is essential. By creating a system where affordable and market-rate developments coexist, we can meet Oakland's housing demands and prevent future displacement.

Rental Subsidies and Housing Vouchers: Expanding housing voucher programs and enhancing partnerships with nonprofit housing providers is a key step. These programs allow low-income residents to access housing within the private market, giving them a viable path out of homelessness and ensuring long-term stability.

Minimum Housing Program: This initiative ties rent to the minimum wage, offering greater stability to workers by ensuring affordable housing is based on their income rather than complicated affordability formulas. It simplifies access to basic housing, ensuring anyone with a job or steady income can avoid displacement.

As a pilot program, we will target essential community members; teachers, police officers, city workers, and first responders allowing them to benefit from this approach and provide vital feedback. By aligning rent costs with minimum wages, we can foster affordability and keep vital personnel living within the communities they serve.

Preventing Criminalization of Homelessness:

In the wake of the **Grants Pass decision** and the Governor's executive order, the city must prioritize humane solutions over punitive measures. To prevent criminalizing homelessness:

1. **Decriminalize Encampments:**
2. **Non-Law Enforcement Responses**
3. **Focus on Housing First:**

7. Local jurisdictions have a legal obligation to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing in all their housing and community development policies. What does this mean to you? What specific policies would you pursue to address the disparate impacts our housing system has on Oakland residents of color, particularly Black, Brown and Indigenous people? What should the City do to ensure a more equitable distribution of affordable housing across all parts of the City rather than concentrating it in low income neighborhoods and communities of color?

Answer:

To me, **Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)** means taking steps to counter historical barriers that have marginalized communities of color, especially Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, in the housing system. Erase the invisible redline system that has restrict underserved community across the city. This will ensures that housing policies not only prevent discrimination but actively work to create equitable opportunities and eliminate systemic inequalities.

Specific Policies to Address Housing Disparities:

1. **Inclusionary Zoning Reform**
2. **Targeted Housing Assistance for Communities of Color**
3. **Equitable Public Land Use for Housing:**
4. **Tenant Protections and Anti-Displacement Measures:**
5. **Community-Based Housing Initiatives:**

Ensuring Equitable Distribution:

The City must enact policies that avoid concentrating affordable housing only in historically low-income areas. Some strategies include incentivizing affordable single family homes in our considered affluent neighborhood.

- **Geographic Diversity in Housing Development:** Encourage and incentivize affordable housing development in high-opportunity areas through zoning changes, tax incentives, and expedited permitting processes.
 - **Monitoring and Transparency:** Create a transparent reporting system to monitor where affordable housing is being built, ensuring that no one neighborhood is disproportionately affected or left out of affordable housing plans.
8. Oakland has been considering adoption of a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, which would give tenants the opportunity to purchase their rental units if their buildings are offered for sale. Do you support giving tenants (and nonprofit community organizations) a right of first offer and a right of first refusal? Why or why not? Are there particular provisions or exemptions that you would seek?

Ans:

Yes, because homeownership is critical to the economy and building a lasting community.

9. In December 2018, the City Council adopted a Land Disposition Policy to prioritize the use of surplus public land for affordable housing. Staff was directed to bring back an implementing ordinance within 6 months, but that hasn't happened. What will you do to ensure that a Public Land Ordinance is drafted, enacted and implemented consistent with the adopted policy? What do you think are the most critical elements of a public land policy for Oakland? What role should the community play in the disposition and use of public land?

Answer:

To ensure that the 2018 Land Disposition Policy is implemented effectively, I will take the following steps:

1. **Conduct an Immediate Inventory:** I'll initiate a review of the public lands identified in 2018 and assess whether they meet our current needs. This will involve pushing for immediate action to determine the usability and readiness of the available land for development.
2. **Engage the Community:** I will involve residents, local organizations, and housing advocates in reviewing the available land. Together, we will decide how to best utilize these spaces to address immediate housing needs and ensure long-term benefits for the community.
3. **Collaborate with Creatives and Architects:** After engaging with the community, I will invite architects and creatives to help visualize potential uses for the land, ensuring that designs are both innovative and community driven.

4. **Prioritize Affordable Housing:** Above all, I will emphasize that affordable housing should be central to the development of these lands, ensuring that any project meets the city's housing goals and provides real solutions for Oakland's residents.

10. For large projects such the Coliseum area, what community benefits should the city seek and at what levels? Would you require inclusion of affordable housing, and if so, what percentage should be affordable and what income levels should be targeted? Who should pay for that development?

Answer:

I believe the city should retain some control over the use of public land, particularly in reimagining East Oakland as a hub for sports and entertainment. This could pave the way for future expansion teams in the NFL, NBA, or MLB, should the A's depart. Developing the area around these industries would bring significant opportunities, but it's essential to ensure that East Oakland residents are prepared to benefit directly from the economic growth.

To maximize the community benefit, I propose implementing workforce development programs that train residents for job opportunities in management, construction, maintenance, security, repair, and other services that will be in demand during and after the redevelopment process. This way, the city's vision aligns with creating sustainable career pathways for locals while transforming the area into a major entertainment destination.

By keeping the focus on local engagement, job creation, and training, we can foster a long-term, community-first approach to land development that offers lasting benefits for Oakland residents.