

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: Merika Goolsby

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

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 stand firmly in favor of prioritizing low and very low-income housing. The private market has largely failed to address the needs of these vulnerable populations, leading to increased homelessness and housing insecurity. Therefore, the city should focus on developing affordable housing that specifically targets low-income households.

To achieve this, the city can implement inclusionary zoning policies, requiring developers to include a percentage of affordable units in new projects. Furthermore, establishing public-private partnerships can leverage resources to fund the construction of affordable housing. Increasing funding for affordable housing programs and utilizing vacant city-owned land for development can also significantly contribute to addressing the housing crisis.

In addition, the city should explore options such as housing vouchers and rent control to support low-income residents. Streamlining the permitting process for affordable projects can help

reduce costs and expedite construction. By taking these actions, we can ensure that everyone has access to a safe and stable home, ultimately fostering a more equitable community.

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 Oakland District 7, with the regional housing bond off the ballot, we must proactively identify alternative funding sources for affordable housing. For one-time funding, I propose utilizing excess city budget allocations or state and federal grants aimed at community development to establish a dedicated affordable housing fund. This could facilitate immediate investments in both new construction and rehabilitation of existing units. For ongoing funding, I recommend increasing local impact fees on new developments that benefit from infrastructure improvements, ensuring developers contribute to affordable housing initiatives. Additionally, I support the implementation of a modest parcel tax dedicated specifically to affordable housing projects, which can generate consistent revenue over time. Furthermore, exploring partnerships with private entities through social impact bonds can attract private investment for affordable housing while aligning returns with successful housing outcomes. Lastly, expanding funding for community land trusts in District 7 can help maintain long-term affordability and prevent displacement. By diversifying our funding streams, we can create a sustainable approach to addressing the urgent need for affordable housing in our community 2a. In Oakland District 7, with the regional housing bond off the ballot, we must proactively identify alternative funding sources for affordable housing. For one-time funding, I propose utilizing excess city budget allocations or state and federal grants aimed at community development to establish a dedicated affordable housing fund. This could facilitate immediate investments in both new construction and rehabilitation of existing units. For ongoing funding, I recommend increasing local impact fees on new developments that benefit from infrastructure improvements, ensuring developers contribute to affordable housing initiatives. Additionally, I support the implementation of a modest parcel tax dedicated specifically to affordable housing projects, which can generate consistent revenue over time. Furthermore, exploring partnerships with private entities through social impact bonds can attract private investment for affordable housing while aligning returns with successful housing outcomes. Lastly, expanding funding for community land trusts in District 7 can help maintain long-term affordability and prevent displacement. By diversifying our funding streams, we can create a sustainable approach to addressing the urgent need for affordable housing in our community.

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

I support Proposition Five as it empowers local voters to prioritize and address the unique challenges facing their communities effectively. By shifting spending decisions away from state government, Proposition Five allows local governments to allocate resources according to the specific needs of their residents, whether that involves enhancing housing affordability, improving public safety, or investing in vital community services like fire stations. This measure recognizes that local leaders and taxpayers have

a better understanding of the pressing issues in their areas and are well-positioned to make informed decisions. With the flexibility to reallocate funds, communities can respond more agilely to changing circumstances, ensuring that resources are directed where they are most needed. Moreover, Proposition Five fosters greater accountability, as local officials will be directly responsible for the outcomes of their spending decisions. This encourages deeper engagement from residents, promoting collaborative solutions and community-driven initiatives. Overall, I believe Proposition Five is a significant step toward strengthening local governance and ensuring that communities have the tools necessary to tackle the challenges they face.

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 barrier to the development of affordable housing in Oakland, particularly in District 7, is the complex regulatory environment combined with high land costs and affluent community resistance to new low income developments. This results in a disproportionate focus on market-rate housing, while affordable units remain significantly underproduced. To address these barriers, I would advocate for streamlining the permitting process to reduce delays and costs associated with affordable housing projects. Simplifying regulations and providing clear guidelines can encourage developers to pursue affordable options. Additionally, I would support increasing incentives for developers to include affordable units in their projects through inclusionary zoning policies, ensuring that new developments contribute to meeting our community's housing needs. Engaging the community in the planning process is crucial; I propose hosting regular forums to educate residents on the benefits of affordable housing and gather input on proposed developments. This can help alleviate resistance and foster a sense of ownership in the projects. Finally, pursuing partnerships with non-profit organizations and leveraging state and federal funding can enhance resources dedicated to affordable housing, ensuring that production is more balanced and meets the city's stated needs effectively.

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?

In Oakland District 7, several existing policies, such as the Rent Control Ordinance and Just Cause Eviction protections, have been effective in shielding renters from arbitrary evictions and unaffordable rent increases. These measures play a crucial role in maintaining housing stability for vulnerable populations. However, I believe there is room for improvement. One change I would support is the expansion of rental assistance

programs, such as emergency rental vouchers, to help low-income tenants facing sudden financial hardships. Increasing funding for legal aid services can also empower renters to better navigate disputes with landlords, ensuring their rights are upheld. Additionally, I would advocate for stronger anti-displacement policies, such as implementing stricter regulations on tenant buyouts and enhancing relocation assistance for those affected by evictions or redevelopment. Working closely with ACCE and Housing Now Coalition will help address emerging issues and propose timely solutions tailored to the unique needs of District 7 residents. Finally, promoting community land trusts can create long-term affordability, allowing residents to have a stake in their neighborhoods. By bolstering these protections and pursuing innovative policies, we can create a more equitable housing landscape in Oakland, safeguarding our community from 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?
 1. In Oakland District 7, I would support a dual approach to prevent at-risk households from becoming homeless and provide housing for those already experiencing homelessness. Short-term strategies: Include expanding emergency shelters and rapid rehousing programs, along with increased funding for rental assistance to help families stay in their homes. Outreach services must connect unsheltered individuals with mental health and job training resources. Long-term strategies: Involve investing in affordable housing development, reforming zoning laws to facilitate new housing projects, and expanding supportive housing that integrates health services for vulnerable populations. To prevent criminalizing homelessness, the city should reform local ordinances that penalize homelessness-related activities, focusing instead on compassionate support. Public awareness campaigns can educate the community about the complexities of homelessness, while collaboration with law enforcement can ensure that responses prioritize assistance over citations. Lastly, engaging with state officials for alignment on homelessness prevention strategies is essential. These measures will create a sustainable framework focused on support, prevention, and housing solutions.
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?
 1. Affirmatively furthering fair housing means ensuring that all housing and community development policies actively promote equity and address historical injustices,

particularly for marginalized communities. In Oakland, this requires a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers faced by Black, Brown, and Indigenous residents. To address the disparate impacts of the housing system, I would pursue policies such as:

1. Inclusionary Zoning: Mandate that new developments include a percentage of affordable units, ensuring that all neighborhoods contribute to affordable housing stock.
2. Equitable Development Planning: Implement community-led planning processes to ensure that the voices of marginalized communities are heard in housing decisions, promoting developments that reflect their needs.
3. Anti-Displacement Measures: Strengthen tenant protections and rental assistance programs to prevent displacement of low-income residents in gentrifying neighborhoods.
4. Invest in Community Resources: Allocate funding for community services, education, and job training in neighborhoods receiving new affordable housing to support residents' holistic development.
5. Geographic Equity in Housing Distribution: Focus on promoting affordable housing in high-opportunity areas, ensuring that all residents have access to quality resources, jobs, and amenities.

These policies can foster a more equitable housing landscape across 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?
 1. Yes, I support the adoption of a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) in Oakland, granting tenants and nonprofit organizations the right of first offer and right of first refusal. This policy empowers tenants, allowing them to secure their homes and avoid displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. It can also promote community stability and encourage the preservation of affordable housing stock. I would advocate for specific provisions, including:
 1. Nonprofit Involvement: Allow nonprofit organizations to partner with tenants in the purchasing process, facilitating access to resources and expertise for successful ownership.
 2. Transparent Process: Establish clear procedures for notifying tenants when a building is up for sale, ensuring they have sufficient time and information to make informed decisions.
 3. Affordability Protections: Include provisions that prioritize the preservation of affordability, preventing future owners from converting units into higher-priced rentals.
 4. Exemptions: Consider exemptions for small, mom-and-pop landlords to avoid unintended consequences for small property owners who might struggle with the financial burden of extended sale processes. Implementing TOPA can significantly contribute to housing equity and tenant empowerment in Oakland.
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?

To ensure that a public land ordinance is drafted and implemented in line with the city council's 2018 policy prioritizing affordable housing, I would advocate for immediate action by establishing a timeline and accountability measures for city staff. This includes regular progress reports to the council and the community to maintain transparency and momentum. The most critical components of a public land policy for Oakland should include: 1. Affordable Housing Mandate: Require that a significant percentage of any surplus public land be dedicated to affordable housing development. 2. Community Input: Establish robust mechanisms for community engagement, allowing residents to voice their needs and preferences regarding public land use. 3. Equitable Development Principles: Ensure that the policy prioritizes developments that benefit low-income communities, preventing displacement and promoting equity. 4. Partnerships with Nonprofits: Encourage partnerships with community-based organizations to facilitate the development of affordable housing and ensure that projects reflect community interests. The community should play a central role in the disposition and use of public land, actively participating in planning and decision-making processes to ensure that developments serve the needs of Oakland residents and foster inclusive growth.

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?
1. For large projects like the Colosseum area, the city should prioritize community benefits that enhance local quality of life and ensure equitable development. Key community benefits should include: 1. Affordable Housing: Require a minimum of 20-30% of units in new developments to be affordable, targeting low- to moderate-income households (earning up to 80% of the Area Median Income). 2. Job Creation and Workforce Development: Ensure that a percentage of jobs created during construction and operation are accessible to local residents, with training programs to support workforce readiness. 3. Public Spaces and Amenities: Include the development of parks, community centers, and recreational facilities that serve the needs of neighborhood residents. 4. Transportation Improvements: Advocate for enhanced public transit options and infrastructure improvements to facilitate access to the area. Funding for these community benefits should come from a combination of developers' contributions (through inclusionary housing fees or community benefit agreements) and public investment, potentially supported by state and federal grants. This approach ensures that the costs are shared, promoting equitable growth while addressing the needs of the community. Engaging community stakeholders in the planning process will further align development with local priorities.