

East Bay Housing Organizations

Berkeley 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.

Name: Deborah Matthews

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

I love Berkeley. I have seen our immense transformation over the past several decades. I am acutely aware of the issues our community faces. I am passionate about improving the quality of life in South Berkeley through leadership initiatives that advance public safety, affordable housing, equitable economics, infrastructure and climate action.

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?**

We must do both low-income and above-moderate-income housing. Affordable housing should focus on housing policies that help the lowest-income households, fixed income seniors, and people with disabilities. Those households struggle to keep a roof over their heads. Second-chance housing (transitional or reentry housing challenges) offers hope for those who lack access to traditional rental options. These programs are vital in reducing homelessness, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging rehabilitation. Residents with challenging rental histories can obtain a stable living situation and work towards a brighter future through second chance programs and remaining persistent, demonstrating their determination and resilience

Streamlining the permitting process reduces costs by shortening the permit times for small projects on existing residential lots. Currently, obtaining an ADU building permit takes up to 6 months to complete. Actions: pre-approved plans; strengthen staff plan checkers skills; enforce State law.

Smaller, market-rate housing, such as ADUs often rents at below-market-rate prices and they have low turnover rates, construction costs, and faster building times.

We can take action steps 1) Implement grants/low-interest loans to housing-challenge property owners to build ADUS. 2) Amend the Demolition Ordinance to allow developers to pay in-lieu fees for replacement units. 3) Consider San Diego's ADU Bonus Program.

- 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 should continue to build on our most effective resource for Berkeley, the Housing Trust Fund. Currently the Demolition Ordinance does not allow developers to pay the affordable housing in lieu fee when replacing demolished units. This amendment would give developers the in lieu fee option for replacement units as they currently have for other new housing units. Additional use of the affordable housing in lieu fee will increase the Housing Trust Fund and allow construction of more units.

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

Reluctantly, I don't support Proposition 5. It allows many types of local bonds to be approved at the lower threshold; I believe Proposition 5 should focus more on creation of affordable and supportive housing. Local governments could spend all the money on infrastructure, rather than housing, and still comply with the bond measure. Property owners will face higher property taxes and tenants and business owners will face higher rents during these critical economic times.

- 4. In the previous Housing Element cycle (2015-2022), the City of Berkeley produced nearly six units of market-rate housing for every low- or moderate-income unit, producing nearly triple our assigned need for market-rate but only about two-thirds of our affordable housing need. What do you consider to be the greatest barriers to**

development of affordable housing in Berkeley, and what strategies will you take to remove those barriers to ensure that Berkeley's housing production is more balanced and at least proportional to the City's stated needs?

The cost of housing units is alarmingly high, and the gap between what it costs to build and what most people can afford to pay for rent is a pressing issue that needs immediate attention. Community opposition to new development has been a barrier to housing. Finance policy: Local, state, and federal funding is crucial to support programs that provide housing and services; however, the current building permit application process needs to be revised to align more effectively with recent by-right housing bills, such as SB 9, SB 35, and SB 330, to deliver housing.

An effective ADU Amnesty Program will help them get the necessary permits without the threat of being shut down or subject to rent control. Clear, consistent, and stable rules for ADUs and other smaller rental units will reassure property owners that they won't lose control over who shares their property. Unlike other jurisdictions, Berkeley has no incentive programs to encourage the construction of ADUs or other "missing middle" housing. A "Small-housing ombudsman" and financial incentives would help keep existing units on the market.

- 5. Berkeley 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? There are two separate tenant protection measures on the Berkeley ballot this Fall. Which do you favor, and why?**

I support Measure CC. Berkeley has effective policies to protect renters from unaffordable increases and arbitrary evictions. For example, 1). The ordinance prohibits landlords from using fraud, intimidation, or coercion to evict tenants. 2). Tenants can take civil action against landlords who violate the ordinance, and landlords may be liable for damages, court costs, and attorney's fees. 3). The ordinance protects tenants from unwarranted rent increases and evictions without good cause. Tenants in rent-controlled units can petition for rent reductions due to poor housing conditions.

- 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 focusing instead on solutions for unhoused people?**

We can expand the Housing Trust Fund to provide early intervention eviction funds and services to prevent or divert eviction. Study show increased mediation, either preventing eviction or providing tenants time to find new living arrangements; even when evicted, they were left in a better position. Additionally, we can expand our successful housing services; Shelter Care Program and our Shower Program.

- 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 Berkeley 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?**

The 2024 Fair Housing Trend Report shows that in 2023, 34,150 fair housing complaints were received by private nonprofit fair housing organizations, HUD, FHAP agencies, and the DOJ. In 2022, the number was 33,007, showing little change in a year. Private nonprofit fair housing organizations processed 75.52 percent of complaints, a 5.68 percent increase from the previous year. Discrimination based on disability accounted for the majority (52.61 percent) of complaints filed with FHOs, HUD, and FHAP agencies. Complaints based on ethnicity and color increased from 824 in 2022 to 1,523 in 2023, showing a 66.23% annual increase.

In my career field of real estate, I provide a commitment to serve our residents with fairness in home purchasing and retention. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents in a recent Zillow Fair Housing Report, Fifty-seven percent of all respondents in a recent Zillow survey reported experiencing housing discrimination. LGBTQ+ individuals were most likely to say they had been subject to discrimination.

Fewer than half of Zillow respondents said fair housing is essential to them or their families, highlighting how much work is needed to educate people about these laws. We must continue to effectively educate all communities on the historic fair housing laws.

- 8. Berkeley 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 elements of the proposed policy that you would want changed, or any exemptions from such an ordinance that you would seek?

I do not support TOPA. I would suggest a simple tool for tenants to obtain property ownership. A lease purchase agreement—also known as a rent-to-own or lease-to-own agreement—allows tenants to rent a property for a specified period, with the promise to purchase it at the end of the lease term. The owner is contractually obligated to sell the property to the renter when the end of the term hits. Likewise, it also obligates the renter to buy the property from the owner. Real estate contracts are complex documents that establish the rights and obligations of the parties involved. They can include important information like the purchase price, closing date, and what's included in the property. It's essential to ensure the contract protects the parties' legal rights. A real estate attorney will ensure that the contract accurately reflects the parties' agreed-upon terms.

- 9. What is your thinking about the current proposal to eliminate single family zoning in Berkeley and allow multiple units on all lots (sometimes called “middle housing”)? Do you see this as a vehicle for affordability or other important City goals? Why or why not? Do you have other questions or concerns about the proposed policy?**

As most recently proposed by the Council, the Missing Middle Housing Ordinance will provide critical zoning changes to increase density throughout the city, which I strongly support. I suggest expanding our efforts to a fairness and equity lens, which includes an analysis of unintended consequences for low-income, at-risk, and long-term property owners who have historically been denied fair home market value and wealth-building due to racist zoning, covenants, redlining, and eminent domain. This lens will ensure our policies embrace all communities and eliminate unforeseen inequities and unintended consequences.

I strongly support removing single-family zoning in Berkeley. Before we had zoning, Berkeley's historical back story, was neighborhoods with a mixture of buildings – duplexes, triplexes, neighborhood grocery stores, rental units, group living accommodations (like fraternity or sorority houses), small apartment buildings, and shared housing, and our neighborhoods were diverse and strong. Single-family zoning and the neighborhood preservation ordinance changed that, as presented in [The Color of Law](#) by Richard Rothstein. The diversity of building types, housing, and neighborhood services will encourage a variety of homes at all income levels, including smaller homes at a lower purchase price or rent.