



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: LeRonne L. Armstrong

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Phone Number: (510) 750-8582

Office & District Sought: Oakland City Councilmember At-Large

Campaign Website: armstrongforoakland.com

Social Media Handles

- Twitter: armstrongforoak
- Facebook:
- Instagram:
- LinkedIn:
- TikTok:

Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$250,000

Funds Raised To Date: \$50,000

General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

Most Oaklanders know me as the former Chief of Police, however many also know me based on my deep personal and professional relationships in Oakland. I’m a West Oakland native, raised in public housing by a mother who worked two jobs and taught me the value of hard work. My brother was killed in Oakland, while I was in high school. This experience compelled me to want to bring justice to other victims of violence and their families. I understand the need for accountability to bring closure and justice for victims, however I also believe mentoring and workforce programs that prevent criminal activity.



I graduated from McClymonds high school in West Oakland. I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, a Master's Degree in Organizational Leadership, and an Executive Leadership Certificate from Harvard University. I am a graduate of the prestigious FBI National Academy and FBI Executive Leadership Academy. I provided practical and common-sense leadership in the City of Oakland for 24 years as an officer with OPD and as Police Chief. I successfully managed the largest City of Oakland department of over 1,100 employees and managed the largest department budget over \$300 million dollars. I brought OPD three million dollars under budget and delivered a balanced budget for the department for the first time in decades.

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

The City of Oakland faces many challenges, however it is important to prioritize the issues that are most important to our residents and businesses and will also have the greatest impact on their quality of life. My top issues are crime and public safety, affordable housing and the unhoused, and good government that works for everyone. Our neighborhoods and businesses cannot thrive without public safety. As Police Chief, I worked everyday to keep residents safe and I am the only candidate in this race that has implemented policies that have proven to decrease crime. As a native Oaklander, I believe that long term residents should be able to afford to live in Oakland and I will create policies that encourage and streamline the creation of different housing options. I will also work towards policies that prevent homelessness and seek county, state and federal funding to support our unhoused neighbors. Finally, as a former department head, I understand the importance of fully functioning and efficient city government.

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

I am the only candidate who has led a city department and has executive level leadership to move the city forward. I am running to become Oakland's next At Large City Councilmember, where I would represent the entire City. After 24 years of service, I still have much more service to offer the Oakland community. I will use my extensive knowledge of the City of Oakland to bring real policy solutions to the city council to solve the city's toughest problems. I have a broad understanding of the needs of the city since it was my duty and charge to keep our residents safe. I was born and raised in West Oakland and now reside in East Oakland, therefore I have a broad understanding of the entire city. I proudly served the City of Oakland for 24 years, including two years as Chief of Police. I look forward to continuing to serve the city that raised me and where I raised my family. I cannot sit by and allow the residents and businesses to suffer when I know that I can have the experience and leadership to turn things around. I am running to continue my work to keep all Oaklanders safe, to end the sense of lawlessness that has caused many residents and business owners to feel that the city is not meeting their needs. I am the only candidate in this race with the experience and knowledge to work within the city to bring real change to turn the city around.



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

Prior to running for office I led the largest city department. I worked in city government for over 20 years. Some of my biggest accomplishments include

- Establishing the Community Liaison Officers in Chinatown, Little Saigon, Fruitvale, and East/West Oakland
- Launched the Community Pastors Response Program to assist trauma victims
- Promoted Community Policing through block parties connecting residents and patrol officers
- Brought in a three-million-dollar budget under budget for the first time in decades
- Developed the current five-year Strategic Plan for Oakland's largest department
- Oversaw the Violent Crime Operations Center to address homicides and gun crimes
- Created the city's first Victim's Specialist position to provide assistance to victims and families.
- Initiated and championed the Ceasefire Strategy, a violence reduction initiative
- Oversaw the Final Phase of OPD's Federal Oversight for the first time

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.

Existing public safety investments that I would increase is the number of officers to improve public safety. I would reduce the number of OPD unfunded positions, there are currently 120 unfunded positions in the police budget. I would seek to identify funding and incrementally increase funding to get OPD to full staffing levels of 792 positions. I would pursue federal and state hiring grants to increase our funding for OPD. I would hire professionals to review the budget and identify savings or potential cuts that could be allocated to public safety. In two years I would increase OPD staffing from 676 to 790 which should reduce crime by 15% over a 2 year period. In 4 years I would further increase OPD staffing based on the budget with the goal of reducing crime by 30%.

- 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?



The City of Oakland has invested in non-sworn responses to public safety both inside and outside OPD. The ceasefire program is an example, it is in OPD, and also within the Department of Violence Prevention (DVP). Some of the most effective strategies within DVP's ceasefire program's use of life coaches. I would continue programs and strategies with a proven track record of success. The process of providing grants to nonprofits that prove that they have met their goals should be continued.

- 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).

The City of Oakland is far below the appropriate level for a city of its size and the amount of crime experienced by residents and businesses. By 2028, I would like to see 950 officers in OPD.

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

There are various strategies that should be employed to address crime in Oakland. The ceasefire strategy is a useful strategy to respond to group and gang violence. I would also look to outside resources such as working with the governor who has assisted both San Francisco and San Jose with retail theft. I would increase traffic enforcement in retail business areas. Ensuring safe residential streets and business corridors is a top priority for all Oaklanders. As someone who experienced the effects of crime personally and professionally, I understand the critical need for improved police response times and a 911 system that works. I am committed to implementing practical solutions that build trust and transparency by supporting the Ceasefire program and increasing the number of Community Resource Officers. I would reduce the number of unfunded OPD positions and bring back traffic enforcement and other specialized units to ensure every resident feels secure. Moverover, I would prioritize public safety in economic centers like the downtown/uptown and the Hegenburger corridor. Finally, I would seek support from federal, state and county agencies to partner in addressing crime in Oakland.

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

Oaklanders should have confidence to deliver on my goals because crime was lower while I led the Oakland Police Department. Under my watch there was no one shot by a police officer. While I was Chief, businesses were not closing at an alarming rate. I used best practices and proven strategies from across the country to keep crime under control. I will bring the same consistency and sensible approach to the City Council.



6. 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? As part of your response, please:

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

The region and the City of Oakland are facing a housing crisis. The affordability crisis has caused my long-term residents to leave the city. Also, many city workers cannot afford to live in the city. I support policies that promote the increase available units while promoting development policies that support our environment. Construction projects should be incentivized to use environmentally friendly materials and avoid harmful chemicals.

- 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?

It is not humane to allow people to live in deplorable and unsafe conditions. Homelessness is a regional problem that requires a regional approach and solutions. In order to support people experiencing long term homelessness, I would advocate for more federal, state, and county funding to address this growing problem. Oakland was the only city in the region to experience an increase in homelessness after the last count. The City should encourage and support the development of more affordable housing. It also needs to reduce barriers to development in the city by streamlining the building permit process. The city should also support programs that offer real pathways out of homelessness. The City should also seek additional mental health funding and resources from the County. In order to ensure the health and safety of all residents it should enforce existing policies and regulations regarding the conditions in which unhoused residents reside.

- c. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. The respective roles of affordable (below-market-rate) housing and market-rate housing

Collaborating with unions, homeowners, housing advocates, landowners, and developers to initiate construction projects for more housing that is affordable for all is crucial for addressing Oakland's homelessness and housing crisis. We need to build affordable and market-rate housing. I aim to bridge the gap between these stakeholders to push for policies that benefit Oaklanders. I support policies which allow those who work in Oakland but can't afford to live in the city to stay here and prevent the displacement of long time and low income residents. I



envision a city where every resident has access to safe, affordable housing and where the focus is on building consensus rather than engaging in divisive politics.

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

In order to promote development, the city should revisit zoning and building height requirements to ensure that developers can build more affordable housing. Also, I would seek a report from the administration on how setback requirements affect development.

Areas of the city that I would prioritize are East Oakland new development because there is a need for more affordable housing, however, it is important to consider all vacant parcels and underdeveloped parts of the city. I would also prioritize areas of the city that are close to transportation centers.

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

Oakland's Encampment Management Policy should be enforced as well as laws pertaining to our roadways and sidewalks. While we must lead with compassion we must also make sure that the City's resources are clean and accessible to all. I would also revise our policies to conform to new law..

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

The City should seek greater investment in mental health and substance abuse from the County. Furthermore, the City should pursue investment in the CARES program and diversion programs.

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

Homelessness and affordable housing are difficult issues to address with the city's limited and strained financial situation. In my position, leading the largest city department, I made many difficult decisions including helping to guide the department through the COVID pandemic.

7. 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? 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).



The biggest problem that Oakland faces regarding public infrastructure is the lack of funding to fix the crumbling streets that are filled with potholes. We must seek additional funding from the state and federal government.

- b. Discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:
 - i. Blight, Litter and Dumping

Specific improvements to address blight, litter and dumping include stronger civil penalties for illegal dumping. There should be a delicate city attorney to follow up on potential civil actions. There should also be dedicated city resources to address blight and graffiti in a timely manner.

- ii. Road repair & repaving

The city should continue to follow an equity analysis to prioritize which streets get paved. I would also seek a comprehensive plan by DOT that lays out timelines, priority streets. I would also work closely with residents to use the 311 system to bring attention to problem roads.

- iii. Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation

In order to increase bike and pedestrian safety the city should pursue efforts to slow people down. I would request traffic studies to inform policies. There is room for improvement in the International Blvd corridor. I would work with AC Transit to make sure bus routes are accessible to our low income and residents.

- iv. Streetscape improvements (trees, parklets, etc)

Tree maintenance is important for beautification and public safety. I would ensure that tree maintenance is prioritized especially in areas with a history of fires and dangerous trees. I would utilize the Oakland Fire Department and public works to maintain these trees. For parklets I support continuing their use in commercial areas.

- v. Stormwater management

I would prioritize areas of the city that are in most need to control stormwater runoff to improve water quality and protect the environment. I would also work with the local water district to ensure the city is employing best practices.

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



I was the Chief of the biggest department in the city, where I set goals and delivered results for all Oaklanders. If elected I will continue to provide Oaklanders the results they need to keep Oakland a vibrant city.

8. 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).

The large labor contracts contribute to the city's budget challenge. Some of the elected officials voted for improved contracts for city workers when they thought the budget would improve. Since the pandemic there has been a decline in city revenues across the board that led to fiscal crisis. Previous Councils/Mayoral administrations have not solved the budget issues because they never made the budget a priority and were not focused on fiscal responsibility.

- 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.

The City should conduct a full fiscal analyst to determine which areas of the budget align with our priorities. If an expense is not a priority it may be ripe for cutting and reallocated to higher budget priorities.

- 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.

The city can increase revenue by increasing the business tax. However the city should pursue external opportunities for growth.

- d. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. Major sources of general fund revenues, and any recent trends or changes

The City should look at the decisions made by other jurisdictions that have enough general fund revenues to support their budget priorities and employ grant writers to specifically bring in funding to assist the general fund

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



When the city faced a decrease in general fund, the city chose to sell a parcel to avoid additional cuts to public safety. This trend should be avoided since it does not address ongoing structural problems in the budget.

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

The City of Oakland must take care of its transactional commitments in a fiscally responsible way. Failure to follow their contractual agreements that could lead to litigation and be costly for the city.

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

Budget decisions should be grounded in data and thoroughly analyzed. External influences by supporters should not be considered to determine budget outcomes.

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

I was the Chief of the biggest department in the city, where I set goals and delivered results for all Oaklanders. If elected I will continue to provide Oaklanders the results they need to keep Oakland a vibrant city.

9. 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.

In order for the city to meet my definition of good government, the city needs council members with leadership and executive experience. The city is currently facing a fiscal and public safety crisis. Our new leaders should be ready to manage complex issues and propose solutions.

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

The changes that I would make to improve the efficiency of city governance and increase efficiency by making city government more accessible to residents. I would meet with a variety of groups and seek more input from residents and businesses. Transparent communication with Oaklanders and clear explanations of issues are foundational to my vision for good, honest



government. I understand that building trust between the city council and the residents is a must to restore faith in city government. The first step to establishing trust is by promoting transparency and reducing the conflicts instigated by a few councilmembers, allowing the city to move towards more effective governance and better serve its residents. I believe that overcoming the aggressive infighting is essential to uniting our city leadership and creating a more supportive environment for all.

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

Greater transparency and allowing the public to see procurement process and bid process earlier would lead to greater oversight. The City could share who the finalists for large projects with the community earlier.

10. **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.
11. **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.

The most impactful vote in the past four years was the defunding of the Oakland Police Department in 2021. The City Council's decision did not support public safety in Oakland. We are feeling the impact of the defunding through increased crime. If I had been on the City Council I would not have voted to defund the police department and I would have voted to support public safety in Oakland. ,

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

The major challenges faced by Oakland businesses are crime, retail theft, and commercial burglary. They are also suffering from vandalism and their employees being threatened and assaulted. Specific steps that I would take to assist businesses are the development of a comprehensive crime reduction plan that would be centered in commercial areas. I would increase the number of walking officers in business districts. Finally, I would increase the number of OPD officers to allow for faster response times and more comprehensive investigations.



Protecting local businesses from crime and organizing events to attract locals and tourists are key components of my plan to boost Oakland's economy. Recognizing that a thriving local business community helps everyone, I understand that Oakland's success depends on the success of small businesses that build community and provide jobs. By listening and working in unity with the business community, I aim to end the divisive tactics of some council members, ensuring a prosperous future for all local businesses and the community at large.

13. 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? (YES/NO)

At this time, I am not ready to make a final decision.

- b. Would you vote to Recall Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao? (YES/NO)

At this time, I am not ready to make a final decision.

- c. Would you vote to pass the Oakland Measure Z renewal? (YES/NO)

Yes, I would vote to pass the Oakland Measure Z renewal, despite some imperfections.

- d. Would you vote to pass California Prop 36 (makes changes to Prop 47)? (YES/NO)

Yes, I would vote to pass California Prop 36 because retail theft has had a tremendous impact on retail stores and the business community. It is unacceptable that businesses are forced to close because of overwhelming theft and there needs to be more accountability for committing these types of crimes.