

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: Rowena Brown

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

Rowena Brown is an East Bay native with deep roots in Oakland. She serves as a State Legislative District Director, former City of Oakland constituent services coordinator, and award-winning community organizer who graduated from *Laney College*, *Mills College*, and the *University of California, Law San Francisco*.

As a Black and Queer woman who lost both of her parents by the age of 17, Rowena knows firsthand why Oaklanders need healthcare, safety, affordable housing, the right to a clean neighborhood, and why a thriving small business and local economy is essential for all. That's why Rowena has been leading efforts to address blight and illegal dumping, fix potholes, shut down drug hot spots, and secure *Oakland's fair share of State resources* to fight human trafficking, reduce gun violence, and protect the clean air we all breathe.

She is the *first and best choice* to ensure safety in our local communities, address homelessness, and uplift Oakland's working families.

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?

To alleviate the pressure on the housing market and make it more accessible for individuals across all income levels, we must increase the construction of housing across all price ranges. However, solely focusing on market-rate housing is insufficient. To address the diverse needs of our communities, I will take a balanced approach that encompasses market-rate, affordable, and subsidized housing. We must prioritize creating affordable housing and implement policies that ensure equitable access to housing for all. By building more market-rate housing, we can stabilize rising rents and home prices, making California a more affordable place to reside for everyone

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.

As an elected councilmember, I will work with leaders across levels of government to bring resources into Oakland - while working to rework a stronger Regional Housing Bond for the future.

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

I support Proposition 5. My goal is to create more housing opportunities at all income levels, and we recognize that local bonds can sometimes make projects financially viable when they would not be so otherwise. By tapping new sources of funding, we can help ensure that more mixed-income housing projects are built. This approach promotes diverse, inclusive communities while addressing the urgent need for more housing across California.

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?

Policies limiting the amount of housing, and by extension affordable housing, are a major barrier to developing housing in Oakland. In light of California's severe housing shortage and the need for more inclusive neighborhoods, I propose a critical step: allowing a minimum of four units per lot across the state. This approach offers flexibility to homeowners, creates more housing opportunities, and reduces displacement pressures by increasing the overall housing supply. I support the creation of affordable housing overlay zones, which encourage affordable housing development in certain areas through density bonuses, reducing parking requirements, and speeding up permitting processes. However, we also recognize that certain localities may require higher density development, such as near transit hubs or in urban areas. In these contexts, we advocate for even more units per lot to be permitted. By establishing a standard minimum residential zoning, we can ensure that all communities contribute to solving our housing crisis. This step is essential to reversing decades of exclusionary practices that have disproportionately impacted low-income families and communities of color.

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?

Tenant protections from arbitrary rent increases and miscellaneous fees are some of my biggest priorities. I was overjoyed that Asm. Matt Haney's bill to ensure that move-in cost are limited to just the first month rent will greatly improve access to housing. I also support programs to educate and assist renters with community resources to ensure housing stability.

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?

I personally realize that we must tackle the homelessness crisis by creating more deeply affordable housing for all income levels, we must provide more comprehensive mental health support and substance abuse therapy. In order to support the unhoused community, it requires multiple responses, those living in their car, down on their luck, should be directed to service providers ready to place them in housing and provide pathways for employment. I also would want to create more transitional housing helping to get seniors, women, and children off the streets immediately. I strongly believe that Alameda County could take on more of a supportive role in providing land for more safe RV and Car parking zones.

In addition, we have recent legislation passed at the State level to support churches to build housing on their properties - we must seek funding for these efforts. As council member, I am focused not only in caring for the unhoused community but really creating solutions to help Oakland meet its housing allocation of 26,000 homes by 2031.

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?

Great question! As we are advocating for Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities we recognize that previously incarcerated folks, veterans, seniors and members of the LGBTQBT+ community face the highest rates of housing insecurity. So part of my advocacy work, I want to work to uplift policies that address those who are on fixed incomes, in an economy with rising costs. While also working to ensure liveable wages these all go hand in hand to creating change in the housing space. To ensure equitable distribution of affordable housing across the City, we must be intentional, each councilmember leading on projects to bring housing to their districts and as the At Large councilmember, I'll work together regionally to collaborate with county and state partners to bring more funding resources and investors into the City.

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?

Yes, I think this is a great idea. I can recall being a young person and need to move from a rental duplex property and my dad desiring to buy the rental unit. When we uproot families from their homes, you uproot children from their schools, friends and family and alot of times these leads to be priced out of a community they know and love.

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 would personally like the opportunity to work together with lead sponsors to bring forth legislation to fully push forward utilizing the Surplus Lands Act/ public land this is essential given the urgent time of needing to build 26,000 units of housing by 2031 - this is apart of the answer. I would like accomplishing this goal to be apart of my legacy, this would mean that more people are housed and not living on our streets.

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?

As council member, I am really interested in ensuring that we fully utilize community benefit agreements, this is how we show residents that we have them in mind in all planning efforts and in our goal of creating a City that is thriving and supporting the needs of its residents.

Community Benefits for the Coliseum:

Transportation Hub makes this a transit-oriented development community, allowing easy access to Hegenburger Corridor, the airport, the shoreline, walking and bikeable paths, and downtown.

Family-Centered/ Shopping: I would write into the agreement bringing a major grocery store, a bank activities for families a park/skating/sports field/playground etc. The affordable housing should range from deeply affordable and mixed-income housing, catering to families from all income levels, that desire to live/work and play in Oakland.