

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: Suz Robinson

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

Suz Robinson is a dedicated Oaklander with over a decade of experience in business and public policy. As VP of Governance for the Bay Area Council, she focuses on public safety, housing, homelessness, and economic growth. A leader in both the corporate and nonprofit sectors, Suz is also passionate about community service and cultural healing.

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?**

We are facing a long-term housing crisis in Oakland, and to address it effectively, we need both a strong housing stock and affordable housing options. Without adequate housing, we risk losing jobs and employers to other cities. At the same time, we must ensure that those with lower incomes have access to safe, stable homes, especially to prevent displacement and homelessness.

For the first time in 14 years, the Oakland Housing Authority has reopened applications for the affordable housing voucher waitlist, showing progress, but much more needs to be

done. Measure U funds have helped drive projects forward, and we need to build on this momentum.

To make housing more affordable, we should explore cost-effective solutions like manufactured homes and modular housing, which can be quickly scaled and provide more units at a lower cost. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are another important option, and we should make it easier for residents to add new ADUs or permit older ones.

We must streamline the permitting process, simplify applications, and expedite development approvals. Government must become more efficient, reducing costs and increasing service quality to meet the growing demand for housing. By working on both market-rate and affordable housing solutions, we can ensure that everyone has access to a place to call home.

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.

To expand affordable housing in Oakland, I would focus on maximizing existing local funding sources such as Measure U, which has already shown significant progress and is set to provide another round of funding next year. Programs like Project Homekey and the new Homekey+ initiative also offer valuable opportunities to create more affordable housing options. Additionally, the County's Measure W funds are available to address homelessness and housing, and I believe we should tap into these resources more effectively.

Furthermore, I strongly believe in collaborating closely with the county to fully leverage Prop 1 funds, ensuring that they are used efficiently to meet Oakland's homeless housing needs. Another promising opportunity lies in repurposing vacant office buildings. With the growing number of empty office spaces, we should explore converting these properties into housing. I support exploring these conversions as a viable solution to maximize available space and help address the housing shortage.

Lastly, I am excited about Buffy Wicks' upcoming bond measure, which will support affordable housing projects across the state. I would work to ensure that Oakland is well-positioned to benefit from these funds, allowing us to increase our affordable housing stock and provide relief for our residents. By leveraging these sources and exploring new opportunities, we can make significant progress in addressing our housing crisis.

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?

The imbalance between market-rate and affordable housing production in Oakland reflects the current challenges we face. Market-rate housing has slowed due to higher interest rates, economic uncertainty, and reduced demand in the city. In this environment, it's unlikely that market-rate housing will outpace affordable housing production unless conditions change significantly.

The biggest barriers to affordable housing development are funding and high construction costs. To address this, we need to focus on reducing costs through innovative approaches like manufactured homes, rapid construction techniques, and modular solutions. These methods can lower per-unit costs, making it more feasible to produce affordable housing at scale.

Additionally, there are legislative efforts underway, such as a permitting package in Sacramento, designed to speed up construction, particularly for affordable housing. The S-13 Affordable Housing Combining Zone is another important tool to streamline development. By leveraging these opportunities and focusing on cost-effective construction methods, we can ensure a more balanced and sustainable housing production model.

It's essential that we collaborate effectively between the city and state to address Oakland's housing needs. Only by working together can we create a housing system that meets the needs of all residents, ensuring affordable housing is prioritized alongside market-rate options.

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?

I am deeply committed to ensuring that Oakland remains a city where both renters and homeowners can thrive without the threat of displacement or financial hardship. While Oakland is known for having some of the strongest tenant protections in the country, we must also be mindful of the impact that these policies can have on small and medium-sized landlords, who are critical to providing housing options. Many of these landlords rely on rental income to maintain their properties and support their families. Unfortunately, we've seen a number of small landlords go bankrupt because they can't absorb the financial strain of tenants unable to pay rent.

Rent support is crucial to preventing homelessness, but we must also be careful not to discourage housing providers from staying in the rental market. Policies must strike a balance between protecting tenants and not placing excessive financial burdens on landlords. I would explore options like offering tax incentives, grants for property improvements, or other forms of support to help landlords continue providing affordable housing while ensuring that tenants are not unfairly displaced.

Moreover, we must encourage more equitable opportunities for homeownership, which will contribute to increasing housing supply. House hacking, room rentals, ADU rentals, and duplexes are all viable ways to make homeownership more affordable, as rental income can help homeowners cover their mortgage costs. We need to promote policies that support these creative housing solutions to ensure more people have access to housing and the ability to invest in property.

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?

While I understand the need for action regarding encampments, simply removing individuals from the streets without providing viable solutions is not the way forward. We must approach this issue with compassion, providing a pathway out of poverty rather than just moving people around. Individuals experiencing homelessness deserve dignity and access to services to regain stability in their lives.

To prevent more households from becoming homeless, we need to focus on root causes by providing rent subsidies, mental health and addiction services, job training, and affordable housing options. These interventions can help keep people in their homes and reduce the flow into homelessness.

For those already experiencing homelessness, I support a campus-style model like Haven for Hope in San Antonio. This model integrates shelter, health services, job training, and social services in one location, providing a clean, safe space for people to regain stability. It directly connects to affordable housing projects, offering a seamless transition from emergency shelter to permanent housing.

This model will drive down long-term costs by improving service coordination and tracking data. It helps individuals regain independence, access stable jobs, and break

free from the cycle of homelessness. I am committed to bringing this model to Oakland, creating a sustainable system that helps people thrive and secure permanent housing.

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?

Oakland has a long history of inequity, and I believe we must take proactive steps to create an equitable housing landscape. One key strategy would be increasing the development of affordable housing in neighborhoods with limited access to affordable options. As a city that was segregated by design in the 1930's, we need to work harder to desegregate the city.

We also need to expand community land trusts and ensure community-based decision-making in planning and zoning processes. This means engaging residents, particularly those most affected by displacement, in the creation and implementation of housing policies. Ensuring equitable access to housing also involves addressing discriminatory practices in housing. I support strengthening support for families trying to break into homeownership. By removing barriers to access and investing in neighborhoods, we can move closer to a more equitable housing future for all Oakland residents.

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 the concept of the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), as it offers tenants the potential to empower themselves and promote community stability. However, I believe we need to carefully weigh the pros and cons, as implementation can be complex and may have unintended consequences.

Pros include tenant empowerment, the preservation of affordable housing, and reduced displacement. It also encourages better property maintenance by landlords, knowing that tenants may have the opportunity to purchase the property.

Cons, however, include the complexity of the process and potential financial barriers for tenants, as not everyone can afford to buy their building. This could lead to frustration if tenants are unable to act on the opportunity. Additionally, it might cause delays in sales,

tension in landlord-tenant relationships, and even raise property prices as landlords anticipate potential sales.

In conclusion, while I support the policy conceptually, I believe that careful planning, tenant education, and a consideration of local market conditions are critical for its successful implementation.

- 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?**

First, I want to say that I believe in smart growth and that public land presents an opportunity to ensure we have a city that is positioned for the future, but we also need a balance of green spaces and community spaces. Some public lands are better suited for housing than others. That said, we must also adhere to the California surplus land act, and prioritize affordable housing. Oakland takes too long to get things done, so taking years to address this and come back with a plan is not acceptable. The Mayor has the ability to use a very loud microphone to pressure politicians and the process, which may be needed here. In general, Oakland government takes too long to make simple decisions and to take action on issues that we need to make progress on.

- 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?**

The Coliseum area represents one of Oakland's most valuable assets, and I do not support a "fire sale" approach to its future. We cannot afford to give away this property without a real vision for its potential. The Coliseum should be more than just a development project—it should be the cornerstone of a bold vision for Oakland's future. As a major transit hub with vast undeveloped land, this area offers the opportunity to reimagine the city and create lasting value for all Oaklanders.

In addition to affordable housing, I would push for commitments to local hiring and job training programs, so that Oaklanders have access to economic opportunities created by these developments. Developers should be responsible for funding these community benefits through impact fees or developer contributions. If necessary, the City should step in to subsidize costs to ensure the project serves the public good, not just private interests. The Coliseum area has the potential to be a transformative development for Oakland—let's ensure it benefits everyone.

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 commit to ensuring that the boomerang funds remain dedicated to affordable housing solutions in Oakland. These funds are a crucial resource for addressing the housing crisis, and we must ensure they are used effectively to meet the needs of our community.

However, in light of our current challenges, I believe we must make our resources count and scale housing solutions to meet the size of the crisis. While permanent supportive housing is essential, it is currently costing over \$1 million per unit, a figure that is unsustainable given the number of people we need to help. We need to redefine what affordable housing means and focus on solutions that can be scaled to the population, focusing on more rapid construction manufactured units that are a fraction of the cost. The fund should also pay for more safe parking sites to expand locations where those living in their cars can have a safe place to be at night.

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?

Impact fees are facing significant challenges, particularly with the Sheetz v. El Dorado County Supreme Court ruling, which could threaten their viability. Additionally, to remain competitive in a down economy, Oakland may need to consider waiving impact fees for new developments, as other cities are doing to attract business and investment.

The advantage of impact fees is that they generate revenue for affordable housing development, ensuring new projects contribute to addressing the housing crisis. However, these fees can increase development costs, slowing down projects and limiting the amount of new housing coming online.

In contrast, inclusionary housing requirements, which mandate that a percentage of units be affordable, ensure affordable housing is built as the city grows. However, these requirements also raise development costs, making it harder for developers to proceed with projects. Office conversions present a major opportunity to increase Oakland's housing stock. With many office buildings vacant, especially post-pandemic, converting these spaces into housing through legislation like Ting's bill offers a faster, cost-effective way to add more units. This approach, coupled with state funding and potential bond measures, could help meet our housing goals without overly burdening new developments with high fees.

Ultimately, we must balance these funding sources with the current economic reality and find innovative solutions that meet both housing demand and community needs.

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?

Whenever the City makes significant investments or concessions, I believe it should negotiate a portion of the housing produced is affordable. Additionally, new developments should integrate community amenities, such as parks, community centers, and transportation access, to ensure that the new housing benefits the entire neighborhood. These investments should not only address housing needs but also create opportunities for economic mobility and improved quality of life for all Oakland residents.