

# 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:** Steph Dominguez Walton

**City Council district seat you are running for:** District 1

**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'm 54 years old, I have a BA in Broadcast Journalism from Pepperdine University (by way of Foothill College and San Jose State), I'm a full-time candidate currently, but have over 25 years of experience in the radio and television industry. I live in the Rockridge neighborhood of North Oakland.

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

I have been an active volunteer for Democratic candidates. I was Buffy Wicks' first volunteer and she was the first elected official to endorse my campaign.

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?

Dominguez Walton

Cole Coffee is a second home to me. I met one of my best friends there when her daughter and my son were still in strollers. Now they are 16. Bushrod is our favorite park. It's where my daughter played soccer and my son played baseball.

4. Where can voters get more information about your campaign?  
Voters can visit my website, [www.stephforoakland.com](http://www.stephforoakland.com), or @stephforoakland on Instagram and Twitter and [www.facebook.com/stephforoakland](http://www.facebook.com/stephforoakland)

**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.

The root cause is our housing crisis. Our leaders have failed to implement a responsible housing policy for so many decades that the problem is acute. That's why it's frustrating to listen to politicians claim they can solve the problem that worsen under their watch. If they couldn't make things better before the pandemic, why should we believe they can now?

Another key factor is Proposition 13, which resulted in major cuts to mental health programs. We might be able to address some of this if California approves Proposition 15.

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

Oakland has failed to meet the homelessness crisis. The City Administrator concluded in December that we should expect to see little or no change in the homelessness population, and that was before the pandemic. In the immediate term, we should increase the supply of crisis response beds, community cabins, and safe parking areas. We should address health and hygiene by making portable toilets, wash stations and showers available. In the intermediate term, we should look at purchasing existing vacant or underutilized buildings that can provide deeply affordable housing, particularly for families. We also need tenant protections so that more people don't become homeless. That's why I support Proposition 21. And the long term solution is that we provide more housing, particularly multi-unit dwellings.

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

The homeless population has increased by more than 50% in the last two years. We have been treading water at best. The Vacant lot RV program is good in principle but we're waiting on the execution in practice so we'll see. Seventy-five percent of our homeless are Black but only 25% of Oakland's population.

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

The root cause is exclusionary zoning. Oakland adopted single-family only zoning back in the day to exclude Black and Brown people from desirable neighborhoods, which has perpetuated structural racism ever since. Exclusionary zoning artificially limits the supply of housing, causing prices to sky-rocket, and pushing out lower-income families from our city.

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

Inclusionary zoning. We need more multi-family units, particularly those close to transit.

**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 supported Council member Bas' proposal to reduce the Oakland Police Department's budget by \$25 million. I believe this could have been done without compromising OPD's ability to protect and serve. I believe more money can be reallocated from OPD to other departments that are better able to respond to concerns about mental illness or the homeless, or civil matters. We can also find cost-savings in other departments by paying closer attention to their individual budgets. Putting a freeze on hiring is an administrative shell game. There are inefficiencies that can and should be addressed.

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

There are too many vacant parcels in Oakland that could be put to beneficial use and generate tax revenue. We should revisit the vacant parcel tax because it does not appear to provide the right incentives. There has been discussion of a progressive business tax, but we will need to study that to make sure it helps and does not hurt. Oakland made a mistake with cannabis by imposing too high a tax and stifling an emerging industry. That was a real misstep.

Dominguez Walton

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

A healthier Oakland is a more financially sound and safer Oakland. I will prioritize services that benefit those who are in most need. That includes equity in education, food security, and restorative justice. Our roads are in disrepair and need to be made safer for bicyclists.

**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.

The Police Commission wasn't given the resources any commission would need to be successful. This measure will give them those resources.

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

I support this because our students tend to know more about how our schools are run than we do. My son is 16 and has spoken passionately about racial justice and climate change. He's shown me he would take this right seriously. I also hope this will encourage our youth to vote in our local, state and federal elections so that they have a real voice in selecting who will lead our country.

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

Residents in District 1 have brought to my attention several businesses that operate in blatant violation of permit requirements but do so with relative impunity because the city's ability to levy civil penalties is limited. That's why I support this measure. But I believe the city can and should take a more active role in enforcing code requirements because there are other options to compel compliance.

**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 support the goal. Now we need to see if it can be done and improve our well-being, not compromise our security.

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

We can't put people on the street in the middle of a pandemic.

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

I support this. A resident of my district reached out to me recently because her landlord demanded she sign an agreement that her apartment was not subject to rent control when it was. She did not sign the agreement after talking with me. Tenant harassment is real and must be addressed head on.

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.

A progressive tax structure is intriguing but we don't have enough information to make a decision.

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 support this, provided adequate training is provided and precautions are taken.

**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 support the Howard Terminal project, but it must be done in a manner that protects the environment and community. The Coliseum site presents a tremendous opportunity for mixed use development with a substantial affordable housing component.

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

I do not support coal. Oakland should take no part in promoting climate change. The city council was irresponsible when it voted for the development agreement and lease for the terminal because they did not realize what they approved. Now we will pay millions in

legal fees. I am confident this dispute can be resolved without cost, just at more expense to the city than should have been the case.

**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 will decrease as our communities become healthier and enjoy greater economic opportunities. Poverty, mental illness, joblessness, substance abuse and structural racism are root causes of gun violence. We can address these by reallocating funds from OPD for trauma and mental health services and job training. We should promote restorative justice programs. And we should look to Richmond, which reduced gun violence by 66% through its Office of Neighborhood Safety, which is a non-law enforcement agency that actively engages with the community when disputes arise so that retribution does not occur.

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

We can improve pedestrian safety by promoting refuge islands and medians on streets with multiple travel lanes, painted bulb outs to reduce speeds when cars turn corners, and improving nighttime lighting at intersections. The slow streets program has been a revelation for many. We need more bike boulevards and bike lanes and we should consider bicycle specific traffic signals. We can improve conditions for everyone as we repave our streets that are in disrepair.

**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?

We want the people who work in Oakland to live in Oakland. I support a livable wage, project labor agreements, and neutrality agreements. Many benefits in the workplace we take for granted were a direct result of labor. Our city inspectors should follow up on complaints and conduct drop in inspections to make sure employers are complying with occupational health and safety requirements. And, finally, those who make low wages will be better able to live in Oakland as we make affordable housing available.

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

Dominguez Walton

Oakland's economy will improve if its residents have the resources to purchase goods and services in the city. Making sure our workers are paid prevailing wages are key to Oakland's recovery. Our local stores and restaurants employ thousands of Oaklanders and help make the city what we know and love. We need them to thrive for Oakland to recover. This will require listening to business owners to identify what support they need from the city. Many local business owners in District 1 do not feel that their views are solicited or that their interests are taken into account properly. Only 14% of local Black-owned businesses received federal funding under the CARES Act. Oakland must do what it can do to protect these businesses.