



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: Len Raphael
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Office & District Sought: District 1 City Council
Campaign Website: LensForChange.com
Social Media Handles

- Twitter: [@lenraphaelcpa](https://twitter.com/lenraphaelcpa)
- Facebook:
- Instagram: [lenraphael4change](https://www.instagram.com/lenraphael4change)
- LinkedIn: Len Raphael
- TikTok: lenraphael

Expected total Fundraising Amount: 50,000
Funds Raised To Date: 12,000

General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland? *I’ve lived in the Fruitvale, at the top of Panoramic Way, in Mosswood, and for the last 38 years in Temescal. Co-owned Car World repair on Webster and 40th. After working at Price Waterhouse and Deloitte, I opened my accounting practice in Oakland, specializing in small to medium-sized tech businesses as CPA.COM.*
2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?
 - a. *A dysfunctional city government that fails to provide high quality services and elected leaders that ignore their budget staff’s advice and refuse to change budget priorities to increase the size of OPD to at least 800 officers with the goal of 1,200.*



b. *With our many smart, innovative, and diverse residents, a rich cultural history, and our proximity to UC Berkeley, we have the potential to attract businesses that can provide jobs for our many unemployed and underemployed residents.*

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

It's time to refocus on the fundamentals of city government, adopt a realistic approach to our finances, and ensure that residents receive the services they are paying for. As Atlanta DA Fani Willis has said "the first priority of government is to protect its people"

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

Served as the former Treasurer of Temple Beth Abraham, managed a youth soccer team at Bushrod, held the position of Alameda Contra Costa Youth Soccer League Treasurer, co-founded the short-lived SaferTemescal unarmed private patrol, managed another resident's City Council race in 2018, ran for District 1 City Council in 2012, and for City Auditor in 2014 when I was endorsed by the local Democratic caucus. I'm proud of helping get voter approval for the Oakland Police Commission charter provision and pushing OUSD to notify all low income and elderly property owners of available parcel tax exemptions in multiple languages. Currently active in both DA Price and Mayor Thao recalls. CFO of Foundational Oakland Unites.

Oakland City Council

4. **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.

Overhaul the Oakland budget priorities to increase police staffing, technology and adopt changes in OPD rules similar to SF Measure E. Petition the Federal judge to replace our current overseer.

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?

Fire: we don't need more fire stations. We need a lot more fire prevention and quake preparedness measures. That includes more civilian fire inspectors.

I advocated for a MACRO that is not the mobile social services unit that we ended up



with. We need to drastically improve its cost effectiveness. Start by restricting it to East Oakland and operating it 24x7 before expanding it the entire city, if at all.

- 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). 1,000
- iii. Your prioritized strategies for addressing various types of crime, including gun violence, retail robbery, bipping, residential burglary, traffic violence, and any others.

The only proven anti-violence program in the US is CeaseFire. All the other ones operate at best on a hope and a prayer, and efficacy is unmeasurable. I would sunset all of them and the Dept of Violence Prevention. If the programs can't prove efficacy, cut them.

A combination of replacing DA Price with a reasonable DA like the CC Becton or SF Jenkins , increasing sworn staff first to 800 and ultimately to 1,200, implementing SF Measure E type changes to OPD procedures, greatly expanding use of drones, cameras, gps darts etc would bring our property crime down to that of similar cities. And welcoming police instead of villifying them. We don't have to wait until the underlying causes of crime have been cured.

Don't fire police chiefs for the slightest reason. Changing them often undermines the ability of the next chief to implement policy. Criminals get restorative justice for serious crimes. Police chiefs deserve the same.

I would not have fired any of the last three chiefs.

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

When I ran for City Auditor residents from all parts of the city approached me and told him about fiscal stuff going on inside City Hall that should never have occurred. Over the past year I've worked closely with residents from all over Oakland on both recalls, from very different walks of life. Hundreds of residents have told me how they made a mistake when they voted for the DA or the Mayor. Many would say how much they dislike recalls, but that exceptions are needed because they had been victimized by crime that our elected officials have dismissed as Next Door hysteria or "pearl clutching". Much of the crime targets women and the elderly. Property crime is often violent.

5. **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:**

I support Gov Newsom's implementation of the SCOTUS Grant's Pass ruling. But I would only relocate the unhoused from public spaces if we had at least temporary abodes for them, regardless of their



opposition.

If elected I would advocate with Federal and State elected officials for substantial funding to finance low income housing. I am neither a YIMBY nor a NIMBY and believe that upzoning done with quality design can reduce the cost of market rate housing but not much impact on low income housing.

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

Oakland does not have the tax base of SF, LA, or NYC. It should not be spending tax money on housing until it can afford to provide core services to all residents. Spend only the minimum required by law and spend it to leverage other subsidies.

- 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?
- c. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. The respective roles of affordable (below-market-rate) housing and market-rate housing
 - ii. The City's Housing Element and proposed zoning reforms
 - iii. Oakland's Encampment Management Policy, implementation of it to date, and improvements needed moving forward
 - iv. The City/County's approach to mental health and substance abuse treatment
- d. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

6. **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).
- b. Discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:
 - i. Blight, Litter and Dumping

Provide free dumpsters throughout the city with surveillance cameras.

- ii. Road repair & repaving
- iii. Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation

Instead of costly physical improvements such as roundabouts and bulbouts, integrate security cameras with systems that clock the speed of vehicles and automatically issues speeding tickets. This has been done effectively in the UK.

- iv. Streetscape improvements (trees, parklets, etc)
- v. Stormwater management
- c. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?



7. **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.
 - 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.
 - d. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. Major sources of general fund revenues, and any recent trends or changes
 - ii. Major general fund expenditures, and any recent trends or changes
 - iii. Unfunded liabilities, including pensions and deferred maintenance, and any recent trends or changes
 - e. Describe how you will maintain objectivity despite pressure and specific budget asks by the groups and organizations that have endorsed you.
 - f. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

Much of my detailed platform is devoted to this:

Require a balanced budget without structural deficits. *Implement charter-backed guardrails to ensure that our City finances don’t keep staggering from one fiscal crisis to another. Place a measure on the ballot that requires the City Auditor to certify that the adopted budget is sustainably balanced using the five-year revenue and expense projections prepared by the City Budget Bureau and accepted by the Citizens Budget Advisory Commission. Also require the City Budget Office to prepare ten-year projections for the City Auditor to evaluate legislation and budgets. Like the Congressional Budget Office, adding the City Auditor as a non-partisan referee to the process of passing a budget to eliminate the accounting gimmicks and fake revenue projections that have plagued the budget process and put the City on a path to financial ruin.*

- g. **Negotiate permanent concessions.** *A structurally balanced budget requires concessions from the unions, possibly a reduction in benefits rather than pay. The longer we fail to address the serious financial issues, the more layoffs and concessions will be required down the road. Bring the parties to the table and negotiate concessions, understanding that Chapter 9 bankruptcy is the likely alternative. Bankruptcy benefits no one: city staff, residents, or businesses.*
- h. **Fully Reopen City Hall.** *All city employees must work at least four days a week in their downtown offices. Currently, each department sets its work-from-home policy separately. Some allow full remote work. But Oakland City Hall is not efficiently set up for work-from-home resulting in inferior public service.*
- i. **Prioritize core city services with police and fire at the top of the list.** *Then parks, trash cleanup, paving, senior and rec centers, Head Start, and libraries. Eliminate non-core services and ineffective programs and departments.*



- j. **Don't cut the subsidies for public festivals and art.** When run properly and policed as needed, they greatly improve the quality of life.
- k. **Guarantee funding for the City Auditor's Office.** Especially in tough financial times, the Auditor becomes one of the most important offices in the city. Guarantee the City Auditor has the funding, staff, and resources to perform fraud and effectiveness audits on all city contracts above a certain dollar amount on a random basis. Currently, most are not audited.
- l. **Cut all anti-violence programs except Ceasefire.** Only Ceasefire has demonstrated its effectiveness. Many of the crimes here are perpetrated by people coming to Oakland who are not even touched by any of our anti-violence programs. Evaluate eliminating the Department of Violence Prevention if it cannot show that it significantly reduces violence. Use half these savings to fund more after-school rec centers and tutoring. If people want to keep anti-violence programs whose effectiveness can't be measured (most anti-violence programs can't be evaluated because it's difficult to get participants to say they had intended to hurt someone), set up an independent citizen's committee and a lottery system for grants. Random audit the non-profit grant recipients for fraud.
- m. **Eliminate the Economic Development Department, which has never developed anything.** Economic development results from a cleaner and safer city. City Hall has neither the funds nor the expertise for "industrial policy." **Make the city clean and safe, and employers will come.**
- n. **Scale back MACRO.** Do not increase the MACRO police civilian alternative budget until an effective and limited pilot has been demonstrated. Limit MACRO to East Oakland with 24x7 service. Evaluate why the cost per incident is so high.
- o. **Flatten top-heavy departments with excessive management costs. Every organization has waste.** Layoffs are often the only way to force government departments to make hard staffing decisions. Start at the top.
- p. **Require the City Administrator to re-engineer all departments to improve their work culture and productivity.** A prime example is the building department. Other cities process permits much faster than Oakland.
- q. **Evaluate our retirement system.** California's pension system is broken. Oakland's dire financial straits make it the perfect place to discuss how to fix it. Consider higher employee contributions to retirement plans or even switching to 401k-type plans for new employees. Review our retirement health care benefits.
- r. **Transparently disclose the details of city finances and operations so that our many savvy residents can analyze and suggest ways to improve operations. Elected officials have promised transparency for years but failed to deliver.**
- s. **End parcel tax bait and switch.** Amend the City Charter as needed to prevent the use of parcel tax money for anything other than for the titled purposes. Remove all small print exceptions that allow money to be diverted to the general fund so the generosity of voters and taxpayers can no longer be abused.
- t. **Once the house is in order, craft a "wide net" tax increase for the ballot. Only after all of the above changes have been made and every department scrutinized for inefficiencies and ineffectiveness, craft a package of tax increases for the ballot, including an unpleasantly large parcel tax that would be borne by renters, owners, and businesses alike with generous exemptions for low-income residents and small and start-up businesses.**



8. **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:
- Describe in what ways the City of Oakland is meeting and/or not meeting your definition of good government.
 - Summarize what changes you would make in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of city governance and increase transparency.

Transparency is another empty promise of Oakland officials for years. Libby Schaaf promised she would implement a “city stat” real time dashboard of service metrics for residents to monitor the City’s delivery of services. Never happened but should have.

The current semi-strong mayor setup is not working. We either need to go back to a city manager system or move to a strong mayor system. At present we have the worst of both systems with mayors who have limited powers so it’s hard to hard them accountable.

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

Getting fiscal details from the city in enough detail to figure out solutions is extremely difficult. One former Citizen’s Budget Advisory member told me the only way he could get the info he needed was to ask a friendly staff member to run reports for him. We have many extrodinarily fiscally competent residents who could help the city staff and elected officials if they had better access to data.

9. **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.
10. **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.

Most significant was the budget vote of June 2023 that was a lost opportunity to put our finances on a sustainable footing. Council and Mayor were warned months before by budget staff that using COVID money and accounting smoke/mirrors would only make our future problems worse. They repeated the same mistake this past July.

I would have worked with other council members to get permanent concessions in benefits and possibly wages from all city staff. I would have held hearings to learn what priorities residents could agree on and try to reach consensus as difficult as that might be.



11. 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?

Just having a few elected officials with private sector experience would greatly improve the support for local employers. Almost all of our elected officials for the past two decades have been either government or non-profit employees, or employment attorneys. Not that a city should be run like a business, but it's hard to understand what it takes to support business development when you've never been in private industry

12. 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) YES
- b. Would you vote to Recall Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao? (YES/NO) YES
- c. Would you vote to pass the Oakland Measure Z renewal? (YES/NO) NO
- d. Would you vote to pass California Prop 36 (makes changes to Prop 47)? (YES/NO) YES