



# Empower Oakland Candidate Questionnaire

## Oakland mayoral special election, 2025

*Empower Oakland is a movement fueled by Oakland residents who recognize that “business as usual politics” will only further perpetuate Oakland’s downward spiral. We believe in empowering Oaklanders to amplify their collective voices for greater political impact and influence.*

*Empower Oakland is asking candidates to complete our candidate questionnaire. These submissions will be published on [empoweroakland.com](http://empoweroakland.com) to educate Oakland voters and will be unedited for spelling and grammar. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their candidate endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made in mid-February.*

*Please email the completed questionnaire as a .docx or .pdf document to [info@empoweroakland.com](mailto:info@empoweroakland.com) by 5pm on Monday, January 27th. Please include a headshot (square/vertical headshot, in JPG or PNG format, 1000-1500px and <2MB, and please name the file).*

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**Candidate name: Barbara Lee**

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**Phone number: 5102441573**

**Campaign website: [www.barbaralee4oakland.com](http://www.barbaralee4oakland.com)**

**Social media handles:**

- X: [@BarbaraLee\\_CA](#)
- Facebook: [BarbaraLeeforCA](#)
- Instagram: [barbaraleeforca](#)
- LinkedIn:

**Expected total fundraising amount: \$532,500** (current VEL amount)

**Funds raised to date: \$150,000**

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## Background & general questions

1. What is your background in Oakland? How have you been involved in local government? What specific experiences do you have across housing, homelessness, public safety, public infrastructure, budget, and good government?

I have spent my career fighting for Oakland and securing resources to help our City realize its potential, and to address the challenges our city faces. As a **State Assemblymember, State Senator, and Congresswoman**, I have successfully delivered **billions of dollars** to Oakland for affordable housing, public safety, workforce development, and infrastructure projects.



I have served on the **House Appropriations Committee**, directing federal resources to local programs that support **homelessness services, affordable housing initiatives, and community violence prevention programs**. I have a strong track record of **fighting for good governance, accountability, and transparency**, ensuring that public funds serve the people—not special interests. I am proud of the work that I’ve done nationally to end the corrupting influence of big money in politics, including supporting campaign finance reform laws that limit the size of campaign donations, leading efforts to overturn the disastrous Citizens United decision -- which opened the floodgates to unlimited spending by billionaires to buy elections, and fighting for tougher disclosure laws on campaign donations and expenditures—experience I will bring to City Hall in this critical moment.

2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?

### **Top Challenges:**

1. **Public Safety & Crime** – Oaklanders deserve to feel safe in their neighborhoods. We must work towards comprehensive public safety strategies that include law enforcement, violence prevention, and alternative response models.
2. **Housing & Homelessness** – We need to streamline affordable housing development, prevent displacement, and expand mental health and addiction treatment services for those in crisis.

### **Bright Spots:**

- **Oakland’s Resilient Communities** – Our residents, labor unions, small businesses, and activists continue to push for change and invest in solutions. I am particularly grateful to have all sides of the recall movement and community leaders representing a broad spectrum of views in my campaign. We are all focused on looking forward, not backwards—and this spirit of resiliency and determination will serve Oakland well.
- **Growing Regional Investment** – Oakland has an opportunity to secure **state and federal funding** for key infrastructure, housing, and public safety initiatives. As Mayor, I will also work to attract philanthropic and private investment to pilot models to addressing these issues using models/innovation that have worked successfully in other communities.

3. Why are you running for office, and why are you uniquely qualified to serve in this position?

I am running for **Mayor of Oakland** because our city is at a crossroads. We need a leader who can **unite our communities, restore trust in local government, and fight for real solutions** to Oakland’s biggest challenges. I welcome Empower Oakland and all residents to join me in that vision.



With **decades of experience**, I know how to **navigate government at every level** and **bring in critical resources**. I have successfully worked with state, regional, and federal partners to direct **billions of dollars to Oakland**—something no other candidate can say. I will be an **engaged, hands-on Mayor** who works every day to **build a stronger, saferOakland where services are being delivered to every family**.

4. This special election is for a shortened term, making it crucial that the winning candidate can be effective immediately. What concrete steps are you taking to prepare, and what will be your strategy for making an impact in this shortened time frame?
  - **Always Working for Oakland:** I've dedicated my life working and fighting for Oakland, for months now I've met with stakeholders, business and labor leaders, community organizations, faith members, and so many others to discuss the key issues, solutions, and challenges ahead.
  - **Leverage My Experience:** I already have strong working relationships with state federal and philanthropic partners, giving Oakland a **head start in securing critical funding** for key priorities.
  - **Immediate Focus on Core Issues:** Work towards **improving public safety, addressing homelessness, and addressing the city's budget crisis** from day one. Bringing stakeholders, organizations, and officials together to develop and implement real solutions.
  - **Seamless Transition:** I am grateful to have the support of city leaders and stakeholders who typically do not agree—Labor/Business, former Mayors across the political divide, and former City Administrators--who have pledged to work together in a decisive and seamless transition if voters elect me Mayor.
  - **Restore Public Trust in Government:** I fully support current efforts by stakeholders such as the League of Women Voters, Public Ethics Commissioners, and good government leaders to toughen Oakland ethics regulations and conduct Charter Review and Reform to ensure stronger government accountability, A Barbara Lee administration will work towards making **City Hall more transparent, efficient, and accountable** to the people, with zero tolerance to those who seek to influence city officials in their decision-making.
  - **A Focused Team for Growth:** I will establish within the Mayor's office a dedicated team to focus on **expanding opportunities in public and private partnerships**. A key focus area will be to explore and pilot programs and projects that have been successful in other cities.
  - **Increasing Communication and Accountability:** Convene meetings with the City Administrator, city department heads, and key players to ensure inter-departmental communication and collaboration.

**Public safety**



The following questions ask for your perspective on improving **public safety** in Oakland.

5. What specific and measurable improvements in public safety will you deliver for Oaklanders over the next two years? What existing investments would you increase, reduce or eliminate to ensure adequate resources for you to meet your goal?

I will work towards:

- **Expanding MACRO and violence prevention programs** to reduce reliance on law enforcement for non-violent crises.
  - **Fully staffing 911 dispatch services** to improve emergency response times.
  - **Strengthening community-based policing efforts** to rebuild trust between residents and law enforcement.
  - **Working to reopen closed fire stations** and addressing the interagency partnerships needed to address aging fire-related infrastructure, such as the 3,000+ fire hydrants that exist in Oakland.
6. Please speak to the effectiveness of Oakland's non-sworn responses to public safety issues. Which, if any, are successful and should be continued? Which, if any, are not successful and should be discontinued?

Oakland has made important strides in developing non-sworn public safety responses that address emergencies **without solely relying on law enforcement**. These programs are a critical part of a **comprehensive public safety approach**, ensuring that resources are **used efficiently and appropriately** while keeping communities safe.

### **Programs That Should Be Continued & Expanded**

**MACRO (Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland)** –This program deploys crisis response teams from the Fire Department to address mental health and nonviolent 911 calls, allowing police to focus on violent crime calls.. It is a highly successful, community-valued program that should be continued beyond its pilot status.

**Violence Prevention Programs (Department of Violence Prevention, Oakland's Public Safety Ceasefire, and Community-Based Interventions)** –For example, Oakland's Public Safety Ceasefire --which specifically focuses on those responsible for a majority of Oakland crimes and the groups/gangs they're involved with—provides incentives to stop engaging in violence. Perpetrators who continue to do so are targeted by special police teams who are specifically trained in investigating gun crimes and arresting dangerous fugitives. --Programs like these need **sustained funding** and better coordination with other city services, as they have been credited with helping to reduce homicides over the past year in Oakland.

**Alternative Traffic Safety Initiatives** – Exploring ways to **shift traffic enforcement away from armed officers** in cases like minor infractions, pedestrian safety programs, and street design improvements can improve public trust while addressing dangerous road conditions. Traffic calming measures such as round-abouts and speed bumps implemented



with neighborhood input, and joint work to increase safety around school sites for young pedestrians and families should also be prioritized.

### Programs That Need Improvement or Re-Evaluation

**Encampment Management Policy Enforcement** – While a structured approach to addressing homelessness is necessary, enforcement efforts that **displace unsheltered residents without meaningful housing solutions** have led to **increased instability and public safety concerns**. The city must prioritize **housing-first strategies, mental health support, and harm reduction services** over punitive measures, while ensuring that our public places are safe and secure for everyone.

7. What is the appropriate staffing level of sworn police officers for the City of Oakland?

Oakland must have a police force that is **appropriately staffed** to focus on violent crime and repeat offenders. At the same time, we must **expand non-police crisis response models** to handle mental health emergencies and other issues. I would use Measure NN as a guide to get Oakland to 700 officers as voters mandated.

8. What strategies would you prioritize to address crimes like gun violence, retail robbery, sex trafficking, bipping, residential burglary, traffic violence, and any others?

- **Target repeat offenders** and illegal gun trafficking.
- **Expand MACRO and mental health crisis response** to free up officers for serious crimes.
- **Work with businesses and labor** to improve security measures in commercial corridors.
- **Invest in community-based violence prevention programs** that have proven success.
- **Work to end human trafficking** and exploitation, including the commercial exploitation of minors

9. Taking into account Oakland's governance structure, what specific steps would you take to align OPD, the City Administrator's office, the city council, the community, and other stakeholders around your public safety priorities?

Oakland's governance structure requires **collaboration and accountability** to ensure an effective public safety strategy. As Mayor, I will work toward:

**Clear Coordination & Accountability** – Establishing **regular, structured meetings** between OPD, the City Administrator, City Council, and community leaders to align priorities, track progress, and ensure accountability and transparency.



**Strengthening Civilian Oversight & Trust** – Supporting **community engagement efforts, improved police accountability measures, and investment in non-sworn safety programs** to create a balanced approach.

**Data-Driven Decision Making** – Using **real-time public safety data** to inform policies, ensure **resources are deployed effectively**, and address disparities in policing.

**Expanding Alternative Safety Responses** – Scaling up **MACRO, violence prevention programs, and community-led solutions** so police officers can focus on gun violence and other violent crimes..

Oakland needs a **comprehensive approach to public safety that includes both traditional law enforcement and prevention programs, as approved by voters in Measure NN which was developed by a broad coalition of Oakland community leaders, small businesses, doctors, public health experts, and first responders. Oaklanders want balanced, smart-on-crime, data driven approaches to addressing crime.**

#### **Homelessness and housing affordability**

*The following questions ask for your perspective on **reducing homelessness and improving housing affordability** in Oakland.*

10. What specific and measurable improvements in Oakland’s homelessness and housing affordability crisis will you deliver for Oaklanders over the next two years? How do you plan to deliver these homelessness and housing affordability wins for Oakland? What investments might you advance, reduce, or eliminate to ensure adequate resources are available to meet your housing and homelessness goals?

I will work towards:

- **Expanding transitional and supportive housing** by converting motels and vacant properties into shelter.
- **Cutting red tape on affordable housing development** to get more units built faster.

We must **ensure zoning reforms balance affordability and neighborhood stability**, allowing for more housing while preventing displacement.

Encampments should not be a long-term solution. I will work towards **increasing shelter capacity, expanding supportive housing, and investing in mental health and addiction services** to address the root causes of homelessness.

11. Please discuss your perspective on the following topics:
  - a. The respective roles of affordable (below-market-rate) housing and market-rate housing



A balanced approach is needed—**affordable housing** ensures low-income residents aren't displaced, while **responsible market-rate development** helps expand overall housing supply. Both must be paired with **tenant protections and equitable growth strategies** to maintain Oakland's diversity and affordability.

b. The City's Housing Element and proposed zoning reforms  
Oakland must ensure its **Housing Element goals align with real affordability needs** while implementing zoning reforms that **streamline development, prioritize deeply affordable housing, and protect existing communities from displacement.**

c. Oakland's Encampment Management Policy, implementation of it to date, and improvements needed moving forward  
Encampment policies must be **compassionate and solutions-driven**—prioritizing **housing placements, supportive services, and enforcement that doesn't criminalize poverty.** Improvements should focus on **faster shelter access, more transitional housing, and stronger mental health outreach.**

d. The City/County's approach to mental health and substance abuse treatment  
Oakland must work toward **expanding crisis intervention, treatment access, and long-term support services.** Strengthening partnerships with **Alameda County, healthcare providers, and community organizations** is essential to ensure those in crisis receive **care, not just enforcement.**

### **Public infrastructure**

*The following questions ask for your perspective on improving Oakland's **public infrastructure.***

12. What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver with respect to Oakland's public infrastructure over the next two years? How do you plan to deliver these improvements?

I will work toward:

- **Faster pothole and road repairs** by streamlining city processes and securing additional state and federal funding.
- **Expanding illegal dumping prevention programs** with increased enforcement and community-led clean-up efforts.
- **Enhancing public transportation and pedestrian safety** through traffic-calming measures, better-lit streets, and protected bike lanes, pedestrian and school crossings.

Delivering these improvements requires **efficient use of city resources, accountability in spending, and strategic partnerships** with regional and state agencies.

13. What are the biggest problem(s) Oakland faces when it comes to public infrastructure? How might we address these challenges, and what trade-offs, if any, might we need to consider?



Oakland's biggest infrastructure challenges include:

- **A backlog of road repairs & failing streets** due to years of deferred maintenance.
- **Chronic illegal dumping & blight**, especially in underserved communities.
- **Aging stormwater systems** that contribute to flooding risks.

Addressing these requires **prioritization and resource allocation**, ensuring **core services are funded first** while also exploring **public-private partnerships and additional grant funding** to avoid placing the burden solely on residents.

14. Please discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:
- a. Blight, litter and dumping
  - b. Road repair & repaving
  - c. Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation
  - d. Streetscape improvements (trees, parklets, etc)
  - e. Stormwater management

**Blight, Litter & Dumping** – Strengthen enforcement against illegal dumping while **expanding community-led cleanups and improving waste management services.**

**Road Repair & Repaving** – Advocate for **a fully funded, data-driven paving plan** that prioritizes high-use roads and underserved neighborhoods.

**Bike/Pedestrian Safety & Public Transportation** – **Expand protected bike lanes, improve lighting at crosswalks, and enhance public transit options** to make streets safer for all users.

**Streetscape Improvements** – Increase **tree planting, expand parklets, and improve urban greening initiatives** to enhance Oakland's livability.

**Stormwater Management** – Work with regional agencies to **modernize storm drains and invest in green infrastructure** to mitigate flooding risks.

### **Fiscal issues & budget**

*The following questions ask for your perspective on **addressing Oakland's immediate fiscal crisis and long-term structural budget deficit.***

15. How do you plan to address Oakland's immediate fiscal crisis AND long-term structural budget deficit? What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver over the next two years? Please discuss your specific perspective on:
- a. How you might increase general fund revenues
  - b. How you might reduce expenses (specifying any cuts you might make)
  - c. How you might better manage unfunded liabilities, including pensions and deferred maintenance

### **Addressing Oakland's Fiscal Crisis & Long-Term Budget Deficit**

To stabilize Oakland's finances, we must focus on revenue collection on funds the City is already entitled to, expanding its **revenue base, reducing waste, bureaucracy and**





**inefficiencies, and managing long-term obligations responsibly.** Over the next two years, I will work toward:

- **Growing general fund revenues** by improving business retention, enforcing existing taxes and fees, and securing additional state and federal funding.
- **Cutting inefficiencies** by reducing administrative bloat, reining in excessive overtime costs, and streamlining city operations.
- **Managing unfunded liabilities** by negotiating sustainable pension agreements, prioritizing essential services, and investing in infrastructure maintenance to reduce long-term costs.

16. What are the largest contributors to Oakland's budget challenges? In your opinion, why have previous Councils/Mayoral administrations failed to address these challenges?

Oakland's **persistent budget shortfalls** stem from:

- **Reliance on one-time funding** instead of long-term structural fixes.
- **Uncollected revenues** from business taxes, fines, and fees.
- **Escalating pension and healthcare liabilities** without a clear long-term funding plan.
- **Inefficient spending** and a lack of transparency in city contracts.

Previous administrations have struggled due to **political gridlock, lack of fiscal discipline, and failure to implement long-term solutions.** My approach will focus on **pragmatic, data-driven decision-making** and **ensuring public dollars are spent effectively.**

17. How will you maintain objectivity on fiscal matters in the face of pressure and specific budget asks by groups and organizations that endorse you?

- **Every dollar must be accountable.** I will work towards a transparent budget process that includes community engagement and clear fiscal guidelines.
- **Equity-focused, needs-based budgeting.** Spending decisions must reflect the city's most urgent needs while avoiding wasteful expenditures.
- **Commitment to long-term financial health.** I will resist short-term political pressures that undermine Oakland's fiscal stability.

**Prior to my career in public service, I was a small business owner with 400 employees.** Like any business, the City must manage its budget responsibly and well, while prioritizing spending that benefits the customer—in the City's case, the people of Oakland.

18. Given the mayor's role in proposing but not controlling the final budget, how would you build consensus around your fiscal priorities? How would you work with the City Administrator to ensure effective implementation?

- **Clear priorities, early collaboration.** I will set budget priorities early and work with the community and council members to ensure alignment with the needs of the people we serve.



- **Data-driven decision-making.** Using measurable outcomes to guide budget investments and ensure efficiency. We see in Measure NN that the Oakland voters want data-driven approaches, which also allows us to ensure accountability by assessing whether benchmarks are being met.
  - **Accountability & transparency.** Strengthening oversight on spending, contracts, and city programs.
  - **Leveraging external funding.** Actively securing grants and partnerships to offset city costs.
19. Oakland businesses are an important contributor to the local and regional economy, and — directly and indirectly — to the city’s financial resources. What are the major challenges faced by Oakland businesses? What specific steps will you take to ensure that Oakland businesses can thrive, create more jobs, and improve the Oakland economy?

Oakland businesses **face high costs, bureaucratic hurdles, and public safety concerns.** To ensure growth and job creation, I will work toward:

- **Cutting red tape** to make it easier for small businesses to open and operate.
- **Improving public safety** to ensure commercial corridors are safe for workers and customers, and the public at large. Car thefts, “smash/grabs” and retail theft erode confidence and affect the health and well being of our small businesses, who are reliant on foot traffic.
- **Supporting workforce development** by expanding job training and apprenticeship programs.
- **Strengthening partnerships** between the city, local businesses, and community organizations to drive investment and economic revitalization.

## **Governance**

*The following questions ask for your perspective on **improving governance** in Oakland.*

20. To what extent is the City of Oakland meeting or not meeting your definition of good government? As mayor, what changes would you make to improve government effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in Oakland?

Oakland faces **serious governance challenges**, including **inefficiency, lack of transparency, and inconsistent accountability** across city agencies. As Mayor, I will work toward:

- **Strengthening transparency** by making city contracts, spending, and performance data publicly accessible.
- **Improving efficiency** by cutting bureaucratic red tape and streamlining city processes.



- **Building accountability** by implementing clear performance metrics for city departments and leadership.
- **Restoring trust** by ensuring decision-making is community-driven and prioritizing equitable investment in services.

I'll build on my national leadership on ethics and campaign reform to work with ethics and good government leaders to strengthen and close loopholes on current gift prohibitions, work to create a user-friendly city portal where any member of the public can view contracts, and support Charter Review/Reform efforts to increase accountability.

21. More specifically, how might the city provide greater oversight and public accountability in contracting, grant-making, and outcomes/performance management?

To enhance public trust and oversight, I will advocate for:

- **Stronger contract and grant oversight** to ensure city funds are used effectively and equitably.
- **Regular public reporting on city performance** in areas like housing, public safety, and infrastructure.
- **Independent audits** of major contracts, department spending, and policy implementation.
- **A user-friendly public database** where residents can view contracts, track spending and performance outcomes.

22. Oakland has a unique hybrid governance structure where power is shared between the mayor, council, and city administrator. How would you provide effective executive leadership within this structure? Please give specific examples of how you would:

- a. Set and drive citywide priorities by aligning the council, staff, and community around shared priorities
  - Establish clear **policy priorities** early, focusing on public safety, housing, and economic revitalization.
  - Develop a **collaborative agenda** with City Council and the City Administrator to avoid political gridlock.
- b. Build productive working relationships with city council
  - Regular, **structured meetings with councilmembers** to align priorities with the public's needs, and address concerns.
  - Maintain **an open-door policy** to ensure communication remains strong and proactive.
- c. Manage and empower the city administrator
  - Set **clear goals and performance expectations** while allowing the City Administrator the autonomy to implement policies established by the City's elected leaders, effectively.
  - Ensure **regular performance evaluations** to keep city operations on track.
- d. Ensure accountability across departments



- Implement **clear, data-driven performance measures** for city services.
- Hold **department heads accountable** for achieving key outcomes in public safety, housing, and infrastructure.
- Improve **public reporting** to enhance transparency and responsiveness.

23. As Oakland's mayor, you would be the city's most visible leader but would need to work through others to implement many initiatives. How would you do the following (and please provide examples from your experience that demonstrate these capabilities):

- a. Use the platform of the mayor's office to advance city priorities?
    - **Communicate consistently and transparently** through press briefings, public town halls, and digital engagement.
    - **Champion key initiatives** at the state and federal level to secure Oakland's fair share of resources.
  - b. Build and maintain coalitions to achieve your goals?
    - **Engage labor, business, and community groups** to align on shared priorities and solve problems together, even though they may not traditionally agree.
    - **Facilitate partnerships between city agencies** non-profit organizations, and philanthropists to maximize impact and secure additional resources for piloting programs that have been successful in other communities.
  - c. Represent Oakland effectively in regional discussions?
    - **Advocate for Oakland's needs** in regional transit, housing, and economic development forums.
- **Leverage relationships with state and federal partners** and work to secure Oakland's fair share of resources