

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: Derreck Johnson

City Council district seat you are running for: Oakland City-at-Large

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.

Age: 55

Occupation: Entrepreneur

B.A. Fisk University

Residence: West Oakland, District 3

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

I've worked to reduce violence through Khadafy Washington Foundation for Non-Violence and oversaw violence prevention funding on the City's Measure Y Committee. I've overseen critical employment and job training programs that create opportunity for Oaklanders through his work on the City's Workforce Development Board. And I've helped provide scholarships to low-income youth through the Summit Bank Foundation.

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?

Johnson

My own restaurant, Home of Chicken and Waffles has to be my favorite. I was raised in West Oakland (in the Acorn housing projects) so West Oakland neighborhoods are still near and dear to my heart. As a kid, I learned how to swim at Defermery Park, which is still my favorite park today.

4. Where can voters get more information about your campaign?
<https://www.johnsonforoakland.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. (Review the City of Oakland Pathway Plan- in draft but has been before City Council and defines the causes of homelessness)

The level of homelessness in Oakland is an indictment of our failed national priorities. We must do a more effective job providing assistance for the most vulnerable. 70% of Oakland's homeless population is Black. As a Black Oakland native, this is particularly troubling to me. Oakland's homelessness is part of a regional crisis rooted in 5 main causes:

- Insufficient housing supply, which led to a lack of sufficient affordable housing
- Insufficient inventory of shelters and permanent supportive housing, and gaps in rapid re-housing resources
- Lack of political will
- Insufficient resources for psychiatric care
- Legacy of redlining and urban renewal

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

- Push for the adoption of the Pathway Plan, with the goal of creating permanent housing solutions
- Improve prevention and diversion programs.
- Expand the housing supply available to extremely low-income households.
- Test and rapidly scale new accommodation models.
- Drive greater state and regional collaboration by leveraging my relationships at every level developed over a lifetime of living in and running a small business in Oakland.
- Advocate for consolidating existing state programs into new State Homeless Services Agency.
- Explore ways to simplify and strengthen the planning and approval process for housing.
- Work with stakeholders at the county and regional level to develop and

implement regional homelessness management plans.

- Leverage my business experience and relationships to build a plan for private and philanthropic capital to get involved to help scale effective solutions.
- Use technology to improve homeless services.

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

Winning the recent grant applications to the State's HomeKey program to fund acquisition of housing units for homeless and seniors would be a big win. Programs that help people that are on the verge of losing housing are highly effective. Keep Oakland Housed is one example. .

The current street encampments need to be continually supported with sanitation. It's always a challenge to make use of limited resources for temporary solutions while longer term the goal must be to build and acquire more permanent housing. It is also critical to improve the City's relationship with Alameda County as they are a key partner in funding and health and human services support for the unhoused population.

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

Oakland's housing affordability crisis is primarily the result of a severe housing shortage in the Bay Area. Oakland's slow planning approval process, the Council's late implementation of affordable housing impact fees, and the failure of surrounding cities to build sufficient housing all contribute to a chronic shortage that skews the market toward higher prices. Housing for very-low-income households has been hardest hit.

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

The City needs to create incentives to increase private sector investment in affordable housing. I would advocate for a full inventory of options to be researched and brought to the City Council for consideration.

- Remove Regulatory Barriers to Accessory Dwelling Units
- Increase Minimum Zoning near Transit
- Speed up the Housing Approval Process
- Expedited Approvals and Financial Incentives for Affordable and Workforce Housing
- Unlock Public Land for Affordable Housing
- Grow and Stabilize the Construction Labor Force

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?

My goal would be to first focus funding on core services,. One key issue is that the General Fund (GF) is what is mainly impacted by the decrease in revenues and it is currently funding public safety (about 70%) and general government which includes support services such as human resources, fiscal services, City Clerk, City Administrator, City Council, the Mayor's Office , Parks, Recreation and Youth Development. These functions have been reduced over time and would need to be closely examined. The Reimagine Safety Task Force will be looking at the Police portion of this and I will be open to the recommendations that come from that effort. The other GF is used to meet requirements of City ballot measures such as the Library and Kids First which will have to be met.

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

I would want to hear from the community and have a full menu of options from the City Administrator and Finance Director. Getting small business back in service and attracting new business will be key to bringing the COVID impacted revenue back. The pandemic has greatly restricted the normal functions in the City, with no fans at A's games Festivals and events not permitted, and no inside use of restaurants all hurting our revenue picture. We need to shut down the Coronavirus and get back to normal to have the revenues improve. Unfortunately that also may require new leadership at the federal level.

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

Funding the Economic Development staff to do the hard work of rebuilding is key. Making sure that the KK funds for Streets, City Facilities and Affordable Housing are all leveraged to the maximum extent possible. We need a complete review from A to Z for the entire budget, including how each program or function is currently operating and what the costs are, in order to assess the opportunities for growth and priority.

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.**

Yes, because we want to increase citizen oversight of the police department.

Johnson

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

Yes. School Board Members have a direct impact on the education and quality of life for our youth. Also, getting our youth more involved in civics *before* they turn 18 will help them become more informed and involved citizens.

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

I would have voted yes on the ordinance provided it had an exemption for low income families, and seniors on fixed incomes.

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.

During this campaign, I have been advised by many groups, and for me, at this time, I am comfortable with a 30% reduction in the OPD budget, with the caveat that once I have more information that is concrete on what exactly are the recommended cuts and the plan for the redistribution of those funds, I will be in a better position to provide my opinion, and if the evidence indicates that we can still maintain public safety and fund social service programs, I would be interested in looking at where we could achieve additional cuts.

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

I would have voted yes and continue to support a moratorium on evictions until the pandemic is over.

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

Oakland has passed some of the strongest tenant protections in the state. Tenants deserve and need protection and in those areas I would be in agreement..

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.

I agree and would have also rejected this ordinance. In this current crisis of COVID-19, the uncertainty of what all businesses are facing should be paramount and at the forefront of any decision to change the tax structure right now. We must first deal with businesses large and small getting through the pandemic.

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

I would have voted yes on this pilot program. Nonviolent people experiencing a mental health crisis, or folks who fell asleep in their car in a drive-thru restaurant, for example, do not necessitate a response from an officer with a gun, who may just unnecessarily escalate the situation. Additionally by reforming this area of police responsibility and redirecting funding for these types of responses to mental health workers and trained unarmed city staff would allow Police officers in Oakland to be focused on the real threat, which is the rise in violent crime and homicide.

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?

I've spoken to many groups about this question and I am concerned with where we are right now, at a stalemate between the City and the A's. I'm also concerned that the A's are using Howard Terminal as leverage, to force the City into selling them the property when we would be best served by putting it up for a competitive bid or trying to work out a deal to redevelop the current Coliseum site and the surrounding area with housing and retail. The Howard Terminal site could also have a negative impact on union workers at the Port, something I strongly oppose

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

The residents of West Oakland have been severely impacted by the poor environmental standards and air quality for far too long. Having coal come through these neighborhoods will only exacerbate the existing problem.

The reality is that Oakland's ban on transporting coal through the city was recently affirmed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Oakland is facing serious major budgetary shortfalls and the costly legal bills following such losses in court only makes the situation worse. If elected I would choose a strategy of mediating with the developer and see if we can come up with a plan, with a common sense solution that would be mutually beneficial to promote the health and safety of our citizens.

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.**

First I would continue to support and expand the "Ceasefire" program. This partnership between the police department and community leaders has proved to be invaluable in getting guns off the streets, dealing with gang violence, and identifying those who are most likely to commit violent crimes.

The answer is not more police but more community involvement. We know that Oakland's midnight basketball league has also helped curb violence and can continue to once the pandemic is over. I would be an advocate to continue to support the league's effort.

I have personally been involved in the Ceasefire program and from my firsthand experience the best way to improve public safety is through education and jobs. I would like to reinvest in our youth through vocational training, Internships and summer Job programs. When it is all said and done we have to do more in early education, to make sure our kids get the reading and writing skills they need to strive to be successful as adults.

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

The city of Oakland has already improved cycling and pedestrian safety by installing the neon safety cones. Unlike the incumbent, I would work with the Mayor and the City's Department of Transportation to implement policies that enhance safety protocol for our streets.

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 a small business owner in Oakland for over the past 30 years and a member of the City of Oakland's Workforce Development Board for the past 5 years, I have advocated for Scaling up our relationships with our CBO's to: (1) Hire Oakland First. (2) Provide training in various business sectors to those individuals from the most vulnerable communities to help them achieve a livable wage (3) Enhance our public-private partnerships to spur job creation.

- 26. How will you help small and local businesses succeed, especially with the**

recession caused by the pandemic?

In order to help Oakland recover economically from COVID-19, we must work directly in our community to provide small business owners with tools that work, like low-interest micro loans and City fee waivers for struggling businesses, to keep employees working and help neighborhoods thrive even in tough times. We must prevent commercial corridors from withering away and becoming ghost towns. We can also conduct outreach to anchor businesses, help struggling businesses resolve issues with landlords, and even put emergency rules in place to expand where business can be conducted and meals can be served while maintaining social distancing. It is essential to also make it easier to start and restart a small business in Oakland. We must trim the bureaucracy and cut the red tape that delays and prevents small business from opening, or—even more critical in the coming months—reopening.