

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: Erin Armstrong, Candidate for Oakland City Council District 5

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

As the leader of the Alameda County Illegal Dumping Task Force, I've spearheaded efforts to reduce illegal dumping through community-based solutions and enforcement. By addressing root causes and engaging with various stakeholders, we've transformed a notorious dumping hotspot into a vibrant community. This experience demonstrates my ability to build coalitions and drive positive change, making me a strong candidate for Oakland City Council.

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?

Addressing housing affordability in Oakland requires a balanced approach. While increasing market-rate housing supply can help, prioritizing affordable housing for low-income residents is crucial.

To achieve this, the City should foster mixed-income development, preserve existing affordable housing, streamline regulations, implement land use policies, and enhance tenant protections. By adopting a comprehensive strategy that addresses these key areas, Oakland can create a more equitable and sustainable housing market that meets the needs of all residents.

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.

In crafting the Alameda County Affordable Housing plan, I'm focused on developing investment strategies to produce and preserve affordable housing. Given the high cost of building affordable housing compared to the affordability of market-rate housing, public funding is essential to ensure the development of deeply affordable and workforce housing.

Unfortunately, the recent removal of the BAHFA Regional Bond from the ballot is a setback for these efforts. This bond would have provided crucial funding to support affordable housing initiatives in our community.

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

We must support State Proposition 5, so that we are able to develop public funding for affordable housing in the future.

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?

The biggest thing that I believe the City can do to support production is to fix its broken permitting and planning process, and reduce barriers and costs associated with the City when affordable housing units are in the pipeline. I would also like to see a dedicated affordable housing desk that streamlines and guides these projects through the process in a prioritized manner.

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?

Capping annual rent increases is a very effective policy to assist in displacement prevention and keep people housed. I am eager to see Alameda County's Measure W prevail in Court so that we can attach programming dollars to prevention efforts.

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?

Long-term, we need to prevent displacement and provide robust exits from homelessness. We need to ensure that the number of people leaving homelessness is much greater than the number entering.

Short-term, Oakland needs to ensuring that it's encampment management policy is implemented, so that Oakland does not become the dumping ground for regional issues, especially as neighboring Cities crack down, but we need to ensure that anytime an encampment is displaced that it is done with real and substantive offers of shelter and services, which take into account the needs of encampment residents. We cannot just shuffle encampments around!

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?

To me, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing means actively addressing the legacy of discrimination in housing and ensuring equitable opportunities for all. In Oakland, Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities have faced systemic barriers to housing, which we must work to dismantle. This includes stronger inclusionary zoning policies requiring developers to build affordable units citywide, paired with incentives like streamlined permitting and density bonuses.

I would also push for expanded tenant protections, such as rent control and Just Cause eviction protections, to prevent displacement. Additionally, I support funding for community land trusts and social housing models to keep housing permanently affordable, as well as measures like Measure W and the BAHFA bond, which I helped develop.

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 adopting a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) in Oakland, as a tool to prevent displacement, stabilize neighborhoods, and increase community ownership. I would like to see provisions to ensure TOPA is accessible to tenants of all income levels, not just those with significant financial resources. This could include creating a public fund or low-interest loan program to help tenants and nonprofits finance purchases, but this must have a funding source attached and cannot come from the City's General Fund.

I believe small, owner-occupied buildings (e.g., 1-4 unit properties) should be exempt to protect homeowners who might rely on the sale of their properties for retirement or personal financial reasons.

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?

I support ensuring public land is used for the benefit of the community, with a focus on affordable housing and addressing local needs.

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?

Community benefits are crucial to ensuring large projects like the Coliseum area serve local residents. Requiring benefits like affordable housing can create much-needed opportunities, but high demands can also increase project costs and delay development. The City should aim for a balance, ensuring developers contribute to affordable housing while targeting low- and moderate-income levels, with the addition of deeply affordable and transitional housing.

However, the cost of these benefits needs to be shared equitably to avoid stalling economic progress. I don't want to see the City making it harder or more expensive to build in Oakland, especially when those projects include affordable housing.