

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: Charlene Wang

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

I'm a former Biden-Harris appointee that launched a \$4 billion infrastructure program. Seeing my family fall through the cracks motivated my career in public service. Oakland was the formative city of my childhood, I'd like to put my experience to work for the town. My priorities are safety and cost of living.

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?

I support faster permitting, removal of burdensome aesthetic design standards, increasing height limits and other streamlining that support market-rate and nonprofit developers alike. My goal is development without displacement, affordable housing developers are absolutely essential to this goal. In general, I support using impact fees to ensure that market rate developments generate revenue for nonprofit developments. In this sense, building more market rate housing will help build affordable housing.

I'm running on the creation of cultural districts in West Oakland, East Oakland, Little Saigon, and Fruitvale that have tax incentives for new small, minority-owned businesses in the arts, music, restaurant, and nightlife industries. These can encourage development and create a virtuous cycle where rising property values through tax increment financing fund land trusts for affordable housing.

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.

We need to make the most of Measure U funding. Construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing projects should be competitively bid, and should be evaluated on a cost per unit basis to ensure that we are ensuring that we are able to build as many affordable housing units as possible with our Measure U funds.

These revenues should support community land trusts, moderate income housing, and programs that support taking homeless off the street and into shelter and jobs. When we approve market-rate housing, we should ensure that property tax revenues and one-time impact fees fund affordable housing.

The California Legislature approved versions of the new TIF law that allowed the "Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts" or EIFDs to finance, among other things, housing for very low-, low-, and moderate-income people. We can connect these to cultural districts to promote development without displacement.

I also support affordable housing bond measures and impact fees that maximize the amount of affordable units.

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

I'm a strong supporter of Prop 5. The current supermajority threshold makes it exceedingly difficult to raise money for affordable housing. If passed, it would make it easier for Oakland to raise funds for new affordable housing.

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?

Financing, permitting delays from inadequate permitting and fire inspection workforces and purely aesthetic design standards are significant barriers to all housing developments. The reason market rate developments have been able to better adjust to it is that they can recover permitting losses with higher rents. While working to speed permitting across the board, we should explore a "fast pass" for nonprofit developers to clear permitting faster since their margins are thinner.

New revenue sources from bond measures, land trusts, and the Jobs and Housing Impact Fee can also expand the stock of badly needed affordable housing.

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?

When I canvass, I frequently hear from tenants who say their landlords are mistreating them and allowing unsafe conditions to fester. When they come to the city, they're moved from one office to another and eventually give up. I want to adequately staff tenant legal services, empower the city attorney to go after violations of our rent laws, and make sure that these remedies are communicated to renters. I support maintaining current tenant protections, creating an emergency rental assistance fund, and constructing new affordable units. The shortage of nonprofit developments leaves renters in units that are unaffordable, deplete their savings, and trap them in poverty. Supporting nonprofit developers is an essential anti-displacement policy.

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?

Emergency rental assistance, connected to job training, services, and paths to self-sufficiency are more cost-effective than only helping people once they've lost housing. I support new

shelter capacity and was alarmed that LeRonne Armstrong opposes badly needed shelter beds at Jack London. We can't allow encampments to block parks and sidewalk access in Oakland, but the process needs to start with compassionate outreach, offers to help, and always respect the property of unhoused people. Unhoused Oaklanders need multiple year-round shelters and transitional housing, access to wrap-around services, job opportunities, and pathways to long term housing. I worked to reorganize Massachusetts' statewide homeless services to connect people with shelter and pathways to permanent housing faster. I'm ready to lead on this issue.

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?

This means that affordable and accessible housing should be a feature of all our communities. New units add to the diversity and vibrancy of our neighborhoods, they also create downsizing options that help longtime residents age in place.

I was glad to see the missing middle upzoning passed so that single-family zoning is banned city-wide. However, given the scale of the housing crisis I don't think the upzoning went far enough with up to 4 units on a 4,000 square foot lot. I think we should push for additional density, that still does not constitute high rises. To add 55-60,000 new units, we need more units along Rockridge and Piedmont Corridors.

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?

I support TOPA, but would exempt owner-occupied properties and ensure that it includes a timely process that gives tenants a meaningful right of first refusal without mirroring property owners in long and complex proceedings. Inadequate funding for land trusts constrains the effectiveness of any TOPA measure, I'd work to expand funding sources so tenants have a real opportunity to purchase.

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?

Public land should prioritize badly needed affordable housing. I have a proven track record of leading on social housing, in particular on decommissioned highway infrastructure. In the Biden-Harris Administration, I fought to allow Reconnecting Communities Initiative funding to go towards social housing. I will fight for Oakland to approach I-980 decommissioning as the generational social housing opportunity that it is. By establishing right to return protections, we can ensure that people who were themselves displaced by the I-980, or are related to those who were, can access affordable and very affordable units on I-980 land.

The most critical element of Oakland's public land policy concerning affordable housing is maximizing the number of affordable units. Community input is important, but forums need to be well publicized and conducted with the urgency of our housing crisis in mind. Leading with generous community benefits agreements is a great way that the city can support a quick process.

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?

I'm interested in exploring hiring pipelines between Oakland public schools and living wage, union jobs in the trades for renewable energy and construction. The Coliseum project should create living wage jobs, and eventually affordable units, for East Oaklanders. I support robust community benefits agreements and have ensured their implementation them federally, they should focus on higher levels of affordability. These can be paid through impact fees.

Inclusion of affordable and middle-income housing should be required. The exact percentage should be determined by an analysis of project costs with a goal to maximize the number of affordable units. Impact fees from market-rate developers should finance these, hopefully Prop 5's successful passage will enable more public payments.