

East Bay Housing Organizations

Oakland Candidate Questionnaire 2025

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: Charlene Wang

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

My grandparents' Oakland affordable housing provided stability during my childhood. I'm an Alameda County Commissioner, former Family Violence Law Center board member, and volunteer English teacher for immigrant women. My work includes launching an infrastructure program reconnecting segregated communities, reforming rapid rehousing systems, and protecting civil rights at the EPA.

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 faster permitting, removal of burdensome aesthetic design standards, increasing height limits and other streamlining that support market-rate and nonprofit developers alike. My goal is development without displacement, affordable housing developers are absolutely essential to this goal. In general, I support using impact fees to ensure that market rate developments generate revenue for nonprofit developments. In this sense, building more market rate housing will help build affordable housing.

I'm running on the creation of cultural districts in West Oakland, East Oakland, Little Saigon, and Fruitvale that have tax incentives for new small, minority-owned businesses in the arts, music, restaurant, and nightlife industries. These can encourage development and create a virtuous cycle where rising property values through tax increment financing fund land trusts for affordable housing.

2. What current local/City sources of affordable housing funding would you increase or expand? What new sources would you support? Please identify both one-time and ongoing funding streams.

We need to make the most of Measure U funding. Construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing projects should be competitively bid, and should be evaluated on a cost per unit basis to ensure that we are ensuring that we are able to build as many affordable housing units as possible with our Measure U funds.

These revenues should support community land trusts, moderate income housing, and programs that support taking homeless off the street and into shelter and jobs. When we approve market-rate housing, we should ensure that property tax revenues and one-time impact fees fund affordable housing.

The California Legislature approved versions of the new TIF law that allowed the "Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts" or EIFDs to finance, among other things, housing for very low, low, and moderate income people. We can connect these to cultural districts to promote development without displacement.

I also support affordable housing bond measures and impact fees that maximize the amount of affordable units.

3. 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?

Financing, permitting delays from inadequate permitting and fire inspection workforces and purely aesthetic design standards are significant barriers to all housing developments. The reason market rate developments have been able to better adjust to it is that they can recover permitting losses with higher rents. While working to speed permitting across the board, we should explore a "fast pass" for small businesses and nonprofit developers to clear permitting faster since their margins are thinner.

New revenue sources from bond measures, land trusts, and the Jobs and Housing Impact Fee can also expand supply of badly needed affordable housing.

4. Oakland has a number of ordinances to protect renters from unaffordable rent increases, arbitrary evictions, and other forms of displacement included in the Rent Adjustment Program (RAP). Are there any additions or modifications that you would make to any of these ordinances? How would you strengthen or improve the administration and enforcement of RAP?

When I canvass, I frequently hear from tenants who say their landlords are mistreating them and allowing unsafe conditions to fester. When they come to the city, they're moved from one office to another and eventually give up. I want to adequately staff tenant legal services, empower the city attorney to go after violations of our rent laws, and make sure that these remedies are communicated to renters. I support maintaining current tenant protections, creating an emergency rental assistance fund, and constructing new affordable units. The shortage of nonprofit developments leaves renters in units that are unaffordable, deplete their savings, and trap them in poverty. Supporting nonprofit developers is an essential anti-displacement policy.

5. Do you agree with the previous Mayor's Executive Order on removal of homeless encampments? 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?

Emergency rental assistance, connected to job training, services, and paths to self-sufficiency are more cost-effective than only helping people once they've lost housing. We can't allow

encampments to block parks and sidewalk access in Oakland, but the process needs to start with compassionate outreach, offers to help, and always respect the property of unhoused people. Unhoused Oaklanders need multiple year-round shelters and transitional housing, access to wrap-around services, job opportunities, and pathways to long term housing. I worked to reorganize Massachusetts' statewide homeless services to connect people with shelter and pathways to permanent housing faster. I'm ready to lead on this issue.

6. Local jurisdictions have a legal obligation to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing in all their housing and community development policies. What should the City do to ensure a more equitable distribution of affordable housing across all parts of the City and equitable access to housing for communities of color?

This means that affordable and accessible housing should be a feature of all our communities. New units add to the diversity and vibrancy of our neighborhoods, they also create downsizing options that help longtime residents age in place.

I was glad to see the missing middle upzoning passed so that single-family zoning is banned city-wide. However, given the scale of the housing crisis I don't think the upzoning went far enough with up to 4 units on a 4,000 square foot lot. I think we should push for additional density, that still does not constitute high rises. To add 55-60,000 new units, we need more units along Rockridge and Piedmont Corridors.

7. Oakland has in the past considered adoption of a Tenant/Community 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?

I support TOPA, but would exempt owner-occupied properties and ensure that it includes a timely process that gives tenants a meaningful right of first refusal without miring property owners in long and complex proceedings. Inadequate funding for land trusts constrains the effectiveness of any TOPA measure. I'd work to expand funding sources so tenants have a real opportunity to purchase.

8. 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?

Public land should prioritize badly needed affordable housing. I have a proven track record of leading on social housing, in particular on decommissioned highway infrastructure. In the Biden-Harris Administration, I fought to allow Reconnecting Communities Initiative funding to go towards social housing.

The most critical element of Oakland's public land policy concerning affordable housing is maximizing the number of affordable units. Community input is important, but forums need to be well publicized and conducted with the urgency of our housing crisis in mind. Leading with generous community benefits agreements is a great way that the city can support a quick process.

9. 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?

I'm interested in exploring hiring pipelines between Oakland public schools and living wage, union jobs in the trades for renewable energy and construction. The Coliseum project should create living wage jobs, and eventually affordable units, for East Oaklanders. I support robust community benefits agreements and have ensured their implementation federally, they should focus on higher levels of affordability. These can be paid through impact fees.

Inclusion of affordable and middle income housing should be required, but the process must be predictable and expeditious. The exact percentage should be determined by an analysis of project costs with a goal to maximize the number of affordable units. Impact fees from market-rate developers should finance these.

10. In 2013, The City Council adopted an ordinance setting aside 25% of Oakland's boomerang funds (the City's share of former redevelopment tax increment moneys) for affordable housing. Will you commit to ensuring these funds stay committed to housing solutions?

I'll work to ensure that these funds stay committed to housing solutions. New housing creates jobs and lowers the cost of living that is passed on to businesses and consumers. It is a catalyst for the economic development we need to grow our tax base and preserve city services.

11. Outside of one-time voter approved bond measures the Affordable Housing Impact Fee and the Jobs/Housing Impact Fee are the City's only significant ongoing funding sources for housing since the dissolution of Redevelopment in 2012. What if any changes would

you make to how the City assesses or collects these fees? What are the advantages and disadvantages of impact fees versus inclusionary housing requirements?

Interpretation of the Sheetz ruling will impact viability of impact fees, I'll consult the City Attorney and City Attorney to determine how to preserve affordable housing finance going forward. Predictability and simplicity are major advantages of impact fees over inclusionary requirements. In general, speeding the approval process will be a key goal on housing.

12. When the City makes significant investments (e.g., infrastructure, public facilities) or regulatory concessions (e.g., rezoning, relaxed development standards, permit streamlining) for specific sites or areas, what kinds of housing benefits should it require in return?

These determinations should be site-specific and mindful of project economics but, in general, I'll prioritize concessions on affordable and deeply affordable units.