



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: Erin Armstrong

Email: erinforoakland@gmail.com

Phone Number: 8014949947

Office & District Sought: Oakland City Council, District 5

Campaign Website: www.voteforerin.com

Social Media Handles

- Twitter:
- Facebook: <http://facebook.com/voteforerin>
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/erin_for_oakland/
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/erinarmstrong510/>
- TikTok:

Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$50,000

Funds Raised To Date: \$15,000

General Questions

1. **What is your background/experience in Oakland?**

I am the Senior Policy Advisor to Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley and have had the opportunity to address some of the most challenging issues facing Oakland today, including affordable housing, illegal dumping, homelessness, mental health, early education, police oversight and more.

I got my education locally in the Peralta Community College system and at Mills College, where I received a Joint Masters in Business Administration in Business Administration and Public Policy (MBA/MPP) and BA in Political, Legal and Economic Analysis.



I have volunteered in Oakland on the BART Police Citizen Review Board and the East Bay Women's Political Alliance. I own a home in Oakland, and am raising my daughter, alongside my wife, deepening our roots in Oakland.

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

Oakland is a world class city that is suffering from a lack of basic services. The top challenges I see are delivering clean streets and safe neighborhoods, which are two issues that run through everything the City does, and are impacted directly by the budget and efficiency of city systems.

The strength of Oakland is its people; its diversity of cultures, ideas, religions and perspectives. This is why people come to Oakland, and it is why they stay.

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

As the leader of the Alameda County Illegal Dumping Task Force, I have led the effort to remove over 500 tons of illegal dumping, but more than that, we have prevented illegal dumping by planting trees, fixing the street lights, and improving the curbs. We have reduced barriers to eradication so that local businesses and communities can pick up and dispose of illegal dumping for free, and we have held hundreds of illegal dumpers accountable for coming into Oakland and taking advantage. In 4 years we transformed one of Oakland's worst illegal dumping hotspots into a beautiful tree-lined street that rarely receives illegal dumping.

I did not do this alone. We built a coalition effort, bringing the City and County together with local businesses, nonprofits, faith and community groups, students, residents and more, and we engaged in a dedicated and concerted effort to address the problem comprehensively. This is what I do. I build the coalitions and direct the efforts to achieve a greater vision. This is THE skill set that is necessary to succeed on Oakland City Council, and to address the challenging, and systemic issues that we are facing.

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

I am the Senior Police Advisor to Alameda County Supervisor Miley, served as Chair of the BART Police Citizen Review Board, Chaired the Ad Hoc Community on Urban Shield, did the policy and ran the field operation for Measure A (2018), and am the PAC Chair of the East Bay Women's Political Alliance, raising money to elect pro-choice women into local office. My accomplishments are reflected in my additional answers.



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.
 - 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?
 - 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).
 - iii. Your prioritized strategies for addressing various types of crime, including gun violence, retail robbery, bipping, residential burglary, traffic violence, and any others.
 - c. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

Public safety requires a comprehensive approach—investing in upstream solutions to prevent violence and create opportunity, while ensuring there are consequences for bad behavior. Additionally, we need to ensure we are using the right tool for the right job. As Chair and Vice Chair of the BART Police Citizen Review Board, I was instrumental in the creation of the BART Ambassadors and Fair Inspectors programs, which use non-sworn employees to address quality of life issues like eating or sleeping on a train, as well as fair evasion and ticket inspection. These programs allow the police officers to focus on the crimes that require a badge and gun, while saving money and ensuring an appropriate response to issues that do not. This is the approach that I bring to public safety—comprehensive solutions that use all available tools.

Speaking mainly on downstream solutions, while I believe that OPD should have at least 1,000 officers, I understand that that number is not attainable given the reality of police training schedules and competition for officers. That said, I have a strong relationship with the Sheriff, and have discussed options for ACSO to provide additional support. This is crucial, because OPD is relying on a lot of overtime to meet the needs of our residents, and overtime is very expensive. This is why I will push for the City to evaluate all options when it comes to providing law enforcement services in the City of Oakland, including an examination of whether OPD is able to provide the services that are required, given the incredible restrictions that have been placed upon the force. For



example, OPD officers must evaluate 12 criteria before determining whether or not to chase a suspect, and the people driving recklessly on our streets know it. They know that OPD is not allowed to chase them, and so they come here from all across the Bay Area—because there are no consequences in Oakland. The same is true for smash and grabs, bipping, burglaries and so on. Furthermore, because many of these restrictions are in place because of the Federal receivership that OPD is under, the City Council is powerless to change them. And on top of all of that, morale at OPD is near an all-time low. At what point is it appropriate to ask, “is OPD fundamentally so broken that it is no longer able to provide public safety?”

Therefore, I propose that the City of Oakland engage in a robust evaluation of all options for ensuring law enforcement services are delivered appropriately, across the entire city but especially in East, Deep East, and West Oakland. Should the City invest more in non-sworn programs like MACRO (which I will discuss in my next response), or should the City follow the [Camden Model](#), where Camden NJ dissolved its police force and began receiving police services from the County? Oaklanders pay \$880 per capita for OPD, but the city of Dublin (in Alameda County) pays only \$400 per capita and receives all of its police services from ACSO. I understand that Oakland has a different set of issues than Dublin, but the difference in per capita spending is alarming.

I believe a top-to-bottom re-evaluation of our entire public safety system is necessary in order to ensure the City is addressing the needs of its residents—that being how to most effectively provide comprehensive public safety to its citizens while also remaining fiscally responsible.

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.
- 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?

As the author of the [Alameda County Homeless State of Emergency](#), I understand that the cost of housing, which is not only an Oakland problem, is driving the homeless crisis in America, and California is uniquely impacted by this crisis for a variety of reasons. In order to solve this crisis, we need to address the systemic issues that are driving it, while also making sure that we are not allowing Oakland to become a dumping ground for the region's problems.

On the systemic solutions side, I was intimately involved in the policy making process for Measure W, which is meant to prevent homelessness by providing short-term shallow subsidies aimed at keeping people in their homes. Given the high cost of living, too many people are living on the edge, where losing your job or having your car break down could spiral into losing your housing. It is cheaper, and prevents so much trauma, to keep someone housed, than it is to try and rehouse someone after they have been displaced. This is a no-brainer investment. Unfortunately, the County has been sued by the Tax Payers Association and while we are collecting the tax and have hundreds of millions of dollars ready to spend, we are prevented from moving forward.

I am leading the process for developing the Alameda County Affordable Housing plan. The plan outlines investment strategies for producing and preserving affordable housing. It costs over \$1M on average to build 1 unit of affordable housing, but a mortgage of that same amount would cost \$5-7K a month depending on interest rates and down payment. Given these costs, it is necessary for public funding to be used in order to ensure affordable, deeply affordable, and workforce housing are developed—not just luxury housing, which is what is most easily penciled out. Unfortunately, the BAHFA Regional Bond was removed from the ballot this week. In its wake we must support [State Proposition 5](#) passes, so that we are able to develop public funding for affordable housing in the future.

Furthermore, I serve on the Care Courts Advisory Committee, ensuring that the implementation of the Alameda County Care Courts system is on track for 2025. This is the program that places people who are no longer able to care for themselves, due to mental health, substance use, and other factors, before a judge who can order the County to provide the treatment and housing necessary to restore them to self sufficiency. This program is intended for the most desperate of cases, but is crucial in ensuring a humane response to homelessness and destitution on our streets. It is important the front-line city staff like police officers and MACRO teams have the ability to make referrals to Care Courts, which would be an expansion of MACRO's capabilities. I



also believe MACRO should have the ability to 5150 a person, so they don't need to rely on OPD to do it, which takes officers away from activities more fitting to their skillset and toolkit.

On the City response side, the City has an encampment management plan that it does not enforce. Encampments are not allowed in residential neighborhoods, parks, in front of schools and playgrounds and churches, but you wouldn't know it looking at the state of our neighborhoods and streets—especially in District 5. Given the recent Grants Pass Supreme Court ruling, overturning the Boise decision, it is time for the City to ensure its policy is enforced. San Francisco is cracking down, Berkeley is cracking down. Dublin, Pleasanton, Hayward, Fremont; they're all cracking down. And, if Oakland continues to not enforce its encampment management policy there is no question where the individuals displaced from these cities will go. Therefore, it is imperative that Oakland ensures its policies are implemented. But, how and where it is key to ensuring a sustainable solution.

Using police to crack down, without providing an alternative place to go, is just going to lead to a game of encampment whack-a-mole, further traumatizing the unhoused while not actually dealing with the problem. We must endeavor to ensure housing is offered when an encampment is closed, but if the offer of housing is refused that does not provide an individual the right to assume control and ownership of a public space like a park, sidewalk or bike lane. If a choice is made to remain unsheltered, that choice does not trump the public's right to public spaces.

I believe that MACRO should be expanded, and that they should have a major role in leading on the enforcement of the encampment management policy. In particular, I would like MACRO to remain nimble and responsive, so that they can intervene quickly when an encampment begins to form in an unauthorized area (like a park). It is much easier to remove one person who just set up a tent than it is to remove dozens of people who have lived in an encampment for months. MACRO should have the ability to direct the unhoused out of areas where encampments are not allowed, and if those directions are not followed then the police can get involved.

It's all about using the right tool for the right job, and ensuring a comprehensive approach that seeks to prevent the issue while also dealing with its downstream consequences.

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).



- b. Discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:
 - i. Blight, Litter and Dumping
 - ii. Road repair & repaving
 - iii. Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation
 - 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?

Since 2018 I have led the Alameda County Illegal Dumping Task Force, a coalition of City/County, private sector, nonprofit, faith, school and community groups coming together to comprehensively address illegal dumping. We adopted nearly 2 miles of illegal dumping hotspots in deep East Oakland and piloted a strategy called “The Three E’s” (Education, Eradication, Enforcement)--a comprehensive approach that addresses both the upstream causes and downstream impacts of illegal dumping. Our goal was to identify strategies that can be replicated and scaled, and we did just that. Today, many Cities and Counties, including Oakland, San Jose, Sacramento and Los Angeles, have adopted a 3E’s approach.

As part of our efforts we planted over 150 trees, fixed the street lighting and improved the curbs—which prevented illegal dumping and had other positive effects—connected local business to free illegal dumping removal, so that they could pick up the garbage on their street and have it removed for free, and installed a dozen cameras and held hundreds of people accountable for taking advantage and dumping in our City. We sustained those efforts and made a real difference. Using a comprehensive strategy and building a coalition to make it happen has transformed one of Oakland's worst illegal dumping hotspots into a beautiful tree lined street that rarely receives dumping.

Currently, there are no consequences for dumping in Oakland, and illegal dumpers know it. Many are doing it for profit—rather than taking it to the dump they pocket the money and dump the problem on our streets. Cleaning up on the weekends is a good start, but without prevention and enforcement efforts we are just providing a free garbage service to illegal dumpers.

Additionally, it should be easier for residents to request speed bumps in their community, and the City should be proactive about installing them in residential communities, especially where there are a lot of renters and it is harder to organize and collect signatures to request a speed bump. And in order to implement it effectively we need to ensure our Department of Transportation and Public Works Departments are operating efficiently and are fully staffed.



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).
 - 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?

Oakland is facing an incredible budget crisis and one-time-solutions (APRA, Coliseum Sale, etc) are not an appropriate fix. Revenue from transfer taxes is drying up and will not be coming back until interest rates drop enough that it makes sense for homeowners to move. If this crisis remains unaddressed we will face the same budget deficit in another 2 years but we won’t have COVID dollars to save us or a Coliseum to sell. The cuts will be deep and painful.

There are two tracks the City must address to solve this crisis: maximizing revenue while minimizing costs. The City cannot afford to miss out of major grants, nor leave tax revenue on the table. In 2023 those losses accounted for at least \$25 million. To grow revenue the City must invest in positions like parking enforcement, to ensure we are collecting revenue that is due, and grant writers, to go after new sources of revenue.

At the same time, we must look at costs. The major drivers of general fund expenses are fire and police services, which are both desperately needed. Yet, we are overspending on public safety by 10’s of millions every year due to overtime. This is because it is more expensive to have an understaffed police force. Rather than rely on overtime, however,



which is very expensive, we should look at all options available to us in ensuring public safety. I have spoken with the Sheriff about law enforcement services in Oakland and in the next few years she feels the department will be staffed and prepared to engage. Could it be more cost-effective to contract with the Sheriff than rely on overtime? Can we move some responsibilities to non-sworn employees, freeing up officers to focus on the things that require a badge and a gun? All options need to be on the table in order to address the structural deficit in the City.

As Chair of the BART Police Citizen Review Board I was instrumental in bringing the Ambassadors and Fair Inspector programs to fruition. These programs saved the system money by shifting responsibility for quality of life calls (e.g. eating or smoking on the train) and fair inspection to non-sworn employees, which freed up the officers to focus on law enforcement and emergency response calls. Oakland has done some of that with MACRO, but there is more work that can be done in this regard.

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.
- b. Summarize what changes you would make in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of city governance and increase transparency.
- c. Answer how Oakland City Council can provide greater oversight and public accountability in contracting, grant-making, and outcomes/performance management.

As an employee at the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, it is always disconcerting to watch the circus at City Hall. Too often infighting and ego gets in the way of making the right decision, and that is not what the residents of Oakland deserve.

My approach to any problem solving is through coalition building. When I Chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Urban Shield, an incredibly divisive program that received a lot of public attention and scrutiny, I was able to thread the needle and guide the Committee, which included very different personalities and perspectives, towards the creation of a comprehensive policy. We did not always agree, but we had set up a process that was fair and we followed it. In the end, no one got everything they wanted, but everyone got something. This is the same approach I will bring to the Council.

Additionally, I would like to explore ways that City Council members can more effectively respond to the needs of their constituents. Currently Councilmembers are prohibited from directing City staff, which is very different from how the County operates. Would we be better off moving back to a City Manager form of government? Can we revisit the



rules limiting direction to staff? These are the questions I seek to address in ensuring an efficient and effective City Council.

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 2022 Budget vote, which used one-time ARPA funding to fill the deficit, was a very impactful vote. While I would have also voted yes on that budget, I would have ensured that we also created a process to address the structural budget deficit proactively. As it stands, or at least appears so to an outside observer, no work happened to address the deficit and in 2024 it returned.

ARPA was such an incredible opportunity to invest directly into the community, especially those that were impacted most by the pandemic. The County was able to invest hundreds of millions of dollars, all across the County, including \$25 million that went directly to unincorporated Alameda County. These funds were invested directly into the community and supported innovative recovery efforts like lending circles, park revitalization, and investing in unbanked individuals. It was difficult to watch the County make such historic investments, while the City simply covered its deficit.

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?**

Public Safety is the number 1 concern I hear from businesses. Whether it's Kaiser employees going to lunch downtown or businesses operating along the Heggenberger Corridor, they are all concerned about public safety.

I believe that my focus on Clean Streets and Safe Neighborhoods is what is necessary to ensure a thriving and prosperous city, which will produce the tax revenue necessary to fund these vital services. Too many businesses are closing down or leaving to surrounding towns (Emeryville, Livermore, etc), taking their tax revenue with them. If businesses do not feel safe, and if the City is not clean, our tax base will continue to flee and the City will continue circling the drain. We must focus on clean streets and safe neighborhoods, so that we can attract the business and talent needed for Oakland to thrive.



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

As a matter of principle, I do not discuss my personal vote. As a public figure, I endorse candidates and campaigns. I have endorsed Measure Z renewal, and am considering an endorsement of Prop 36.