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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: Rebecca Kaplan

City Council district seat you are running for: 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.

I grew up in Ontario, Canada and my first job was as a Hebrew bible teacher. As an undergraduate, I ran our student LGBT group, and was involved in getting our campus to divest from Apartheid-era South Africa. I have worked as an attorney, handling prisoner rights and housing discrimination cases. I am admitted to the State Bar of California.

My educational background includes:

- Bachelor's degree in Psychology (With honors - Phi Beta Kappa) from M.I.T.
- Certificate in Women in Politics and Government, Boston College
- M.A. in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts University
- J.D. from Stanford Law School

I am 49 years old; I am currently the Oakland City Councilmember At Large, and in January 2019, I was unanimously selected as Council President by my colleagues.

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

Before running for City Council, I worked as an attorney in Oakland helping residents who faced housing discrimination. I served as a State Assembly Legislative Aide, and in 2002, I was elected to serve on the Board of AC Transit. I have served on the Board of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), the Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC), and Stopwaste.

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?

One of my favorite places to spend time is the waterfront walking/biking path along the Oakland estuary, which borders the waterfront in Jack London Square and beyond. In fact, plans are underway to continue this path to eventually connect all around the bay.

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

<http://kaplanforoakland.org/>

<https://twitter.com/Kaplan4Oakland>

I'm honored to be endorsed by a wide range of people and organizations in our community, including the Sierra Club, Alameda Labor Council, Black Women Organized for Political Action PAC, Equality California, our nurses, firefighters, the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, and many more. For more info see:

<http://kaplanforoakland.org/endorsements/>

Also, this year it is more important than ever to vote early, and make sure our ballots get submitted. Every California voter will be sent a vote-by-mail ballot. People can return them by mail, (which should be done early), to designated in-person voting locations, and to official ballot drop boxes. We have also encouraged, and the County Registrar is working on, opening additional safe-distance voting locations and additional ballot drop boxes.

More information about this available at:

<http://kaplanforoakland.org/how-to-vote-by-mail-and-more/>

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

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

Oakland's homelessness crisis, and the dramatic increase in recent years in the numbers of people living on our streets and sidewalks, is largely caused by displacement, as increasing numbers of people have been pushed out of housing by wrongful foreclosures, excessive rent increases, and evictions. The overwhelming majority of people who are homeless in Oakland are from here, and the majority of homelessness was caused by economic factors. In addition, these factors are disproportionately impacting African Americans, who face disproportionately high rates of evictions, foreclosures, and homelessness. Historically, broader decisions made by former Governor Ronald Reagan, and others, to decimate mental health care, make cuts to education, and an increase in mass incarceration, have all contributed to worsening our homelessness crisis.

<https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/2019-Oakland-Point-In-Time-Count-2-page-infographic.pdf>

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

We have worked successfully to pass laws strengthening protections for tenants, to cut unjust evictions and excessive rent increases, which are a source of much displacement and unaffordability.

We have also fought for dedicated funding to help with homelessness, including in Oakland Measure W (Vacant property tax), and the recent Measure Q on the March 2020 ballot. I have worked to make it easier to provide better places for people to reside, including passing a law to allow owners of vacant

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residential lots to have an RV on their lot for residential use, and to make it easier to add more affordable housing.

I also recognize that access to quality jobs for local residents can help reduce homelessness, and I support local hire, quality jobs, local small business utilization, racial equity, and job training. In new development projects, I support including affordable housing, local jobs, and community serving retail such as access to healthy food in underserved communities, and policies like “ban the box” and anti-discrimination in hiring and housing. We have successfully fought for improved local job training and pre-apprenticeship programs.

I have supported and will continue to fight for Oakland to do more to support our unsheltered residents, including through the acquisition of properties to help house people.

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

I recognize we must provide humane and respectful treatment to those who are unsheltered, and I have brought and passed Council action to prevent the criminalization of the homeless, and to shift away from a “sweeps” approach to a more thoughtful and effective strategy, including providing for sanitation, and allowable locations for people living in RVs, cars and tents, including the “safe parking” program, allowing RVs on private lots, designating publicly-owned lands for these purposes, and passing ballot measures to improve funding for services for our unsheltered residents, and to provide civilian personnel to help. In addition, Oakland’s data have shown that some of the more effective strategies are places like the Henry Robinson Center, which provide those who are unsheltered with a room to stay in, together with supportive services. (This program has a higher success rate than, for example, the tuff sheds). This is part of why I have fought for successfully city actions to expand this successful model, including the recent acquisition of a new facility, the Holland, to provide these services, and actions we have worked for, to acquire additional dorms and other similar buildings for these purposes.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/otisrtaylorjr/article/Room-for-hope-for-homeless-at-the-Holland-in-13575328.php>

We also must recognize that more people are being pushed into homelessness, through displacement, and that is part of why I and others of my colleagues fought for tenant assistance to prevent displacement – since for our interventions to help the homeless to be effective we also need to prevent more people from being pushed into homelessness.

4. What are the root causes of Oakland’s housing affordability crisis?

Oakland has failed to produce the needed number of housing units, coming in far below the number of affordable units assigned to Oakland in the Regional Housing Needs Assessment.

<https://ebho.org/press-release-impact-fees-into-affordable-housing-now-action/>

The lack of sufficient numbers of affordable housing units is a significant part of Oakland’s affordability crisis and is part of why I have been urging to increase affordable housing production, including through the use of public lands. In addition to inadequate production of affordable housing in Oakland, the housing affordability crisis in Oakland is also worsened by additional factors, including:

- *Excessive rent increases on existing units, including the problem of State law exempting certain corporate-owned housing from tenant protections.*

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- *Inadequate housing construction in surrounding communities that have built jobs/office space, but not built or permitted adequate housing for the workforce they are seeking to attract, leaving Oakland to absorb housing demand for Silicon Valley and San Francisco.*
- *A history of destruction of viable housing, especially African American owned housing, such as the demolitions that took place for the building of the freeways*
- *In some cases, zoning, permitting rules and procedures impede housing affordability. We have worked to pass amendments to make it easier to produce missing housing units in Oakland, including to make it easier to add Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), to extend the hours and staffing at the permit counters, updates to zoning to allow for more transit oriented development, to reduce parking requirements that can impede viability of housing, and fought for laws to make it easier for faith-based organizations to build housing on their property.*

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

I support the creation and preservation of deeply affordable housing, and the decriminalization of homelessness and provision of respectful supports. I have helped move forward multiple actions to support these goals, including fighting for an amendment to the budget last year to create a Permanent Affordability Fund for the development of deeply affordable housing and for acquisition and rehabilitation of buildings suitable for deeply affordable housing. I was the co-author of the Public Land Policy to prioritize affordable housing development on public land. Using public lands for the construction of affordable housing is one of the important strategies that we can do as a local government, since that is a resource we have the power to mobilize. I successfully brought through Council recently an action to put out a list of publicly owned properties to affordable housing developers, to seek proposals to use those properties for affordable housing production.

I helped pass the impact fee fund legislation that requires market rate developers to pay fees to help fund affordable housing. (And also brought back to Council the action to require an audit and accounting of these funds, when we learned the Administration was not fully tracking and distributing them). <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Oakland-collects-fee-for-affordable-housing-but-14894300.php>

In addition, I believe we must enforce anti-displacement protections, and prevent the improper removal of such housing, for example, for SRO's. I also support expanding programs that help incentivize deep affordability, such as funding to renovate/build units that will then be dedicated to be used through programs like Section 8 and more, and use tools like land trusts where possible to preserve affordability. In addition, I recognize that people sometimes lose affordable units due to illegal evictions and improperly excessive rent increases, which is why I have fought for, and will continue to fight for, assistance for tenants to prevent these acts of displacement. In our budget we have directly funded anti-displacement efforts, including emergency assistance for tenants. All of these items, if implemented, will reduce the number of unsheltered neighbors and prevent displacement.

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

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

Policing is the area of Oakland government which received the lowest score on the equity indicators report and requires substantial change, and it is also the largest discretionary spending category in the budget. True public safety requires providing the right response for the job, and not assuming that sending someone with a gun is the solution to every problem. Thus far, we have passed my proposals to launch civilian mental health response, and to civilianize the Special Events function out of the police department. This will save community millions of dollars, as well as providing more effective service. And we have passed a direction to change how speeding/traffic enforcement is handled, to make it more effective and less expensive, while also doing more to prevent speeding and harms to community.

Suggested Cuts:

- Public information/media relations. It makes no sense that the police department has their own separate taxpayer funded PR operation, to put out press releases demanding their department get more money, or putting out harmful false attacks against a family being ripped apart by ICE, etc. The City's media and public outreach efforts should be better coordinated, rather than a separate component of it under OPD.

- Traffic enforcement. Vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle stops. Traffic stops are a large percentage of the public's experience of being detained by police, and a significant public expense. Traffic enforcement (including to prevent speeding) should be civilianized and provided by alternative methods.

- Homelessness Response by civilians

- Mental Health Response by civilians

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/7/1/20677523/mental-health-police-cahoots-oregon-oakland-sweden>

- Special Events – civilianize

- Saving on duplication and outside consultants and liability through these and related changes

- Incorporating grants and donor funds into the budgeting

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

It is important to close loopholes that allow some to avoid paying taxes, both to ensure fairness, and to provide the revenue needed to support vital public services. This includes, for example, that when short term residential rental companies like Airbnb started operating in Oakland, but not paying taxes, I took action to remedy that, and now Oakland does receive Transient Occupancy Tax from them. We worked together with community to craft a tax-and-regulate system for cannabis, which was previously outside that purview. And we are advocating to close the loopholes that allow Transportation Network Companies (TNC) not to pay local taxes, even though they use our public infrastructure for their business. In addition, I am advocating for the passage of Schools and Communities First at the Statewide level, which will also help provide funding for vital public needs. I also support making our tax structure more progressive, so that our smallest businesses pay less, and those with the highest revenues pay the higher rates.

In addition, I have a track record of successfully winning funding for important Oakland needs from regional funding sources, and we can and should seek to expand on that for our community. For example, funding for the Free Broadway Shuttle, bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, cleaner trucks, cranes, and trains, including in and around the Port, support for lighting and safety improvements. Other donor/grant funds should also be incorporating into the budget.

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

We must take significant action now to avoid growing woes from a pandemic health crisis and economy, social and environmental crises, with ever-shrinking budgets and worsening air quality and public health. By taking the right actions now, we can address these problems including prioritizing local hiring and local business utilization, civilianizing important functions and providing for police accountability both to reduce harms and to save money, sustainable transportation (including bicycle and pedestrian safety), and attracting green business and growing green jobs and healthcare jobs, and improving the sustainability, responsiveness, and effectiveness of our government. It also requires protecting residents from displacement and taking action to help our unhoused neighbors with dignity rather than punishment. It requires recognizing the inequities, including that Black residents are disproportionately impacted, including in the concentration of air pollution, and in the focus of police stops and enforcement, and must be remedied. These are just some of the steps we must take, and it requires working in coalition, including residents, stakeholders and officials, and a broader movement for building a sustainable and just future.

In some cases, it means continuing to fight for implementation even after the Council votes, such as when we voted to fund anti-displacement assistance for residents, but the Administration declined to issue the funding for over a year and a half – while thousands more were displaced.

<https://www.eastbayexpress.com/SevenDays/archives/2018/05/22/oakland-failed-to-spend-22-million-on-anti-displacement-and-homeless-assistance>

We must support and sustain local jobs, and support efforts ranging from expanding affordable housing, ensuring the impact fee law and tenant protections are adhered to and implemented, improving energy independence and transportation and land use planning, and bring City hall's computer technology systems into this millennium so that basic public information is easily available and so residents can obtain permits and other services online saving, time, money and fuel, and protections from spread of disease, and to provide vital needs, including for example, public Wi-Fi in communities of concern.

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

9. Strengthening the Oakland Police Commission and making it more independent.

I am proud to have worked with community and stakeholder to author this measure and it received a unanimous vote of Council to be on the November Ballot. I am in support, and am one of the signatories to the argument in favor.

<https://draketalkoakland.com/2020/07/24/coalition-for-police-accountability-praises-measure-to-strengthen-police-commission-on-fall-ballot/>

To provide trust and accountability, it is important to have people who are independent of the police chain of command, to oversee these issues. Recent examples, including the tear gassing of demonstrators, the Pawlik case, and false statements made about those matters by OPD leadership, reinforce the need for independent oversight.

<https://oaklandside.org/2020/07/06/opd-excessive-force-against-protesters/>

<https://oaklandside.org/2020/08/17/former-opd-chief-allowed-corrosive-police-culture-to-derail-shooting-investigation/>

10. Allowing anyone 16 and older to vote for Oakland Unified School District directors.
I am proud to have worked with youth advocates to author this measure and it received a unanimous vote of Council to be on the November Ballot. I am in support. This will help improve civic participation, build youth involvement in the issues that deeply impact their lives, and expand our democracy.

11. 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:

12. 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 voted yes. Specific next steps include working to adopt alternative approaches to handling particular items that have been handled by police. This includes civilian mental health responders for mental health calls, civilianizing the special events functions from OPD, and working to provide for alternative methods for traffic/speeding enforcement, and bicycle/pedestrian matters, homeless response.

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

Yes. In addition, next steps include advocating for improved access to information about landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities for both landlords and tenants, and mediation as a method of dispute resolution where possible.

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

Yes. In addition, next steps include advocating for improved access to information about landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities for both landlords and tenants, and mediation as a method of dispute resolution where possible.

15. 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 support making our tax system more progressive.

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

Yes, I fully support this effort, to use trained civilians to respond to mental health needs, who are better prepared to handle mental health issues. Other cities that have tried this approach find that it saves money and saves lives. In 2019, I fought for, and won, funding in the Oakland budget for the initial study to design a civilian mental health response program for Oakland. In the current budget, we won funding to launch this program, now called MACRO, and it is funded for launch this year.

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/7/1/20677523/mental-health-police-cahoots-oregon-oakland-sweden>

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

17. 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?

We have not yet received a proposal for Howard Terminal -- we have not received a transportation plan, or an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the site. A decision on a major project of this type cannot be made without an EIR. It should also consider community benefits, community impacts, transportation plans, and related information. Prior to making any decision about how to vote on an EIR and related actions, the Council would have to receive those materials and have an opportunity to review them and a public hearing. Taking a position about how someone plans to vote on an EIR/public hearing that has not been received nor reviewed, is considered inappropriate, and can be grounds for recusal from the vote.

My vision for the Coliseum site, which already has a completed EIR that has been publicly adopted, is: This large, well-located expanse of public land can and should be used to provide development that benefits the community in multiple ways. The Oakland Coliseum site, co-owned by the City of Oakland and Alameda County (the County is in the process of selling their ownership share), provides a unique opportunity with about 200 acres that are on BART, have freeway access, easy airport connection, Amtrak, and great central location in the Bay Area. We can, and should, work toward a future for the site which provides local benefits, including housing at all income levels, jobs, recreation and health, including for our youth, tax revenue, and revitalization.

The future of this great site should include:

· Significant amount of new housing, at all income levels, including deed restricted affordable housing, workforce housing, and ADA accessible housing.

· Business, retail, hotel and convention/conference facilities, and ongoing

presence of major sporting events.

· Maintain and use Arena, including by seeking to bring a WNBA team and other uses. Arena can also be used in partnership with hotel/conference facilities to host events.

· Soccer options. Explore options to provide soccer, including professional games and places for local youth and other soccer teams to practice and play.

· Retail, restaurants, and entertainment. Inside and outdoors. Possibly with outdoor drive-in movie capacity.

· Improved and widened pedestrian access-way from BART, to make the welcoming experience pleasant and easy to cross, without requiring people to go downstairs and back up, no chain link, well-lit and attractive, and with access to shops and food and more.

· Quality jobs for the local community – including opportunities in construction, and incorporating existing workforce from Coliseum/Arena such as concessions, security, etc. Local hiring, equity, and quality standards policies for jobs.

· Local/small business involvement and opportunity, including for local/small businesses to participate in the new development at the site.

· Protections from displacement for existing surrounding local residents and local businesses.

· Option for inclusion of City of Oakland and Alameda County public needs such as a public administration building, and court.

· Secure bike parking/valet.

· Utilize existing approved Plan/EIR.

· And, to ensure a fair and transparent process, and inclusion of affordable housing, abide by surplus lands act, public lands policies and procedures.

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

I have been actively working on this, including in Oakland's vote to prohibit coal, which I actively fought for, and voted for, and in ongoing efforts since that vote. In addition, I believe we will need to continue to also seek support of State officials (the State of California is a major funder of the project) to help in these efforts as well, and we have reached out for that support. I have been actively working in coalition with community advocates on this, including the "No Coal in Oakland Coalition" and would continue to do so, as well as seeking support from County, State, and Regional entities (such as BAAQMD) who could help in these efforts. In addition, I have been working to identify alternative, more environmentally-sound options for the Port and shipping terminal and connecting with leaders and stakeholders at the Port and beyond on these efforts, in terms of non-coal commodities and options, including, for example, materials

made from eucalyptus trees that can be removed, reducing fire danger, providing commodities that can be shipped and sold that are more environmentally beneficial.

Tell us about how you'll improve public safety.

19. 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.

Gun crime is a major problem facing Oakland, including extensive illegal gun dealing. The overwhelming majority of gun crime is committed with guns that are illegally acquired. Tracking down and shutting down the sources of illegal guns thus is a vital component to improving public safety. Gun tracing is an integral part of our ability to solve gun crimes. We know shutting down illegal sources of guns is essential to stopping the danger of gun violence in our communities. We have fought for multiple specific steps to address this, including:

In 2018 during our mid-cycle budget I fought for and won money for a police crime analyst to focus on gun tracing. We fought for and won previously the implementation of gunshot detection technology, which has shown that the locations where shootings are taking place are often not reflected in 9-1-1 calls. We added funding for technology and equipment to be more able to trace guns, and to trace shell casings that are retrieved from crime scenes, which can be connected to a specific gun. And we fought for and won funding for a program to provide immediate deployment and community responsiveness to shootings. Some of these are tasks done by police officers, such as the deployment to the scene of a shooting, and some of it are generally done by civilian personnel, such as the technology aspects of the tracing. We have also supported the Ceasefire program, to reach out directly to people in the community to reduce violence. And fought for laws at the local, State, and beyond to reduce the easy availability of guns, including a local law to prohibit leaving guns loose and unsecured where they can easily fall into the hands of those who use them for violence. We are advocating that stopping illegal guns and gun crime be prioritized by OPD, and that information and technology be utilized effectively. This also means seeking better allocation of police resources, for example, to respond to gun crime and armed robberies, rather than, for example, having hundreds of police officers ordered to remain downtown to watch a peaceful rally while leaving local businesses with no response to armed robbery.

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

We must revitalize our corridors by improving all forms of transportation, ensuring public safety, and protecting safety to get around on foot, on transit, and by bicycle and wheelchair, as well as traffic safety, and protect and support local businesses.

I have been a leader in seeking common-sense development rules that allow for density on our transit corridors while eliminating unreasonable barriers to development in the right locations, developing more walkable communities, and reducing speeding. In addition, I support protected bikeways, and secure bike parking facilities to encourage people to bicycle. I have helped to fund and expand our Safe Routes to Schools program, which provides safety enhancements, such as safer pedestrian crossings, around schools, and programs like the "walking school bus" which provides for pedestrian safety. We have worked countywide to successfully obtain funding for

safety improvements to rail crossings, bike routes, and pedestrian crossings.

I am also advocating for better enforcement against speeding, including allowing for non-police methods, and for use of physical improvements, including traffic circles, better lighting, bicycle boulevards, traffic islands, and other infrastructure to improve safety.

How will you help Oakland workers and businesses thrive?

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

Wage theft and exploitation of workers are substantial problems, and while they are problems that have existed for a long time, the recent attitude, that some think abuse is okay if done with an app, has created further problems. I support laws, including at the State level, to protect workers from misclassification and wage theft. At the local level, we have fought for more fairness regarding TNCs, including a law to take the burden of the business taxes off of the drivers – who are often very low-income themselves. We have also passed laws to limit the overhead fee by food delivery app companies, to help keep more money in the hands of local workers and local small businesses. We have also passed laws to protect workers through providing enforcement of labor standards, sick leave protections, and right to recall.

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

Our smaller and locally owned businesses are essential to the vitality and diversity of Oakland, and to expanding employment in our communities.

I am pleased to have worked for funding in our mid-cycle budget revise for our Ethnic Chambers of Commerce to assist these local businesses during this time, as well as for community non-profits that help hard-hit Black and Brown communities. Disparities in healthcare and environmental quality continue to harm Black and Brown communities and require continued effort, both during and beyond COVID. I helped fight for testing centers in East Oakland, and provision of resources (including Personal Protective Equipment) for hard-hit communities and free Wi-Fi in communities of concern. We have won funding to expand staffing and hours at the permit counters to make it easier for the public including small businesses, funded healthy corner store conversions, direct local business assistance, support for businesses on the BRT corridor, and city support in both space and logistics as well as financial support to response to COVID-19 related needs and compliance. We are also fighting for stronger and more equitable inclusion of our small local businesses in city projects and programs, and to ensure that our city response to local business needs is more timely.