

# 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:** Richard Santos Raya

**City Council district seat you are running for:** District 5

**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 am 27 years old. I received a Bachelors in American Studies from Macalester College and my J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law, and currently teach through Centro Legal de la Raza's Youth Law Academy. I'm also an organizer with Sunrise Bay Area, writing and recording podcasts for their communications team. I currently live on E 27th Street, a few blocks west of the reservoir, and on the upper cusp of the Fruitvale neighborhood, where I lived as a child.

I'm running for Oakland City Council because there is an urgent need for truly progressive leadership on the council, especially within District 5. I'm not running so much to put *myself* on the council, but to elevate and amplify the demands of the people as a facilitator and co-governor. Earlier this summer at a protest outside Councilmember Gallo's house, I asked several local leaders and activists in the streets if they knew of anyone running to bring a more progressive leader to our district. The answer I received, again and again, was that I should consider running.

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 a frequent commenter at City Council meetings, especially on issues regarding the budget and the police. Additionally, I have been a member of the Cultural Affairs Commission since early 2020.

I was just 15 years old when Oscar Grant was murdered and 18 years old when the Occupy Oakland protests were at their peak. Witnessing this power in local action, and the systemic prejudice present even in my home, a bastion of progressive values, informed my beliefs thereafter. Whether within or beyond the law, I have consistently sought the knowledge and skills to become an effective advocate for the people in my community and social justice generally.

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?

When I was a child, my dad would wake my brother and I up before sunrise for our commute to San Jose, where he worked, where we went to preschool, and where my grandparents still lived. We'd stop every morning at Los Mexicanos Panaderia right on Fruitvale, across the street from Josie de la Cruz Park. To this day it remains my favorite bakery, and honestly, one of my favorite places on Earth; if there is such a thing as Heaven, I personally picture it as holding space for my brother and I, bundled in matching overalls and dinosaur sweatshirts, showing my dad which exact pig-bread we want in the big glass case, in the tiny, dark and warm shop. Back before COVID, I stopped there almost every day on my walk to work.

Working at Centro Legal, I've also fallen in love with the hearty sandwiches at Jugos Cinco de Mayo in the Fruitvale Village Public Market.

I also really enjoy El Huarache Azteca. When I was ten, I begged my parents to let us have my birthday dinner there. They thought that was hilarious but I didn't, and still don't, see what's so silly about a ten year old eager to crush a huarache.

Eating a concha and drinking a champurrado in Josie de la Cruz Park is a sweet pleasure, but I spend more time now on short walks and runs through a tiny park behind my house whose name I'm unsure of, but the internet tells me it's called William D Wood park. My favorite trail in Oakland is the long and winding Sausal Creek trail in Dimond Park that leads all the way to the fabled Golf Ball Graveyard, which my friends and I spent untold hours exploring in our youth (though that's technically in District 4, I believe).

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

For more information, head to [santosraya.com](https://santosraya.com) and check out our campaign's social media accounts on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#). You can read more about my story and why I'm passionate about District 5 [here](#). You can also [reach out over email to me and our campaign directly](#) to answer any questions you have. I've actually been able to respond personally to all of the questions I've received so far!

**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.

First, I have to point out that the City of Oakland estimates that nearly 70% of unhoused people in Oakland are Black. This illuminates a major structural issue underlying our city's crisis: The American housing market is woven through with both explicit systemic racism and implicit ideas of "value" that serve corporations at the expense of hardworking Black families and other families of color. Oakland suffers the consequences of a nation that doesn't believe housing is a human right. This manifests in dwindling funding and restrictive zoning policies from the state and federal government to help us tackle housing issues, many of which are best addressed on the regional level

More concretely, Oakland's homelessness crisis is rooted in a lack of housing to match the Bay Area's recent growth in jobs and living expenses, particularly a lack of *genuinely* affordable housing. When people can't afford housing, they often find themselves moving from one unstable place of shelter to another, in a cycle that makes it harder to manage pre-existing health issues, secure income, or find a new home. When people have no clear and sustainable support system to get out of that cycle, and the cycle is replicated in cities around the region, the problem continues to deepen.

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

The number one way to help address the homelessness crisis is to keep vulnerable people housed in the first place. In Alameda County, about 3 people are becoming homeless for each unhoused person who finds shelter.

This is why I believe it is crucial that the City adopt policies to keep people housed and help people find work.

I would advance a debt forgiveness and rent abatement policy, paired with mortgage relief. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have come to understand that an eviction moratorium is best for public health — and it's a policy I would like to see the City extend into the future. I would also support the commandeering of abandoned developments to create a healthy supply of affordable housing and ensure that

vulnerable renters won't be pushed out onto the streets. We need to move toward housing for all; we need more affordable housing at 0-25% AMI (area median income) to give everyone shelter as they get back on their feet — not just those who can afford 75% AMI.

For people who are currently unhoused, I would also advocate that they be given temporary housing through hotels, RVs or small homes, and be granted services such as a job pipeline (into positions funded, for example, by the Black New Deal). Furthermore, we must ensure Oakland is replete with affordable and equitably managed housing so that people transitioning back into housing have a safe place to land. We also need to take care of our unhoused neighbors now, providing people experiencing homelessness with shelter, mental health support, hygiene services, and jobs programs.

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

The City must abandon the piecemeal, often heartless solutions it is currently using to address our homelessness problems. I've witnessed firsthand my current Councilmember banging on people's tents and RVs, threatening to "throw away" their "shit." This is not a way to cooperate with and assist our unhoused residents. The City also currently uses police as a primary point of contact with unhoused people. But being broke and trying to survive should not be criminalized — and arresting people isn't going to help the situation in the City for any of us. We should create new positions within the City that allow professionals to reach out to our unhoused neighbors with care and provide resources without judgement.

The City is heading in the right direction, and making good efforts, with the Tuff Sheds, but I don't condone the accompanying sweeps of encampments. While the City needs to provide options to people who are homeless by necessity, our City and society need to rethink their roles in the lives of people who reject housing by choice — or reject housing because of paternalistic expectations that accompany the temporary housing offer. Being a progressive leader (as Oakland purports to be) means making room for the many different ways human beings choose to live, and being in City Council means being given the gristly gift of figuring out how to affect this freedom through policy. I look forward to partnering with groups like Moms 4 Housing and The Village to create bold and forward-thinking housing solutions.

The best homelessness policies I am seeing on the council are championed by Councilmember Bas. I am a strong supporter of her Moms 4 Housing Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, which would give renters a chance to buy their building if their landlord is looking to sell. I would be happy to work with Councilmember Bas on more housing issues on the Council.

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

Many of the root causes of our housing affordability crisis are connected to our homelessness crisis, so it's challenging to address the two without repeating myself. As I mentioned, the root causes of our housing affordability crisis come from policy incentives that keep housing supply low and home values inordinately high — and racist housing policies that enable white people moving into Oakland to capitalize on rising home values, while low income people and people of color bear the brunt of the financial and cultural costs.

Oakland can no longer facilitate rampant development, and needs stronger CBAs and PLAs that make any further development equitable and sustainable.

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

I would support a policy that would require housing developers to commit to creating affordable housing. The City should also explore subsidized housing loans — similar to the original New Deal — specifically targeted in communities historically affected by redlining. Rent and eviction moratoriums will ease the pressure on renters of color, and an attenuated loan-support scheme can help build a strong and diverse homeowner class.

The current impact fee scheme, while in theory a strong source of revenue for affordable housing, has seen troublesome implementation (and lost impact fees!). Perhaps more critically, this revenue stream *depends* on continued construction of market rate housing, which will always outstrip the affordable housing constructed and continue to fuel our housing disparities. We need stricter requirements on developers that mandate higher percentage of affordable units within their development, and we need to find ways to take advantage of the housing sitting empty in Oakland.

We should explore ways to incentivize small landlords in keeping their property on the market and below market price, perhaps by clearing away red tape and other fees in exchange for such a commitment.

**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 City of Oakland, as all other cities, should cut the police budget and use the savings to invest in community resources that will build safer communities. I got into this City Council race because of Black Lives Matter — because it is clear that the police are like an occupying force in Black neighborhoods, and that we as a community need to have a

real conversation about what we wanted to fund together. The safest communities are not those with the most police, but the communities with the most resources.

Specifically, I would eliminate unlimited police overtime, and shift the source of OPD settlement payouts from to a different source, such as police pensions. I would transition their traffic, events, and documentation work (e.g., insurance purposes) to other agencies, issue a moratorium on weapon-and-hardware purchases, and move toward reducing and removing positions on the force. My campaign is looking into how much money this could save the city; my stepfather David Muhammad runs the NICJR, and I am working with him to build my own knowledge and generate a plan to reduce the police budget.

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

I know it's going to be tough to craft the next City budget. We're seeing massive shortfalls in projected revenue for the City, and it's scary to think of the government jobs that we could lose. However, it's clear from looking around this beautiful city that we do have wealth here to share — and that this will help us become a more resilient city in the face of crisis. Therefore, I supported the progressive business tax recently proposed by Councilmembers Bas and Sheng Thao. I phonebanked and issued comments in support of it — and would hope to pass an analogous position as soon as possible.

Furthermore, I'd take inventory of tax-exempt business and re-evaluate if all of those types of businesses, especially those that make more than a certain amount, should continue to be exempt. We can also explore creating "luxury" taxes through our sales tax code, levying higher sales tax rates on items regularly purchased only by the wealthy. Finally, we should continue to work with county and state representatives to reassess property taxes and other taxes and continue to expand our revenue streams in a progressive manner.

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

I have three key priorities. First, I want to pass a Black New Deal, laid out by the incredible local organization Anti Police-Terror Project. We can and should leverage City funds to provide vital health and housing support to residents in the flatlands, as well as create a job corps that offers union-pay jobs to residents and addresses infrastructure and environmental needs such as potholes and dumping.

Second, I want to empower school and teachers by funding school-site based support staff and wraparound health services. I also want to expand housing subsidies for teachers. As an educator myself, I know how schools are an established entry point into

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services and community for many families, and we should use schools' established infrastructure to begin rolling out the social services that build a "beloved community." I've been impressed by the work done in the Promise Neighborhoods model (which I've observed through my own father's work in the Mission) and would look to replicate that in Oakland.

Third, I would prioritize creating a Cultural Corridor that celebrates Oakland's rich culture and community history: partnering with residents to design and plan a contiguous corridor of plaques, statues and murals celebrating Black Panthers, Bruce Lee, Fred Korematsu, Moms for Housing and more. The funding from this project could help grow an engaged community of local artists and formalize the City's commitment to its cultural identity, issues we've long discussed on the Cultural Affairs Commission.

I also think it is important that we allocate funding to prepare local stocks of pandemic-preparedness supplies, similar to what needs to occur on a national level. We can create a standing budget allocation for disaster/pandemic preparedness, funded comfortably by the aforementioned expanded revenue streams.

**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 support this ballot measure. In addition to proactive defunding and reimagining of the police force, a strong police commission is essential to managing our police force.

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

I strongly support the Oakland Youth Vote measure because I believe it is both important for young people to have a say in electing the people who make key decisions about their lives and important for young people to practice exercising their civil duties. I work with young people every day, and I know they're smart enough to handle the responsibility with grace.

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

From the research I have conducted so far, I am inclined to support this measure because it would give tenants more protections against landlord harassment.

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**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 would have voted yes, and next steps are immediately working to find and make cuts and ideally hit this goal ahead of schedule. The next steps would also gather input from the community on public safety services we should establish or invest in with the budget savings, and then begin establishing those services.

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

I would have voted in favor of this moratorium. The next steps should include the City exploring the possibility of directly providing funds to provide support to our residents on the margins.

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

Yes, I would have supported this policy. and we should also explore options (such as subsidized purchase and working with land trusts) to help transition people out of the volatile renting market.

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 would not have rejected this tax.

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've supported this, and think we should partner existing groups locally and nationally like NICJR and APTP to build a robust system.

**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'm hesitant to support such a project, given the heavy community pushback against it. Environmental organizations like the Sierra Club have raised the possibility of negative impacts due to out-of-the-way transportation and the risk of toxic runoff into the water. Furthermore, the construction threatens jobs and has earned the ire of port workers.

However, I recognize that nearly the entire Labor Council supports such a project, and that if we don't retain the A's, we may suffer not just financial but cultural loss.

If such a project were to continue, I would like to see it include explicit provisions that provide sustainable rail access to the ballpark and massive allocation of resources to the port and surrounding area to preserve jobs. An A's CBA would commit to the hiring of local labor to plan and build the coliseum, and also designate funds to subsidize housing. Simultaneously, the City would have to make commitments to curb rent rises in response to the construction.

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

The City should formalize a commitment to the environment, and our vulnerable residents, and continue to fight the coal terminal. However, we need to do so in a legally justifiable way, less vulnerable to being struck down in court; to do so requires not focusing on one developer, and inviting contract and takings issues, but instead creating objective city-wide policies and bans rooted not just in local pollution concerns, but global climate concerns.

**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.

We know that funding stronger and healthier communities is a way to proactively reduce violence of all kinds, as we've seen in the Freedom to Thrive report (and as I studied in my Public Health classes at law school). Police funding should be allocated to a job corps, to city repairs, and to overall public health measures.

We can also create a culture of accountability that isn't rooted in violence. Several local orgs have already discussed with me the possibility of creating localized Restorative Justice Councils, in a similar vein (but with an entirely different feel) as local public safety/neighborhood watch councils, that bring together youth, elders, and people affected by violence to restore harms.

Raya

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

I would like to launch a comprehensive wheelchair-accessibility review of our roads. After speaking with a constituent, Laurie, who navigates the streets in a wheelchair, I was exposed to the lack of curb cuts (and shoddy stopgap "bridges") that she contends with, and that force her to ride not on the sidewalk, but in the streets.

Additionally, I hope to use the Black New Deal to create a city-funded job corps that implements vital transportation services. While simple, and not exactly "sexy," these have directly correlated safety outcomes.

Roads with massive potholes prompt erratic driving and swerving, and roads without speed bumps facilitate speeding and car crashes. Addressing these basic needs don't just make things safer for motorists, but everyone else.

### **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'm against Prop 22!

In general, I'm also wary of the costs of the gig economy. One place we can start is addressing Oakland's inner workings, and ending the prevalence/dependence on Temporary/Part Time (TPO) positions among City Workers.

Additionally, as I've stated in all of my forums and questionnaires for various labor groups, I support Oakland *finally* adopting a baseline PLA (Project Labor Agreement) for the entire city. Anyone that the City contracts with must abide by modern standards when it comes to employment/benefits.

By ending TPO and creating a PLA, we can create a more just labor landscape which makes it more difficult for subcontractors to undercut our commitments to labor justice. (I'd love to talk more about how this intersects with the BRT!)

We can and should also continue to distribute grants and work in cultural/community economic development to boost business for small businesses-- perhaps with the creation of a Cultural Corridor!

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

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This is a tough question; my best guess at the moment is continue to give people and businesses direct support. While I know Oakland is strapped for cash, the County has a lot in reserves that should be leveraged in support of our most vulnerable, either through grants or through debt forgiveness.