

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: Lynette Gibson McElhaney

City Council district seat you are running for: Oakland District 3

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: 52

Education: BA in Political Science from University of California Berkeley

I am the current City Councilmember for District 3.

I live in West Oakland.

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

Prior to running for Council my involvement with local government was only as a taxpayer. I worked as a community leader in the City of Richmond, running a small non-profit, volunteering with my church and as a volunteer on various initiatives.

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?

That's like asking me to choose my favorite child! These days, I love the newly opened "Alamar" in downtown Oakland, and I'm so proud of the new Snow Park by Lake Merritt and spend a fair

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amount of time at Jack London Square, walking on Mandela Parkway and visiting the 7th Street shoreline park.

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

<https://www.lynetteforoakland.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.

Oakland's homelessness crisis is an epidemic. Fundamentally, racism is at the heart of our homelessness crisis. We have deeply underinvested in our communities and our people, resulting in thousands of individuals unable to make ends meet as our city changes. While historically, we thought of homelessness as largely a problem driven by mental health challenges, largely, that directionality has shifted, with more and more individuals becoming homeless, leading them to develop mental health problems. Race bias in education, employment, housing and finance leave too many members of our society without the means to fully participate in the economy - especially in securing market-based housing solutions.

With all of this said, we also must consider the evisceration of the national safety net, the disinvestment in the Department of Housing and Urban development has created great scarcity in subsidized housing availability both in terms of built units as well as housing choice vouchers - two programs designed to keep people housed and to best racial barriers from the housing market.

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

I am proud to have pioneered the Compassionate Communities initiative and secured millions of dollars in homelessness funding. This work led to the innovation of the Cabin Communities - low-cost, supported respite housing to allow people to access employment and more permanent housing solutions. I will continue to work hard to identify funding sources to enact place-based initiatives to serve our homeless neighbors where they are. This could include more community cabin communities, as well as more sanctioned encampment communities with necessary hygiene facilities.

I led the effort to include \$150 Million for Affordable housing in Mayor Schaaf's 2014 Infrastructure Bond (Measure Kk), dedicating 20% of these funds specifically for homelessness housing solutions (targeted to 0-20% AMI). I also added the provision of homelessness in the most recent Parks bond (Measure Q), increasing funding for homelessness by millions.

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To truly redress homelessness, we need a full restoration of HUD funding at the national level, a workers program that provides meaningful work for homeless residents and modernization of zoning and exclusionary housing practices.

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

Oakland and Alameda County have notable programs that have been worthy of nationwide emulation. Our principal challenge is that for every person that gets housed, 2 more become unhoused, a phenomenon that is peculiar to California. Oakland is not unique among the cities that struggle to provide safe, decent housing for people at all income levels.

While I appreciate the sincere efforts of the dedicated professionals that make up the City and County's emergency housing divisions, I am frustrated by the lack of a strategic plan with measurable goals. I also am seeking to have more unhoused and formerly unhoused Black people participate in determining the City's response. I believe in community-leadership and it is woefully lacking in the space of homelessness policy and program design.

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

- Wages that have not kept pace with the cost of living
- Low production
- Exclusionary Housing policies
- Redlining
- Predatory lending practices
- Housing Finance discrimination.

Housing is essential to the quality of life one enjoys. More must be done to provide safe, decent housing for people at every income level, and right now, we have not been building enough housing at any price point. Housing and getting people housed must rise in the national debate because cities cannot correct the deficiencies of an unjust biased economy alone. We need elected leaders who are committed to restoring the spirit and promise of the Housing Rights Act who understand how markets work. We seek growth without displacement, diversity without gentrification and to balance the needs of workers with the needs of neighborhoods.

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

I support building more housing at all levels of affordability, including both subsidized affordable and market rate homes, and I believe in segmentation in the market, with a particular interest in low/mod and moderate income units for working families and seniors. I support rezonings to allow more housing in exclusionary neighborhoods. To increase funding for subsidized

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affordable housing, we need to reconsider the State tax structure, find ways to restore redevelopment agencies and to increase wages for low and moderate income families.

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?

I am proud that the Equity Caucus led our efforts to responsibly reduce the police budget to further invest in our flatland communities and stave off the Administration's proposed cuts and furloughs. I believe the work of the Reimagining Public Safety taskforce will make serious recommendations to redirect funds from OPD overtime to other essential services.

I believe all progressives need to be focused on passing Proposition 15 - Schools and Community First. This will result in 10s of millions of dollars to our cities to meet our on-going needs which will undoubtedly include preserving service levels.

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

I am a strong supporter of Prop 15, the Schools and Communities First Initiative, which would bring \$60 million per year to our city. In addition, we need to attract businesses to our amazing city, which brings needed tax revenue. I'm proud to have worked to bring Target into my district! Additionally, new residential development brings tax dollars and new tax payers into the city.

Good growth results in new revenues. Since being elected I have preserved \$25 million for safety and services, supported the progressive real estate transfer tax, help pass Measure KK, Measure Q and Measure D.

In 2022 the Council will consider a restructure to our business taxes. Increased attention to business retention will help stave off losses in revenue.

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

1. Advancing Community Safety: This is managing and monitoring the Council's directive to reduce by 50% the general purpose fund investments in policing and to redirect those funds to redress harms done to Black residents and neighborhoods and assuring the full establishment of the Department of Violence Prevention.

2. COVID19 Relief & Recovery: Working for an equitable response and recovery to the pandemic, redressing system racial outcomes and to ensure the timely release of Council directed funds to stem displacement and provide support for Oakland's residents, artists and

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small business owners; advocating for additional COVID relief funds for Oakland residents and businesses

3. Homelessness Response: Working to transform Oakland's response to the homelessness crisis.
4. Environmental Justice: Enacting AB617; Advancing our Healthy Homes Initiative to reduce lead exposure for youth and remediate lead contamination in Oakland homes
5. Supporting Oakland youth and vulnerable populations

My budget priorities including protecting spending around homelessness, affordable housing, and violence prevention.

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.

I strongly support strengthening the Oakland Police Commission and making it more independent. It's extremely important that we continue to have citizen oversight of our police.

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

I strongly support allowing anyone 16 and older to vote for OUSD directors. OUSD directors are making decisions on our children's behalfs; our children should have a say in who those decision makers are!

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

I support this removal so that we can hold large scofflaws responsible for their contribution to blight and housing scarcity. I am concerned about equitable implementation and want to be assured that these increased authorities to further displace long term African American property owners.

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 supported this cut. It will be vital that we work with communities to identify alternatives to policing for the necessary public safety responsibilities of our police.

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

I supported the eviction moratorium, and we will need to continue to reassess as our residents continue to suffer due to this COVID-19 pandemic and ensure that we protect our residents from unnecessary evictions and homelessness.

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

Yes, I supported these measures. I believe we need to strengthen tenant protections and find greater regulation on corporate/hedge fund owners. There needs to be a regulatory environment that will do better than leaving these matters to the courts where tenant protection is expensive. We also need to make sure we don't weaponize wealthy tenants over low income, low asset elderly Black homeowners - a noted trend across the Bay and the nation.

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.

The proposal brought forward by the sponsors was not fully vetted and did not provide the public accurate information about the potential impacts of the proposal. Rushed legislation tends to be particularly unforgiving for Black, Immigrant and refugee owned businesses. It was important that the Council give due consideration to the small business owners and large firms that reported grave concerns that the legislation was deadly to their ability to survive and recover from the COVID19 induced recession.

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 supported this program. I authored the amendment that fully funded the pilot to be citywide - including West and parts of North Oakland in the pilot. I look forward to reviewing the findings from this pilot and expanding to other parts of the city as is appropriate.

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 Port of Oakland has entered into agreement with the A's, the city has no authority over this decision but I believe the City must examine all of the financial and environmental

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projections with close scrutiny, with a specific examination to protect the environmental and economic well being of residents and the economic vitality of the Port of Oakland and port related industries

The A's must engage in fair dealing with the City for approvals

I do not favor the A's purchasing the Coliseum site for anything other than the construction of a sports complex; as the majority has determined to enter into negotiations, I have monitored this process to insist that the A's must pay full fair market value with no city subsidies for any acquisition at the Coliseum

I have insisted on robust community engagement and community benefits negotiations at both sites.

It is my duty to remain an unbiased jurist with respect to the EIR/CEQA documents, which I will do; and I insist that these documents are produced to reflect the full suite of concerns identified by the community.

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

Absolutely, the city should keep fighting the proposed coal terminal. Following information provided to the Council in public testimony during the Public Hearing on risks, I found that the transport of coal poses a significant risk to the residents in District 3.

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.

As a West Oakland resident and a Black mother who lost my son and grandson to gun violence, "Black Lives Matter" is not a slogan. It's my life's calling - the reason I get up everyday, rooted in love, working for justice, hopefully fighting for the soul of the Town. I led the effort to establish Oakland's Division of Violence Prevention, which has spearheaded efforts to reduce gun violence and violent crime in our communities without the need for armed police officers. As we engage with our community on how to dial back the disastrous War on Drugs policies that lead to bloated police department budgets, it will be crucial that we invest in developing our people with trauma-informed investments in education, arts education, counseling and non-policing intervention solutions like the evidence-based solutions developed and managed with the Department of Violence Prevention to reduce violent crime without the need for armed police.

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

It is important that we fully staff our Department of Transportation to organize community-involved and led efforts to make our streets more walkable and bikeable and design our streets in a way that slows down traffic. I support expanding our bike lanes in ways that are safe for both our bicyclists and our drivers, and I support extending our Slow Streets programs in neighborhoods happy with their outcomes.

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?

I voted with the Council to raise Oakland's minimum wage. We need to continue to monitor and ensure that our minimum wage tracks with the rising cost of living in Oakland so that people who work in Oakland can afford to live in Oakland. I will continue to work closely with the City Attorney's office to guarantee that our businesses are not exploiting their employees. People who work a full day's work should receive the full benefits of employment; as a result, I supported AB 5 last year, and I oppose Prop 22.

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

The Equity Caucus put forward a package of more than \$10 million emergency aid for small local businesses and artists. I have been working with each of the privately held Black Business support funds to create a "fund of funds" concept that will allow us to get matching dollars from philanthropy with the goal of raising \$20 Million for an equity fund that will specifically seek to support Black Businesses (and other equity applicants) traditionally barred from mainstream lending opportunities.