

Oakland City Council candidate questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete The Oaklandside's 2020 election questionnaire. We understand we're asking a lot of you and your time, but we feel that Oakland voters deserve to know as much as possible about each candidate's views on major issues like housing affordability, homelessness, public safety, and more. We will be posting your answers to these questions on our website for our readers to see, and noting whether candidates chose not to respond. We are not endorsing anyone for office.

We'd like to receive your answers by August 28. Please briefly answer each question below using no more than 200 words. Please be as specific as possible when discussing policy ideas or positions you've taken, or would take, on different issues. Our reporters will also follow up with you for a phone or Zoom interview at some point.

Your name: Aaron Clay

City Council district seat you are running for: District 7

We want to know more about you and the reasons you're running for council:

1. Please list your age, education, any professional licenses or other relevant credentials, your current occupation, and your neighborhood of residence.

I am 51 years old, raised and educated in Oakland public schools before going to Morehouse College and graduating with a degree in Political Science. I continued my education at Loyola University of Chicago Law School, where I received a Leadership and Service Scholarship Award and my law degree. I also have Professional Certificates in Energy Innovation from Stanford University, Advanced Energy Law and Policy from UC Berkeley School of Law, Core Business Credential from Harvard Business School and a Global Social Impact Fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy.
I live in the 94605 area code.

2. Before running for City Council, how were you involved in local government? Have you served on any local boards or commissions?

I have served as an advisor and active participant for a number of local organizations. I served as a member of the:

- California Energy Commission Working Group to develop opportunities and funding for clean energy jobs and economic opportunities in low-income and disadvantaged communities;
- an advisor for Green the Church, an Initiative that promotes sustainable practices for organizations of Faith and their communities to build economic & political change
- a Director at Solar-Oversight, a Oakland based nonprofit organization created to help structure transactional financing to deliver energy efficiency improvements and sustainable energy solutions to underserved communities and nonprofit organizations;
- a co-founder for the Oakland Green Jobs Summit and Job Fair,
- an advisor for Solar Richmond, a nonprofit organization to help promote environmental justice, energy training and business opportunities for low income and under-employed residents; and
- I am also a business consultant and presenter for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Cannabis Education Initiative.

I also currently serves on the Board of Youth Uprising, an East Oakland non-profit organization whose mission is to develop leadership, mental wellbeing, community connections, educational attainment, and career achievement in East Oakland youth, along with teaching in East Oakland schools as an OUSD employee.

3. What's your favorite restaurant or small business in your district—or somewhere you spend a lot of time? What's your favorite local park?

Clay

I spend a lot of time hiking in the Regional Park in the Oakland Hills and volunteering at Youth Uprising.

4. Where can voters get more information about your campaign?

Clay4d7.com

Homelessness and housing affordability are issues that many Oaklanders rank high on their list of concerns, regardless of what district they live in.

5. Tell us what you think the root causes of Oakland's homelessness crisis are.

Lack of affordable housing for working class people and families. When a resident has a temporary obstacle in their life (such as job loss, family death, landlord selling property illness or other setback), without enough affordable housing stock, there is nowhere to move to in this time of escalating housing prices.

6. What specific policies will you advance to address the homelessness crisis?

Under HUD guidelines, "Low Income Affordable" in Oakland is a household income of \$105,350 per year for a family of four which is not affordable housing for the majority of East Oakland residents. Over 50% of our residents pay more than 30% their income for housing. We need to be more intentional about providing housing and finding ways to fill the housing affordability gap. Utilizing city owned land for more affordable housing makes more sense than building luxury condos that current residents can't afford. Having the city provide the land on a ground lease with affordable covenants can help fill that affordability gap while increasing a permanent supply of housing that Oakland residents can afford without being displaced.

7. When you think of the city's existing homelessness policies, what's working and what isn't?

There are different types of unsheltered people in different situations with different needs. There needs to be more targeted outreach to residents that are unsheltered to understand who they are, what their individual needs are and what kind of short and long term resources they need from the City of Oakland to help them get back on their feet.

8. What are the root causes of Oakland's housing affordability crisis?

Oakland has not created enough housing for its residents. In 2016, The California Housing Partnership Corp. estimated that Oakland requires nearly 60,000 more homes to reduce prices and accommodate low-income and very low-income families. We need housing of all types and price levels for our current residents from transitional and supportive housing to affordable workforce development housing to market rate housing that doesn't cause further displacement of existing residents. Creating no housing at all causes incoming residents to bid up the prices of housing that are available, lowers the housing that is affordable for current residents.

9. What specific policies would you advance to address the affordable housing crisis?

We need Housing that is:

- Adequate (number of units and suitable for healthy living)
- Accessible (located near jobs, services, amenities and transportation)
- Affordable (affordable for current residents and working class people)

We need to create more housing, but also improve the substandard housing stock we currently have to improve not only the health and living conditions of our residents, but also to maintain the affordable housing stock in our community. If a rental property continues to deteriorate, it will be considered unfit to rent and purchased by an outside investor, who will do the improvements and price it out of the range of current residents. If a landlord cant maintain a basic level of habitability for an apartment building, the tenant or a nonprofit organization should be given the opportunity to purchase for the benefit of the community.

If elected, you'll likely have to balance the city's next budget, which has been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

10. What will you cut? Where will you find savings in the next budget?

The budget is a list of our priorities. We need to find savings but also increase our revenue though support current and new businesses. We need to determine what resources need to be redirected to help residents be able to live the best life they can. Currently Oakland spends more money (41% of our budget) than other major cities on its Police Department which vastly outpaces expenditures for vital community resources and services.

11. How might you find new sources of revenue to help the city make it through tough times and grow in the future?

We have to grow our economic base through new job creation. Under the Biden Clean Energy Plan, there are proposed Investments of \$2 trillion over the next 4 years for public investment in clean energy and innovation and a target of 100% clean electricity standard by 2035 through incentives for deep retrofits that

Clay

combine electrification, efficiency, and clean power generation. Oakland can be an economic hub for those Green jobs and businesses.

Oakland has to be ready to capitalize on those opportunities. We have people who want jobs that they can support their family on, we have land ideal for light manufacturing and development of renewable energy resources and we have people who understand and have been advocating for clean energy in our community. We just need the will and experience by our city leadership to create a community centered plan to create pathways for young people and for unemployed or underemployed residents to be a part of one of the largest transformative aspects of our society moving forward.

12. What will your budget priorities be? What services or projects will you ensure receive a growing share of the city budget?

I believe we need to significantly change how we imagine public safety and direct more funding and resources to housing and economic development issues, especially in East Oakland.

There are three measures specific to Oakland on the ballot this year. Tell us briefly why you support or oppose each.

13. Strengthening the Oakland Police Commission and making it more independent.
Support

14. Allowing anyone 16 and older to vote for Oakland Unified School District directors.
Support

15. Removing the \$1,000 cap on fines for ordinance violations.
Support

The City Council voted on some controversial and major policies over the past six months. Please tell us how you would have voted on the following, and what you think the next steps should be:

16. The council adopted the goal of reducing the Police Department's share of the general fund budget by 50% in the 2021-2023 budget.

I think you have to determine the vision first before you determine how much it will cost. We need to create a community centered plan on reimagining Public Safety and then determine the resources needed to create that vision.

17. The council approved a moratorium on residential evictions until the end of the COVID-19 emergency.

Support

18. The council strengthened rent control and Just Cause eviction protections and Oakland's Tenant Protection Ordinance.

Support

19. The council rejected a plan to reform Oakland's business tax by changing it from flat tax rates to a progressive tax in which bigger companies with higher gross receipts would pay more.

Our business tax system needs to be reevaluated.

20. The council voted to create a pilot program to send unarmed civilians to respond to nonviolent mental health crises, instead of the police.

Support

City Councilmembers reps will need to make big decisions on more hot-button issues in the coming year. How would you handle the following?

21. Should the city permit the A's to build a new ballpark at Howard Terminal in D3 or keep the ballpark in D7 near the Coliseum?

The Oakland Coliseum is a city owned asset that should be invested in a manner that reflects the community's priorities and needs without jeopardizing our future.

Currently, two of the more urgent needs in our community are housing and jobs. The Coliseum land has the potential to be part of a solution for both of those issues, but only if the land is not sold to a private developer.

The Oakland A's should stay in East Oakland and build a new stadium at the current Coliseum site, but under a long term lease with the City. The transportation infrastructure is already built out (BART, 880 Freeway) and won't cause additional environmental damage as would building on an industrial contaminated site at Howard Terminal. The remaining land should be developed based on the needs and for the residents in District 7. The Coliseum land is suitable for development for multiple sport teams, housing, retail, restaurants and other small local businesses.

22. Should the city keep fighting the proposed coal terminal in West Oakland, or permit the developer to build it?

We should stay the course protesting against shipping coal through West Oakland. I was part of the protest before and I will continue that important goal of stopping pollutants from creating negative health impacts in our communities. It has not been proven safe for Oakland residents, especially in an area where the families have been historically been impacted by prior ongoing environmental injustices. We can do better by investing in green jobs and the green economy than supporting a dying industry.

At the beginning of the year, we are going to have a new Federal administration that will be creating programs and incentives to promote clean energy jobs and businesses. Under the Biden Clean Energy Plan, there are proposed investments of \$2 trillion over the next 4 years for public investment in clean energy and innovation and a target of 100% clean electricity standard by 2035 through incentives for deep retrofits that combine electrification, efficiency, and

clean power generation. With the right leadership, Oakland can be an economic hub for those Green jobs and businesses.

Tell us about how you'll improve public safety.

23. What's your approach to reducing gun violence? What specific policies or tools will you advance that will save lives? More police? More non-police services? Please be specific.

I believe that the current responsibilities of police officers are too broad. I believe that non violent incidents should be managed by civilian organizations specializing in those issues of homelessness, truancy, mental health, family counseling and others and should be properly funded proportionally from the current police budget. Police do not prevent crime, whereas jobs and sheltering people has been proven to be effective in reducing crime rates.

24. Too many of Oakland's streets are dangerous for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. What policies will you advance that will improve transportation safety?

Many of the recent changes to streets in East Oakland were done without enough input and understanding of the community that lives here. Some of the changes made to try to "slow" Oakland drivers down have not been successful. Changing streets that were historically designed to be primary thoroughways through the city into one lane streets do not necessarily make those streets safer. We need a better collaborative process with the residents in the communities where these changes are made.

How will you help Oakland workers and businesses thrive?

25. What specific policies will you advance to help Oakland workers who struggle with low wages, exploitative employers, and the uncertainties of the gig economy?

As co-founder and CEO of an Oakland-based renewable energy company, I believe in creating real economic development based on community ownership and tangible benefits. The Gig economy is here to stay. We need to look at ways to support those who choose to support themselves and their families in this way, whether through enforcing labor laws, supporting our unions, providing group health benefits, community bank financial privileges or other needed community services.

26. How will you help small and local businesses succeed, especially with the recession caused by the pandemic?

A recent report estimated that Oakland could lose 50% of its Black and Brown owned small businesses by the end of the year due to the combination of the construction of the BLT line on E14 the last two years and the effect of the Covid19 quarantine. This affects families, children, and local workers who rely on the revenue from small businesses. If we don't support our small business with the maximum effort, it will result in more evictions, more foreclosures, more unsheltered residents.

We need a Small Business Enterprise program that does extensive and effective outreach right now to every small business (SBE) in the City that focuses on assistance with:

- Conversion to post quarantine economy
- Increased Marketing and Promotional Campaigns
- Rent reduction and lease modifications
- Employee support and training
- Anything else that is discovered would help SBEs thrive during this transition

Clay

Small businesses are our economic engine, we have to be more international about what we can do for them, and not require the business owners to come searching for resources downtown.