



Empower Oakland 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

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.

All submissions will be published on 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 by early September.

Please email the completed questionnaire as a .docx or .pdf document to info@empoweroakland.com. Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.

Candidate Name: Kanitha Matoury

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Phone Number: 510-773-9928

Office & District Sought: Oakland City Council At-Large

Campaign Website: www.kanithaforoakland.com

Social Media Handles

- Twitter: Kanitha4Oakland
- Facebook: KanithaforOakland
- Instagram: KanithaForOakland
- LinkedIn: KanithaForOakland
- TikTok: teamkanithaforoak

Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$250,000

Funds Raised To Date: \$63,000

General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

After being granted political asylum as a teenager, I attended Berkeley High, SF State and spent 9 years with the Air Force Reserves before moving to Oakland to start a family. I opened Spice Monkey Restaurant 17 years ago, then Howden Market which is still open after 9 years, as well as commercial spaces in the Laurel and Chinatown neighborhoods.

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



Public Safety and Crime is an ongoing crisis with residents dealing with statistically higher violent and property crime than most of the country, leading to an unacceptable number of business closures which impacts our essential services and ultimately everyone's quality of life.

Economy - our current ongoing structural deficit is a major problem, directly tied to declining small business and real estate revenues caused by Oakland's rampant crime and minimal law enforcement. This issue is worsened by the growing affordable housing crisis and widening income disparity, both of which are being poorly managed. To turn things around, Oakland needs to attract new investment, including infrastructure projects that could be secured if we improved our public safety image or simply applied for the substantial grants we qualify for.

Bright spots - Oakland is one of the most culturally diverse and arts-focused cities in America. We have a chance to become the top cultural destination in the western states if we support our resources and promote our opportunities. With the best weather, premier transportation hub, amazing restaurants, and rich musical talent, it's time to shift the focus to Oakland's positive attributes.

3. Why are you running for office and why are you uniquely qualified to fulfill the office you are running for at this time?

We need new leadership that prioritizes practical solutions aligned with Oakland's progressive values. As Barack Obama said, small businesses are "the backbone of our economy and the cornerstones of our communities." With over 20 years of experience in various businesses, including my latest ventures, Spice Monkey and Howden Market, as well as 9 years of service as a U.S. Air Force veteran, I will bring accountability and teamwork to City Hall. My focus will be on restoring public safety, implementing community policing, and revitalizing our small business community. Additionally, I'll address Maslow's hierarchy of needs by ensuring access to housing at all levels—from affordable and subsidized to market-rate—so our communities have the foundation to thrive.

4. Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?

I've opened and maintained businesses in downtown, Chinatown, Laurel and Downtown Oakland for 17 years. Although taking care of these businesses and my family have been my focus, during this time I've also come to know many of our local government staff, community and business leaders. My late father was a politician and human rights founder in Cambodia, but this is my first run for office.



Oakland City Council

5. What specific and measurable improvements in public safety will you deliver for Oaklanders in 2 years? 4 years? Please describe how you plan to deliver these public safety improvements. As part of your response, please:

- a. Summarize what existing public safety investments you might increase, reduce or eliminate to ensure adequate resources for you to meet your goal.**

To improve both law enforcement effectiveness and community safety, we must move more quickly to implement technology such as cameras, drones, and reporting apps. We also need to closely review programs that are underperforming or lower funding priority than our current public safety issues.

- b. Discuss your perspectives on:**

- i. The effectiveness of Oakland's non-sworn responses to public safety issues. Which ones (if any) are successful and should be continued? Which ones (if any) are not successful and should be discontinued?**

I am concerned about the effectiveness of some programs given the current budget limitations. I would need to review the records.

- ii. The appropriate staffing level of sworn police officers for the city of Oakland (provide a specific number of officers you would like to see in place by December 2028).**

To meet both the emergency call volume, as well as implement a comprehensive community policing program we need to consider the recommendations of 800-1,000 officers for Oakland.

- iii. Your prioritized strategies for addressing various types of crime, including gun violence, retail robbery, bipping, residential burglary, traffic violence, and any others.**

At a local level, we need to enhance security, reducing opportunities for crime. Introduce temporary street modifications in key business areas to control access and slow traffic as part of our community safety program; if successful, consider making these changes permanent. Push for stricter gun laws particularly for those individuals with violent histories. Update laws to impose increasingly severe penalties for repeat offenders, while emphasizing rehabilitation and support to prevent future crimes.



c. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals

I show up, and don't easily give up...if ever. I've delivered on my word, keeping my reputation strong. I attribute my success as a small business owner to keeping my employees inspired, valuing input, innovating continuously, and managing finances carefully. My skills as a collaborative problem solver, active listener and effective negotiator in bridging divisions to achieve common goals is transferable to city council.

3. What specific and measurable improvements in Oakland's homelessness and housing affordability crisis will you deliver for Oaklanders in 2 years? 4 years? How do you plan to deliver these homelessness and housing affordability wins for Oakland?

We need to explore more cost-effective strategies for constructing affordable housing from the outset. For instance, the developer of the new mass timber project at 15th & Webster claims this method is 30% cheaper and faster to build, while offering greater disaster resilience compared to steel or concrete. It's also crucial to streamline the approval process for affordable, fair-market and market-rate housing to ensure they remain affordable. Additionally, when drafting or sponsoring ordinances for affordable housing, we should publicly commit to clear and measurable goals, and, importantly, ensure that city agencies effectively implement and monitor these policies.

As part of your response, please:

a. Describe the biggest problems our city faces that keep us from solving the housing crisis.

Overall, the housing supply shortage is largely due to new construction failing to keep up with population growth. This issue is compounded by restrictive land use and zoning regulations, high construction costs, and political and community resistance.

For new construction, excessive impact, permit, inspection, compliance, and affordable housing fees, coupled with unacceptably long approval processes, have even led to lawsuits against the city in some cases.

b. Summarize what homelessness/housing investments you might advance, reduce, or eliminate to ensure adequate resources are available to meet the goals you stated above. What trade-offs might need to be considered in distributing resources between different solutions?



Private investors are reluctant to invest in Oakland right now. So to expand investment in affordable housing, we'll need to focus on local bonds, state, and federal funding, and public-private partnerships-such as the \$20 billion nine county proposed bond (that was just withdrawn).

We also need to address rising housing costs and resulting displacement by expanding permanent supportive housing and enhancing rental assistance programs. The city should reduce reliance on costly temporary solutions, consolidate inefficient programs, eliminate barriers like high fees and restrictive zoning while expanding incentives to developers who build affordable housing.

c. Discuss your perspectives on:

i. The respective roles of affordable (below-market-rate) housing and market-rate housing

Affordable housing is designed to provide homes for people who earn below the median income, often those making between 30% to 80% of the area median income (AMI). These units are crucial for residents who might otherwise be priced out of the market, including working-class families, seniors, and people with disabilities. By ensuring long-term affordability, below-market-rate housing helps retain existing residents, especially in neighborhoods undergoing gentrification and displacement pressures.

Market-rate housing is driven by private developers without income restrictions on tenants. It contributes to middle- and upper-income residents who do not qualify for affordable housing but are still seeking housing. Market-rate developments often attract investment, which can contribute to neighborhood revitalization and economic growth.

Both affordable and market-rate housing are essential for a balanced housing system in Oakland. However, our city struggles to maintain this balance, aiming to prevent displacement while ensuring housing remains affordable for all residents. We are missing the opportunity to vitalize our working class with fair-market housing availability.

ii. The City's Housing Element and proposed zoning reforms

If Oakland wants to meet this state-required plan to increase housing supply, affordability, and equity then leadership needs to do a better job of bringing the community together to support higher-density developments while streamlining approval processes.



iii. Oakland's Encampment Management Policy, implementation of it to date, and improvements needed moving forward

With the recent Grants Pass Supreme Court Ruling, our already uneven community support and legal issues are about to get much more challenging. From a downtown business owner's perspective, we are suddenly seeing a number of new, seemingly unhoused people on the street-perhaps from the clearing of our own camps but also in surrounding communities. With these camps being cleared, we need to seriously step up our support services, refine policy guidelines, and focus on long-term housing solutions.

iv. The City/County's approach to mental health and substance abuse treatment

From what we see downtown, Oakland's approach to addressing mental health and substance abuse through community-based programs, crisis intervention, integrated care, and supportive housing needs more assessment and support. Our crisis response teams have not been adequate to manage our part of the city, and from what I see, in our other neighborhoods as well. We need to address our resource limitations and better coordinate and integrate services.

I would like to see a better coordinated effort with Alameda County, which has many of the same approaches. Ultimately, we have a responsibility to not make our community members and businesses the first line of care/response for an issue they are already taxed millions annually to be handled by our funded agencies.

d. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

I care about all of Oakland, and have interacted with the unhoused/those in need for all of my years while on the front line running businesses with essential workers. When the pandemic started, my market was the first to implement distancing and limited customer protocols.

My philosophy is to always strive to leave things better than when I found them, and thrive on creating solutions that improve outcomes. I approach my work with passion, attention to detail and the collaboration and resourcefulness to address Oakland's pressing needs.

4. What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver with respect to Oakland's public infrastructure in 2 years? 4 years? How do you plan to deliver these improvements?



In 2 Years:

1. Road Repairs: fix 20% of the worst roads using city crews and community input.
2. Transit Upgrades: improve on-time performance by optimizing schedules and upgrading stops.
3. Parks: upgrade ten parks with volunteer help and grants.

In 4 Years:

1. Broadband: expand internet access with local partnerships and low-cost options.
2. Stormwater: improve drainage with green infrastructure projects and volunteer support.
3. Streetlights: install 200 new lights in high-crime areas with community and business support.

Delivery Plan:

- Focus on Needs: prioritize critical repairs and upgrades.
- Leverage Partnerships: use local resources, businesses, and volunteers.
- Seek Funding: explore small grants and community support.

5. As part of your response, please:

- a. Summarize the biggest problem(s) Oakland faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable).

Businesses closing and crimes. See some other answers that were stated in this questionnaire.

- b. Discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:

- i. **Blight, Litter and Dumping** - this is unacceptable-we need investigative units to hold those accountable with the same basic tools as other law enforcement. Heavy fines must be enforced for illegal dumping, including sewage.
- ii. **Road repair & repaving** - opening to more competitive bidding and more contractors without excessive restrictions that delay and lead to lawsuits.
- iii. **Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation** - reconfigure our excessive speed encouraging, multi-lane with more bike lanes to encourage a safer and more walkable city.
- iv. **Streetscape improvements (trees, parklets, etc)** - involve our community (including youth) in participating in park and garden spaces. We should encourage businesses to beautify and maintain through



incentives, and support their parklets to be up to code and not an added expense.

- v. **Stormwater management** - address key flooding hotspots, use low-cost solutions like cleaning drains and installing rain gardens with community help, expand green infrastructure and seek partnerships for funding and support.
- c. **Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?**

I restored my restaurant and market in a nearly 100 year old building following green initiatives. I believe in the future of “greening our economy” and the important role the health of our environment plays in my children’s future. I personally love to garden, woodwork and anything that creates a positive environment for myself and my staff. Please come and visit me at Howden Market. We can take a tour.

- 6. **Please describe how you plan to address Oakland’s immediate fiscal budget crisis AND long-term structural budget deficit. What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver in 2 years? 4 years? As part of your response, please:**
 - a. **Summarize the largest contributors to Oakland’s budget challenges and your understanding of why previous Councils/Mayoral administrations have not solved the issue(s).**
 - b. **Describe how you will reduce expenses (including cuts you would make to specific programs) that will free up resources that can be allocated toward addressing other budget priorities.**

There is more homework to be done to gain a full understanding of the issues and deliver effective solutions. I start by looking at non-essential, low-priority, and non-performance programs. .

- c. **Describe how you will increase revenues to fund much-needed services, avoid painful cuts, invest in the city’s future growth, and address the structural deficit.**
 - 1. **Attract Businesses:** Offer tax incentives and simplify permits.
 - 2. **Boost Tourism:** Promote local attractions and host events.
 - 3. **Revise Property Taxes:** Update assessments and adjust rates.
 - 4. **Increase Fees and Fines:** Update service fees and enforce fines.
 - 5. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with private companies on city projects.
 - 6. **Local Sales Tax:** Introduce or raise local sales tax rates.
 - 7. **Grants and Funding:** Apply for grants and use crowdfunding.



8. **Optimize Utilities:** Adjust utility rates and reduce waste.
9. **Invest in Infrastructure:** Improve infrastructure to attract businesses.
10. **Monetize Assets:** Lease or sell underutilized city properties or turn them into performing assets.

d. Discuss your perspectives on:

i. Major sources of general fund revenues, and any recent trends or changes

Our major general fund revenue sources include property taxes, sales taxes, income taxes, fees and charges for services, business taxes, fines and penalties, and grants. This revenue is plummeting, and doesn't appear to be getting better anytime soon. Which is a big reason why I'm running for city council city wide.

ii. Major general fund expenditures, and any recent trends or changes -n/a

Major general fund expenditures include public safety, public works, parks and recreation, housing and homelessness services, health and human services, education, and administrative support. Although we've been increasing spending on homelessness and affordable housing, public safety reform, and higher investment in infrastructure and health services-it doesn't seem we're getting the results needed right now.

iii. Unfunded liabilities, including pensions and deferred maintenance, and any recent trends or changes -n/a

Oakland faces significant unfunded liabilities, including rising pension costs and a growing backlog of deferred maintenance. Recent trends show increased focus on pension reform and strategic investments to address deferred maintenance, we need to continue work in balancing/fully resolving these issues.

e. Describe how you will maintain objectivity despite pressure and specific budget asks by the groups and organizations that have endorsed you - create a win-win and maintenance fairness

To stay objective and fair, I will prioritize transparency and base my decisions on data, engaging with our diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable resource allocation. I will seek collaborative solutions, and maintain accountability through regular reviews and community reporting.



f. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

This is about voter trust. Over my 17 years in business, I've navigated tough times and overcome adversity. This experience has honed my skills in problem-solving, negotiation, and relationship-building. I will bring to City Council my collaborative approach to data-driven plans, community engagement and accountability through regular and transparent reports.

7. Please describe what you plan to do differently from business-as-usual in city hall to ensure effective, efficient, transparent, and accountable governance in Oakland.
As part of your response, please:

a. Describe in what ways the City of Oakland is meeting and/or not meeting your definition of good government.

It doesn't seem city leadership truly grasps the pressing issues Oakland is facing, but rather continuing to prioritize failed strategies. We are leaving common sense solutions off the table which are frustrating our citizens and deteriorating their way of life.

b. Summarize what changes you would make in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of city governance and increase transparency.

I will push to expand procedural openness, streamline processes, boost public engagement, improve accountability (with performance metrics), foster collaboration, invest in financial and operational management technology, etc. But for this to happen, we need a new city council majority that will vote together for these principles.

c. Answer how Oakland City Council can provide greater oversight and public accountability in contracting, grant-making, and outcomes/performance management.

Start by making contract and grant details publicly available, regularly auditing and reviewing performance, setting clear goals and holding people accountable, involving the community in evaluations, and requiring regular updates from contractors and grantees. These steps will help ensure funds are used effectively and build public trust.

8. For incumbents: What is a vote you're MOST and LEAST proud of in the last four years. Briefly describe the issue, why you voted the way you did, and what you think now about that vote.



9. **For new candidates: What was the most impactful Council vote in the past four years? Briefly describe the issue, what you think of the Council's decision, and what you would have done had you been on the Council.**

There's been a number, but I'll say those that "reimagined" public safety, and their budget priorities, have been the most impactful for Oakland. Although some were likely with good intentions, this most recent budget vote clearly illustrates we're digging an unsustainable structural deficit hole that will continue to undercut our needed public safety resources unless addressed quickly and effectively.

10. **What are the major challenges faced by Oakland businesses?**

There's many, but here's the main ones:

Crime - drives away customers for existing businesses, and investors of new ones;

Unhoused/mental health - particularly for us downtown. We shouldn't have to be our city's social workers dealing with this crisis daily. We receive virtually zero support from the city-especially not MACRO. The only help we get is from fire dept and street ambassadors, and isn't much-we deal with the same people and issues the very next day which diverts our staff from their usual work and sometimes costs us customers;

High operating costs - particularly for the small and independent businesses;

Regulation/Fees - the complex permitting, zoning regulations, and compliance with our local ordinances stifles growth and new investment. But there are other frustrations. For example, the city's failure to manage crime has led to many businesses being dropped by their insurance, or seeing exorbitant increases. After a speeding driver [crashed into my market](#) in 2021 closing it down and costing hundreds of thousands, I requested a small grant from the city to help cover the costs-but this crash didn't qualify. They did eventually announce the option for businesses to install protective Jersey barriers at our cost. Not only are these freeway type dividers unsightly and deter customers, but as [this article I am quoted in](#) shows, these would cost \$1,080 each plus \$22,080 annually if placed in a metered space. This does not include the cost of the barriers themselves, which for my business would be in addition to previous costs related to protection from vehicular collisions.

11. **What specific steps will you take to ensure that Oakland businesses can thrive and are able to create more jobs and improve the Oakland economy?**

1) I will prioritize public safety by working collaboratively between city hall and OPD, OPOA and related commissions in establishing a clear plan and timeline to improve our



security infrastructure and technology implementations such as drones and Flock cameras. Will also advocate for achieving and initiating a community policing plan that meets the needs of each district in Oakland.

2) Second, I will push for simplifying and expediting our permitting and licensing process, while proposing financial incentives to stimulate new business. We need potential investors in our community to feel confident we will be good partners to them.

There are important ballot measures that are up for vote in November. How would you vote on the following and why?

- a. **Would you vote to Recall District Attorney Pamela Price?** I'm running for city council to collaboratively help solve Oakland's issues. I will let the voters decide this issue.
- b. **Would you vote to Recall Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao?** I will let the voters decide on this as well.
- c. **Would you vote to pass the Oakland Measure Z renewal?** Yes, but we need to continue bettering these initiatives.
- d. **Would you vote to pass California Prop 36 (makes changes to Prop 47)?** Yes, but we need to do better on these initiatives as well.