

## 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:** **KEN HOUSTON**

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

Third Generation Oakland, I'm a product of Oakland Unified School District. As Executive Director of Beautification Council for 10 years, addressing illegal dumping, public safety, seniors, homelessness and justice impacted communities workforce readiness has been the focus. I created Oakland's first laundromat serving homeless youth. A dedicated community advocate for Oakland's most pressing issue.

**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?

The private market alone won't solve our housing crisis, especially for low-income residents. While increasing market-rate housing can help ease overall supply issues, it's not enough to address the needs of those most affected by skyrocketing rents. The City must prioritize affordable housing through direct investments, incentives, and partnerships with nonprofits and developers to ensure more low-income and workforce housing is built.

I support streamlining regulations for affordable housing projects, leveraging public land for housing, and expanding inclusionary zoning policies that require developers to build a mix of affordable units. Additionally, we should explore creative solutions like adaptive reuse of existing buildings, co-housing, and community land trusts. By focusing on affordability alongside supply, we can create a more equitable housing market that serves all residents, not just the wealthy.

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.

To expand affordable housing funding in Oakland, I would increase the allocation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which directly supports low-income housing development. I'd also push for enhanced use of Measure KK bond funds and advocate for an increase in state and federal grants, like HOME and CDBG funds, to bolster ongoing support.

With the Regional Housing Bond off the ballot, I would support a local housing bond measure or parcel tax to generate one-time revenue for affordable housing projects. For ongoing funding, I'd back a vacancy tax on vacant properties, encouraging their productive use while raising funds for housing initiatives. Additionally, exploring public-private partnerships can help bring in consistent funding to create more affordable housing opportunities across Oakland.

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

I support Proposition 5 because it allows seniors, people with severe disabilities, and victims of natural disasters to transfer their property tax base to a new home, which helps them remain financially stable when relocating. In Oakland, Alameda County, and across California, housing affordability is a critical issue. Proposition 5 provides much-needed relief by enabling these vulnerable groups to downsize or move without facing a significant tax increase, freeing up larger homes for families and improving housing availability overall.

While concerns exist about potential impacts on local government revenue, I believe we can address those through other measures, such as increasing funding for affordable housing and ensuring equitable property tax structures.

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 greatest barriers to affordable housing development in Oakland are high construction costs, limited funding, and lengthy approval processes. To address this, I support streamlining permitting for affordable projects, increasing local funding through bonds or taxes, and incentivizing developers through zoning adjustments and public-private partnerships to prioritize low-income housing production.

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?

Oakland's Just Cause for Eviction and Rent Control programs are among the most effective policies for protecting renters from displacement. They help prevent arbitrary evictions and limit unaffordable rent increases. I would support strengthening tenant protections by expanding the Rent Adjustment Program to cover more units and streamlining access to legal assistance for renters facing eviction.

I also advocate for increasing funding for Oakland's anti-displacement programs like the Rental Assistance Fund and exploring community land trusts to preserve affordable housing. Additionally, I'd pursue new protections for tenants in unregulated units and incentives for landlords to offer long-term leases to further prevent displacement.

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?

To prevent at-risk households in Deep East Oakland from becoming unhoused, I support expanding rental assistance, eviction protections, and affordable housing access, especially for low-income families. Short-term strategies include increasing emergency rental subsidies, legal aid for tenants, and investing in workforce development and mental health services.

For those experiencing homelessness, I advocate for Safe Parking programs, sanctioned encampments, and rapid re-housing. Long-term, we need more affordable and supportive housing through public-private partnerships, while creating sites where the unhoused can utilize vacant spaces. Working with housing providers to offer appropriate shelter options is crucial.

To avoid criminalizing homelessness, Oakland should focus on services, expanding outreach teams, and providing dignified shelters, partnering with nonprofits for comprehensive care. Homelessness should be addressed as a housing and public health issue, not a criminal one.

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 address disparate impacts on Black, Brown, and Indigenous Oakland residents, I'd prioritize policies like increasing affordable housing in historically excluded areas, expanding anti-displacement protections, and investing in homeownership opportunities for marginalized

communities. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing means actively working to eliminate housing discrimination and promoting equal housing opportunities for all.

To ensure equitable distribution of affordable housing, the City should implement inclusionary zoning citywide, require affordable units in all developments, and incentivize affordable housing in higher-income neighborhoods. This will prevent the concentration of affordable housing in low-income areas and promote diversity throughout Oakland.

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?

While the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) aims to empower tenants, it has raised serious concerns, as seen in Washington, D.C., where it led to unintended consequences, including the displacement of minority communities in traditional urban areas. Housing discrimination is wrong, no matter the policy, and any opportunity to purchase should be part of a carefully designed process, not a law that can be easily manipulated.

I support giving tenants and nonprofit organizations a right of first offer and refusal, but with safeguards to prevent exploitation. Exemptions should apply to small landlords and properties where the policy might lead to increased costs or displacement. We must ensure that any TOPA policy benefits tenants without destabilizing communities or reducing available rental housing.

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?

Critical elements of a public land policy for Oakland include prioritizing affordable housing, ensuring transparency in land use decisions, and establishing criteria for evaluating

development proposals. Additionally, the policy should include mechanisms to prevent speculative or non-community-focused use of public land.

Community involvement is crucial in the disposition and use of public land. Engaging residents through public meetings, surveys, and advisory committees ensures that land use decisions reflect the needs and desires of the community, fostering greater trust and support for the City. I will prioritize holding staff accountable for meeting legislative deadlines while providing necessary support to expedite the process. Clear timelines and regular progress reports will be essential to keep the process on track. We need to ensure that a Public Land Ordinance is drafted, enacted, and implemented as directed by the City Council and staff and leadership need to respond as to why what has been directed has not been completed.

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?

For large projects like the Coliseum area, robust community benefits that include significant employment opportunities, educational programs, and amenities that enrich our city should be part of the deal. It's engagement by the community sale makes it a natural to provide these benefits. Specifically, I advocate for creating job training programs, partnering with local schools and colleges to offer educational pathways, and developing recreational and cultural spaces for residents.

Affordable housing should be a key component of the development. I support requiring at least 30% of new housing to be affordable, targeting a range of income levels, including very low, low, and moderate-income households. This approach ensures that the development benefits all segments of the community. We also need to look at how to provide housing that attracts our civil servant population that service schools and municipal services.

Funding for this development should be a shared responsibility. While the developers should contribute through inclusionary housing requirements and community benefit agreements, additional funding can come from public sources, including city and county funds, and state and federal grants. Leveraging public-private partnerships can help ensure that the development is financially sustainable while delivering on its community commitments.