

Scott

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: Seneca Scott

City Council district seat you are running for: D3

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.
41 years old (DOB 05/31/1979); B.S. from Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations; Small business owner of Oakhella, Co-Founder of Bottoms Up Community Gardens and Labor Relations Consultant. I live in the Lower Bottoms (South Prescott)
2. Before running for City Council, how were you involved in local government? Have you served on any local boards or commissions?
Former East Bay director of SEIU Local 102. Represented and served as Chief Negotiator on behalf of several East Bay city employees including Port of Oakland and City of Oakland.
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?
I love Bar Shiru, in downtown Oakland. I spend most of my time at Bottoms Up Community Gardens. My Favorite Local park is "Lil" Bobby Hutton Park
4. Where can voters get more information about your campaign?

<http://senecaforoaklandd3.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 homeless crisis are the effects of predatory capitalism and white supremacy. The global consolidation of wealth and dramatic wealth disparities in America, have led to displacement of many working families, increased desperation and economic insecurities across America. Oakland's homeless population rose 47% between 2017 and 2019, one of the biggest two-year increases of any California city. Covid-19 has raised the stakes considerably higher, we are indeed at a watershed moment in our beloved City.

Oakland, being one of the few, proud "Black" cities in America, has been particularly affected. In Alameda County, African Americans make up 50% of the homeless population, despite comprising just 11% of the total population. Predatory lending practices and the financial crash of 2008 has had a devastating effect on an already financially precarious group's ability to afford housing. Many end up outside as a result, and unfortunately turn to self-medication to cope with life's harsh realities.

Lastly, the way we treat our mentally ill and disabled community leads to many ending up outside. We have failed them and we must do better. Many of our unhoused need intensive mental health services to be healthy, contributing members of society.

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

We need to reallocate a significant portion of OPD's budget into areas that address the most urgent needs of the homeless population, Drug addiction treatment, mental health services, and safe places for these individuals to stay. We need immediate housing for those who are living in vehicles and RV's. We need an equitable approach to providing housing and services across the City. District 3 should not be forced to bear this burden alone, we need City, County, State and federal assistance to solve this.

We also need to build more affordable housing now, no more excuses. This will require multiple interests to work together; Most importantly City officials, developers and Oakland's planning department. Allowing banks to have thousands of houses sitting empty, while families are living outside cannot continue.

District 3 needs a **Regional Homelessness Task Force** capable of identifying, administering and expediting the appropriate responses necessary to keep our streets clean and safe, while fostering community resilience and housing for all.

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

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District 3 currently is home to approximately 70% of Oakland's unhoused. This is not only unfair to residents of the District but also the end results of decades of neglect, over policing and institutional racism in West Oakland. We have long been a "sacrifice zone" for the city. District 3 demands an equitable approach as well as an all hands on deck effort CITYWIDE to address these issues.

The immediate removal of blight, mostly attributed to the little to no rule of law in encampments is a priority. Equally important is a plan to keep our District clean, once accomplished. The public health dangers created by feces, trash, rats and the inability to access public spaces like parks and sidewalks, especially during a pandemic, are inexcusable.

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

In addition to the answer given for Question 1; I would add a failure of leadership in City Hall to demand that Oakland share the windfalls of our multi-trillion dollar tech industry while allowing these same companies to mine our talents and resources.

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

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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 easiest place to find additional resources lie in OPD. Currently, OPD uses approximately 45% of our budget, compared to 25-35% in comparable cities. We also need to attract more businesses and development to the District. We must support our small businesses, who in turn employ our communities.

It's premature for me to finalize any answer regarding balanced budget and increased revenues. With the catastrophic long term effects that the COVID pandemic is going to have on our local economy, we're facing massive losses to key tax categories. We're going to have to make tough decisions about how we move forward and how to be able to re-approach budget levels that existed only a few months ago.

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

In addition to attracting community oriented development, I have a plan to "Overgrow Oakland" with urban farms and gardens.

Oakland has an amazing climate, and an abundance of open land suitable for growing food year-round. We also have a wealth of talent in the area already running urban farms and gardens throughout District 3 and beyond. We should explore localized agricultural systems as a way to not only combat food insecurities and a looming food crisis, but to also bring a new industry to the area, farming.

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

I know that the city is facing an \$80 million budget gap over the next 14 months or about 12% of the city's annual general fund spending. The size of the shortfall is roughly equal to the annual cost of staffing all of Oakland's 25 fire stations, or the cost of employing 320 police officers, about half the police force.

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I will need to learn more to speak in detail on projects or services that will ensure growth. These are very complex problems.

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, we can always use more oversight in re-imagining what community policing should look like.

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

Yes, recent times have shown that the youth know what they need and what's working for them. We need to listen and let them lead us, not the other way around

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

Yes, we need escalating penalties and a real deterrent to help end the illegal dumping and blight.

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.

Yes. Next steps are to involve the community in helping to decide where these funds go.

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

Yes. We need to ensure we also protect homeowners from losing their homes to the bank.

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

Yes. Monitor closely and make sure we also support homeowners from losing their homes as well.

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.

Yes, This measure as written could very much dis-incentivize business investment at a time when investment is greatly needed. However, Oakland needs to act now to set a course for the future of our communities as we chart our way through the outbreak of this virus and its consequences. We must protect vital city services and support struggling small businesses by modernizing our local tax structure so that it is fair to everyone.

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

Yes, make sure they are kept safe.

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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?

Still deciding. The Unions have issues with it, but District 3, and especially Downtown Businesses desperately could use a boost, and this would provide that.

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

No Coal in Oakland!

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. Gun Violence in the hood is a result of lack of mentorship, opportunities and education. To stop it we need to do a better job of raising our young boys who end up doing most of the killing. We do not need more police or over policing.

Gun violence in America is a different Animal. We are a violent society, founded on violence against native and black bodies. Until we truly atone for these atrocities, the violence will intensify.

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

Oakland needs more funding and resources to fight the everyday epidemic of traffic violence inflicted on our residents. Speeding, reckless driving, and illegal side shows continue to threaten the safety of people who walk, bike, and drive.

OakDOT has already done great work with their Quick Build, Paving, and Slow Streets programs. We should fund them to do more, and push them to improve community engagement for these vital programs. Specifically, I would:

* Shift budget from the Police to OakDOT to increase funding for existing programs like Quick Build, Paving, and Slow Streets. These projects slow motor vehicle speeds and make our streets safer for people who walk, bike, and drive.

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?

Cannot answer in 200 words. But we need to protect our gig economy workers. I supported AB 5 and will continue to work for our working people.

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

Support Alameda County SBDC. Take any and every opportunity to bring County, State and Federal support for our small businesses.