

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: Sophie Hahn

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

I grew up and raised my family in Berkeley, steeped in Berkeley's values. I'm passionate about ending homelessness and increasing affordability. Devoted to service, I will never quit - even in stressful times. I have the experience and stamina to lead our amazing city, and would be honored with EBHO's support.

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 support market rate and affordable housing - to meet different needs. On the Zoning Board and through my pro-housing ZAB appointee, I've said "yes" to more than 10,000 units in Berkeley!

While market housing helps those who can afford market rates, and can reduce prices, *supply alone will never drive housing prices low enough to be affordable to people living at or below AMI.*

That's why I have championed producing, preserving and protecting affordable housing during my eight years on Council.

I co-authored 2018 Measures O and P, securing over \$200 million for affordable housing and homelessness services, resulting in a 45% decline in unsheltered homelessness and 1000+ new affordable units, the largest increase in 50+ years. I've championed Land Trust and co-op models, and secured the largest-ever dollar commitment to Small Sites.

If Berkeley wants to remain a diverse and creative City, we must significantly expand housing affordability. As Mayor, a top priority is to make Berkeley the first city in the U.S. to achieve 30% protected/affordable/"social" housing - by 2050. This initiative will combine rental and ownership opportunities, making housing more accessible to low- and middle-income residents. I'd like EBHO's help!

- 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.**

With Measure O funds fully allocated, I will place another bond on the 2026 ballot. As co-author of Measure O, which passed overwhelmingly, I'm confident we can secure additional funds. I was devastated when the regional measure was pulled, and when 2022's Measure L, with \$200M for affordable housing (thanks to my advocacy), failed over petty disagreements about paving criteria.

With local dollars we get significant matching funds from county, state, and federal sources, multiplying our impact.

I support both all-affordable and mixed-income projects and prefer affordable units built on-site in market projects, using bond financing for all-affordable projects. State density bonuses are successfully incentivizing on-site affordable units, which also helps. Inclusionary requirements and in-lieu fees should be the highest feasible amount, based on updated studies.

Inclusionary units ensure affordable housing is built simultaneously and distributed across neighborhoods, promoting economic diversity and preventing concentration of low-income housing, aligning with Berkeley's commitment to inclusive, fair housing citywide.

I'm interested in innovative strategies, such as engaging banks with a history of redlining to finance affordable housing or down payment assistance to groups historically denied access, and a regional tax on commercial space, so employers finance housing for their workers.

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

I strongly, ardently support Proposition 5 because it directly aligns with our goal to address Berkeley's housing crisis. The $\frac{2}{3}$ requirement is "minority rule," anti-government, and undemocratic. As someone who co-authored and campaigned for Measure L in 2022 - which received over 55% of the vote, but still failed, I witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by the 2/3 requirement. This experience highlights the need for reforms like Proposition 5, which lowers the voter approval requirement to 55%.

Proposition 5 empowers communities by making it easier to secure local funding for affordable housing and other critical infrastructure. I believe this is essential to ensure Berkeley continues to be a creative and economically diverse city, where people from all backgrounds can live and thrive. By passing Proposition 5, we can remove unnecessary barriers to funding projects that directly impact housing equity and affordability.

I believe the only way to achieve housing affordability at scale in the urban core is with a massive public subsidy. My goal of 30% "social" housing in Berkeley by 2050 can only be achieved with tools like Proposition 5 in place, allowing us to meaningfully address the housing needs of our community.

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?

With seven years on ZAB and eight on Council, I know Berkeley has the conditions to produce market housing. That's why, since being elected in 2016, *I have been the Council's most ardent, consistent - and effective - champion for affordable housing.* As Mayor, I will put all my energies into real, not trickle-down, solutions.

The greatest barriers are lack of capital, overall costs, and competition for sites, as well as state-level restrictions on rent control.

Measure O funds are fully allocated, and the regional bond isn't happening. In-Lieu fees help a little, but not enough to make a difference. To address the lack of capital, I will

place another bond on the ballot and explore innovative funding options, described above.

Land is scarce and no surplus public properties exist in Berkeley. New-build projects suffer from high costs, resulting in small units at almost \$1million.

That's why I'm focused on Land Trust projects that purchase existing properties and convert them to affordable. The local contribution is higher than new-build; the overall cost is about half.

I will lobby the State for significant funds to purchase and preserve existing units - a better use of taxpayer dollars, without the 3-5 year timelines to build.

- 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?**

I strongly support policies and programs that protect renters from all abuses. Controlling rents can only be achieved through rent control and deed restrictions, and I will continue strengthening rent control at the local and state levels, and increasing funds available to produce, protect, and preserve deed-restricted units.

I've been at the forefront of ensuring robust funding of Berkeley's eviction defense services - free legal assistance for low-income renters facing eviction. I also support direct rental subsidies and housing navigation for people at risk of losing their housing. I supported legislation to protect renters during the pandemic, and to extend those protections as long as possible.

Vacancy decontrol gutted rent control, and I have repeatedly supported measures to roll this back at the State level. Locally, rent and eviction controls are under constant pressure require push-back from elected officials on a regular basis.

This November, a pernicious landlord measure is on the ballot, deceptively designed to look like it's helping the homeless. I signed the ballot argument against Measure CC. I also was the critical 5th vote to get Measure BB, the Tenant measure, on the ballot after efforts to qualify the measure fell short, and strongly support its passage.

- 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?**

During my first years on Council, I focused relentlessly on breaking the City's punitive and ineffective paradigm to address homelessness.

I authored the blueprint for successful efforts to rehouse the homeless, and "sold" our vision of compassionate, housing-first services to the public via more 20+ presentations to churches, neighborhood groups, and other community forums. That's how we were able to successfully pass 2018 Measures O and P, and rehouse more than 1,500 people -- a 45% reduction in unsheltered homelessness, and 21% reduction overall.

We have four strategies:

Housing retention - to stem the tide of newly homeless. This includes strong rent and eviction controls, free legal services for households facing eviction, short term subsidies, and other measures to keep housed people housed.

Create and preserve affordable and supportive housing - so we have homes to offer.

Create an unbroken chain of state-of-the-art rehousing services and low-barrier shelters.

Improve health, sanitation, and other conditions on the street, to build trust and manage impacts to the broader community.

Our success is based on this paradigm of compassionate services, robust housing retention and rehousing services, and creating more affordable housing. I will not change our policies and programs, because they work!

- 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?

Fair Housing means working actively to correct the housing discrimination that shaped Berkeley. I co-authored Berkeley's Reparations legislation and am the architect of successful return of the West Berkeley Shellmound to the Ohlone people. While not housing, it's land, and it matters.

I achieved the first affordable project in my affluent, mostly-white district since the 1970s – on Solano Avenue, a high-resource corridor, and authored legislation to clear the path for a homeless seniors' project in North Berkeley - demonstrating my commitment to increasing access to formerly excluded communities.

I support right-to-return at Ashby BART, and will introduce a program for down payment assistance for formerly excluded groups to purchase homes in Berkeley. I support "middle housing," but zoning isn't enough. I will explore low-interest financing for projects converting to multi-family, with incentives to participate in a right-to-return program.

I will introduce a requirement that listings for Berkeley homes be published in African American, Spanish language, and other cultural/language media.

I authored legislation to upzone Solano, North Shattuck and College, all high-resource corridors, so we can get more housing in those neighborhoods. I will continue to champion robust inclusionary requirements so affordable units are built in all neighborhoods.

- 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?**

Expanding ownership, particularly for those historically excluded from homeownership, is one of my top priorities. I strongly support the goals of TOPA - which is why I voted YES, as a member of the Land Use Committee, to forward TOPA to the Council.

But I don't believe this is the right version for Berkeley - and I know there aren't five votes to pass it. It doesn't help that TOPA's author quit the Council and isn't present to navigate a majority path forward.

My vision is based on San Francisco's COPA, adding a requirement that, within two years of purchasing a property, a qualified nonprofit must make an offer to transition to cooperative ownership. This would significantly reduce timelines prior to sale (COPA's process is a little more than 30 days), while still offering the same opportunities, with less administration by the City – a real concern.

Berkeley has 120,000+ residents, 1,500+ employees, and a $\frac{3}{4}$ Billion budget; DC has 650,000+ residents, 10,000+ employees, and an \$8Billion budget. A right-sized COPA/TOPA can yield similar results; that is what I believe could eventually earn five votes – and head us in the right direction. We can do more later!

- 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?**

The State already eliminated single family zoning - in Berkeley, and everywhere. All formerly R-1 parcels can build four units; two “regular” and two ADUs. I support this change. Adding housing in all neighborhoods is central to our fair housing goals; turnover of existing units is too slow; we have to put more housing into these neighborhoods.

Council has already advanced middle housing policies, including unit minimums, to expand opportunities in traditionally exclusionary areas. This policy aligns with the city's goal of combating segregation and reducing pressures that lead to displacement of long-term residents.

One concern is the potential unaffordability of middle housing. Projects are unlikely to be feasible with an on-site affordability requirement, so most, if not all, new middle housing will be market rate. I'm interested in exploring low-interest public financing of middle projects in exchange for deed-restricting new units, and down payment support for people from formerly redlined groups.

Safety remains a priority in High Hazard fire zones; I'm waiting for the Fire Department's Evacuation Study before supporting any expansion beyond the State's mandates in

those areas. I have an idea - to cap total built square footage, while allowing multiple units. Fire doesn't care; it just consumes fuel!