

East Bay Housing Organizations Berkeley Mayoral 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 Mayor have been invited to complete the questionnaire.

Name: KATE HARRISON

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

I am running for Mayor to create an affordable, accessible, climate-forward city with safe streets and enticing public space. I will provide effective, sustainable homeless, mental and public health services, enshrine economic/racial equity, and create accountable city government. I will work to ensure our City thrives and remains diverse.

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 build affordable housing to stem the displacement causing so much harm and leaving the community much less economically, racially and culturally diverse.

An oversupply of market rate housing leads to market displacement and, when market prices soften, developers stop building--long before any meaningful reduction in prices. We see this in real time in Berkeley. On Council, I required a pipeline report to assess how much housing was

being built at each income level; the first report found that reached over 160% of the market rate housing target but at 0% for low-income and only 24% for very-low-income households.

As Mayor, our city will focus on building housing for extremely low through moderate income people. In my District, I championed affordable housing on the former parking lot on Berkeley Way and at Jordan Court. I co-authored the 2018 Affordable Housing Action Plan including the Small Sites Program allowing land trusts to rehab dilapidated properties and keep them affordable. I will expand this through TOPA.

I have also proposed stronger regulations on short term rentals (used to avoid rent and eviction protections in apartment buildings) and fighting attempts to reduce replacement units below the 1-to-1 standard in the Demolition Ordinance.

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.

I legislated increasing the affordable housing in-lieu fee to a level shown by economic studies to be needed and still allow developers to make enough profit. The large amount of new building in Berkeley shows that these new fees have not deterred development. Nonetheless, last year, the Council voted (I voted no) to lower those fees for buildings under 10 units. I support the inclusionary housing requirement applying to all new development except the very smallest and changing the methodology that results in far less than our 20% required inclusionary units are being built.

The Vacancy Tax I authored was a critical first step to address the 1,200 long-term vacant units, including some buildings that are more than half empty, a sure sign owners are waiting out tenants so they can tear them down. The tax is raising over \$6 million/year on an ongoing basis and will bring units back on the market.

I served on EBHO's committee to pass the large landlord tax, which recognizes the unique market power of those that own multiple units and brings in \$5 million/year.

When the next regional bond is proposed, I will fight to make sure Berkeley receives its fair share.

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

I support lowering the voter approval requirements for local housing and infrastructure bonds. As a Councilmember I supported Measure L, which would have provided for millions of dollars in needed bond funding, it did not pass because of the current threshold. Lowering the approval threshold going forward will make it easier to acquire needed funding. In addition to bonds, I have sought other funding non-bond sources for local housing including a vacancy tax on empty buildings and raising the transfer tax on the sale of high-valued property.

I support split roll taxes that require commercial owners to pay more than homeowners and tenants and am advocating that we change the municipal code to require that large commercial parking lots are assessed parcel taxes. They are currently excluded, creating both tax inequities and favoring driving by employees.

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?

Primary barriers include land scarcity, overabundance of luxury housing, inadequate funding (addressed above) and failure to prioritize affordable housing approvals.

On Council, I led the efforts to use public land for housing whenever possible, such as at the Hope Center (see above) and our BART stations. As Mayor, I will work with the community to bring the amount of low, very low and extremely low-income housing above the minimum 35%, with the balance dedicated to moderate rather than market-rate housing. I will ensure we turn the Premier Cru building purchased by the city into affordable housing, as intended.

As a dense city, when market rate housing is built, it uses scarce parcels that demolish and can no longer accommodate affordable housing. I cosponsored and will demand we implement the City's land capture policy, which recognizes the increased value of land when we densify. I also advocated for the strongest possible demolition ordinance

I will demand we follow the Council's the council's policy to prioritize approval of affordable projects by the Planning Department. The current structure under which the Planning

Department is funded by permit and planning fees incentivizes prioritizing large, market-rate buildings. The Planning Department should instead be General Funded.

- 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?**

Rent stabilization and eviction protections are key to maintaining affordable housing and avoiding displacement.

While an elected Student Senator at UC Berkeley, I helped pass Berkeley's first rent control ordinance. At California Rural Legal Assistance, I led the coalition to create the State's first Just Cause Eviction protections (later overturned). I also worked on the campaign for Measure YY, providing larger relocation benefits for seniors and those with disabilities and protecting from eviction during the school year.

On Council, I co-authored the eviction moratorium for residential tenants, wrote the commercial tenant eviction moratorium language and helped draft and pass through our 4x4 committee the Demolition Ordinance requiring affordable replacement units be built and protecting tenants in below market rate and rent controlled units.

I have worked to prevent "renovictions" in units in my district by creating use permit conditions that protect current tenants. I authored the legislation to prevent discrimination in housing for people released from jail and support the Alameda County Reentry Housing Plan from Just Cities.

I support Measure BB on the November ballot and vehemently oppose Measure CC that would significantly undermine protections against substandard conditions and decimate our Rent Board.

- 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?

I support Berkeley's stated approach to homelessness: flexible funds preventing homelessness, outreach, immediate street services, shelter options, and mental health, addiction and employment services.

However, citing people or placing them in distant units or hotels without services or focus on building community and self-sufficiency has backfired, with people returning to the streets. I worked to develop the city's first indoor sanctioned homeless encampment/safe RV Parking lot. The Grayson site was effective and compassionate, providing RV parking and indoor space for people to put up tents, receive and cook meals, access support services and build self-sufficiency; over 150 people were served. We must have a replacement for Grayson Street.

We need to expand affordable housing options, including permanent supportive housing, improve service provider coordination, address job training programs such as the Downtown Streets Team I funded in District 4, and enhance community engagement for a comprehensive, sustainable approach. Collaboration with nonprofit organizations, such as Insight Housing, Dorothy Day House, and Building Opportunities for Self Sufficiency, and with faith-based organizations is crucial to ensure unhoused people receive individualized care.

Berkeley is not receiving its fair share of County and State funding to address homelessness. As Mayor, I will demand this change.

- 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 pattern of exclusion exists in all cities. I examined housing development for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors; the vast majority of affordable housing – including new housing -- is concentrated in the Tenderloin. This is due to *both* historic redlining and current practices. We need to rectify past patterns of housing disparities while not replicating those patterns by:

- Require affordable housing requirements be met by building on-site instead of paying the in-lieu fee.
- Removing barriers to housing (I was the tie breaking vote to allow ADUs in the hills without parking requirements; the only low-income housing built in the hills is in my former district at Jordan Court).
- Insisting new housing have significant affordability. Just building will not guarantee Black, Brown and Indigenous people have an opportunity to live in all parts of the city (see below on Missing Middle).
- Demanding community control and participation and right of return for displaced communities when building on our North Berkeley as well as Ashby BART stations. ~~Both stations are on lands from which Black, Brown and Indigenous people were displaced through eminent domain.~~
- Making first time home ownership possible through loan programs and slowing rampant speculation under which corporate interests buy whole buildings with cash. Policies such as the vacancy tax, land trusts and social housing are critical here.

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?

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I am the author of the TOPA legislation most recently before the Council. After Mayor Arreguin removed his support of TOPA, I immediately stepped in to work with the TOPA coalition to keep the legislation alive. I worked with stakeholders to refine the legislation, including holding workshops with tenants, landlords, and Black churches. I support and included exceptions for buildings of under four units currently occupied (not just owned) by non-corporate property owners while continuing the reduction in the transfer tax for those owners if they chose to sell to tenants or a qualified nonprofit as an incentive for them to participate.

Unfortunately, the Council's Land Use Committee refused to consider my TOPA proposal and Council subsequently suspended all committee meetings in January, 2024 (I dissented on that vote), keeping the proposal from being considered. Council brought the legislation forward with a negative recommendation almost nine months later. I have continued to advocate and organize for TOPA through public outreach (such as using my extensive e-mail list to notify

people about the recent TOPA workshop) and working with willing councilmembers to pass TOPA at the Council.

Will you stop police sweeps of encampments and evictions of houseless RV dwellers?

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Yes, with exceptions for significant health and safety concerns. I do not believe in criminalizing homelessness or poverty and firmly believe that creating a network of support the most effective path toward ending homelessness. Above all else, we must individually and systemically work on treating unhoused people as people with agency and care, just as we do the rest of our neighbors. The City's Good Neighbor Guidelines establish and manage expectations for how unhoused neighbors can help create a clean and safe environment with the City doing its part by providing trash services, clean water and restrooms. We should not be using the Grants' Pass decision as a blank check to move homeless people. Moving people from one place only to have them settle in another is not a solution. Resolving encampments by placing people in hotels or housing without common space or services for disabled people or people experience co-occurring disorders and for limited amounts of time is not a real or lasting solution. These are temporary band aids with poor consequences for neighbors, businesses and the unhoused. The cited 45% reduction in unsheltered homelessness does not account for the permanency or appropriateness of the housing provided.

- 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?**

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Missing middle housing was originally presented to Council as a way to build more housing by adding 1-3 units to lots. Conceptually, I support that goal. However, in practice, the policy will allow much greater density than that, especially when the state density bonus is utilized. This presents challenges both in areas with small lot sizes where open space is at a premium and on narrow streets in high fire districts and elsewhere.

Most significantly, there is no evidence that the new housing will be affordable and incentivizes demolishing existing, lower-cost housing, much of it occupied by tenants. While the Demolition

Ordinance requires affordable replacement units, the impact on today's tenants are likely to be enormous.

Finally, the process by which this was brought to Council was flawed. While several meetings were held about adding housing under the Housing Element, the Housing Element assumed no rezoning was needed to accomplish the stated goal of adding 9,000-15,000 housing units and did not sufficiently (or at all) address details about affordability, setbacks, lot coverage, protection of small businesses, etc. as discussed above. We need build consensus on what is our best plan to retain affordability and livability.