



## 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](http://empoweroakland.com) to educate Oakland voters and will be unedited for spelling and grammar. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their Candidate Endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made by early September.*

*Please email the completed questionnaire as a .docx or .pdf document to [info@empoweroakland.com](mailto:info@empoweroakland.com). Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.*

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**Candidate Name:** Noel Gallo  
**Email:** [Noel.Gallo@yahoo.com](mailto:Noel.Gallo@yahoo.com)  
**Phone Number:** (510) 289-4915 cell  
**Office & District Sought:** Oakland City Council, District 5  
**Campaign Website:** [www.noelgalloforoakland.com](http://www.noelgalloforoakland.com) (In construction)  
**Social Media Handles**

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/NoelGallo5>
- Facebook: <https://facebook.com/noelgallodistrict5>
- Instagram: <https://instagram.com/noel.gallod5>

**Expected total Fundraising Amount:**  
City Council District Race maximum budget: \$150,000.

**Funds Raised To Date:**  
\$30,000 pledged to date of which \$22,400 has been collected.

### General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

I grew up in East Oakland, raised my four children, who attended local schools and have graduated from UC Berkeley and Stanford, and received their master’s degrees from UC Davis, Santa Clara and Cal State Eastbay. I live in the Fruitvale District with my wife, Aliza, an Oakland small business owner and very involved in Oakland and Fruitvale community development activities.



I attended Oakland schools; received a University of California, Berkeley - B.S., Business Administration; attended National University San Diego - M.A. Management; professional certification in CPM, Purchasing and Management, San Jose State University. I have worked with both private and public sector employers. Much of my professional career and community service work has been with government (municipal) and educational institutions in leadership or elected office positions.

I was elected to the Oakland Board of Education, District 5 in November 1992 and served 20 years. I was elected to the Oakland City Council; District 5 in November 2012 and I continue to be the current Oakland District 5 Councilmember.

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

The two top challenges facing Oakland are the lack of public safety and issues associated with homelessness.

The bright spots are that Oakland is a community of diverse, compassionate residents and creative entrepreneurs and the potential and resiliency to be an amazing city.

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 very proud to be a lifelong resident of Oakland and work hard to be a community leader and connector. For decades, I have represented and advocated for Oakland families and children both as the incumbent District 5 City Councilmember and a previous District 5 Oakland Board of Education Director. I work to build strong community and business partnerships to build a strong safe and clean city for all of Oakland's children and families.

I represent the voice of Oakland's diverse neighborhoods and the voice for Oakland's Spanish Speaking population which now represents close to 30%, a large percentage of Oakland's small businesses, and is often faced with several issues (affordable housing, education support, victims of crime, and need for advocacy). I am proud to serve and assist my community and work hard to also serve Oakland's other communities via partnerships with my city council colleagues, community organizations and neighborhood leaders, especially in Central and East Oakland to push for equitable resource distribution of funding and city services. I am committed to be an active City Councilmember; my work ethic is "Actions speaks louder than words."

Overall, I have experience, relationships, knowledge and commitment to continue needed leadership and focus on key issues of public safety, a clean city, and business development.

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



I have served Oakland most of my life as community volunteer, staff and Board member to various Oakland Community Service organizations (Unity Council, Spanish Speaking Citizens Foundation, La Clinica), an active youth mentor through sports and tutoring; I was an employee of the City of Oakland, Manager of Parks & Recreation and OUSD, Director of General Services. I also served as the Oakland School Board Director, District 5 for 20 years where I led efforts to ensure that Oakland Contractors and Residents were part of the rebuilding of Oakland Schools through the implementation of Project Labor Agreements policies.

My greatest achievement is that together with my wife Aliza and four children, we continue to be actively involved in Oakland as neighborhood volunteers, serving on CBO Boards of Directors, working for government agencies, small business operation, and active in our Latino and Native American communities.

I joined the Oakland City Council, as the District 5 Councilmember in 2012, and since then have been involved in leading and supporting Ballot Measures such as Measure Z original and the current 2024 Ballot Measure NN to renew Measure Z range of public safety services including intervention programs and community based programs; Measure U – Affordable Housing, Transportation & Infrastructure ; Measure KK to fund Oakland Park improvements; Measure FF- Oakland Minimum Wage; and Measure Z- hotel minimum wages; Measure W – Democracy Dollars.

Among my accomplishments, I consider the following as very important:

I co-authored the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) policies update, including the amnesty program to legalize unpermitted ADUs – assisting many senior homeowners and families renting out secondary property units. Other examples are that I was a co-sponsor of forming the Oakland Police Commission, Public Ethics, and the development of the Homeless Encampment Policy, etc.

I have consistently supported a city budget that supports safe, livable neighborhoods that includes a comprehensive public safety program that includes more police officers for sideshow prevention, motorcycle unit patrols, walking patrols, safety ambassadors, ceasefire program as well as efforts to coordinate cooperation and joint enforcement efforts with the Alameda County Sheriff and California Highway Patrol. My commitment also is to support community, economic and workforce development efforts for Oakland residents and small businesses. I have also supported good government practices and fiscal accountability.

## 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?

Oakland must maintain the cooperation of other law enforcement agencies that have helped and supported Oakland. The California Highway Patrol, Alameda County Sherriff, BART police, Housing Authority, US Marshall's Office, the FBI and even the National Guard.

Currently we should have a minimum of 712 sworn offices for 2024-2025, and by 2028 we should have 750 sworn officers.

We support our Street Ambassadors' Program providers and private security providers, but I recommend that they are trained by our Oakland Police Department. I also support cameras and better street lighting to assist with these crimes.

I have served as the Chairperson of the Public Safety Committee and at that time, we had 740 officers present every year. Also, I worked with the State of California and Federal government agencies to identify and provide financial assistance to Oakland.

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?

The challenges are City administrative that keep us from solving our problems: First is the lack of experience and delivery of services by our current city administration. We have a significant number of policies, laws, ordinances, and procedures but we do not hold staff accountable and responsible to enforce these policies. We have federal, state, county, and city initiatives/laws but these are not enforced as well.

Oakland must aggressively secure financial and technical assistance support of the federal, state, county and private resources. The City Administrator is accountable for ensuring that the grant applications are completed and on time – we cannot afford to lose any funding opportunities. As a City Councilmember, I will propose that the City Council receive a monthly report on grant solicitation efforts, timeline and funding application results. Additionally, I will propose that the City Council also receive reports on the use of funds and assure the Council and community that the funds are well utilized as committed.

The City of Oakland requires a Community Economic Development approach that offers affordable and market rate housing options. We must also focus efforts on economic development to support and invest in our businesses to protect our revenue generation activities. The city must use its tools like zoning, TODs, infill housing developments, promote workforce housing, senior housing, ADU developments. All forms of housing are important, but the city needs to balance its responsibility to protect affordability and prevent gentrification through homebuyer support, preserving affordable units by purchase of buildings, and support efforts like the Low-Income Housing Tax Credits Program.

The Encampment Management Policy is currently being reviewed to meet new federal, state, and county requirements. The city needs to move more aggressively to deal with existing encampments, especially near schools, neighborhoods or business corridors. The issue also requires a regional approach.



I have been a co-sponsor of the MACRO legislation that has addressed funding of services for housing, homeless services and mental health services. My efforts have brought the city and county closer together to improve mental health and substance abuse treatment options and programs. I will continue to monitor through my service on the Alameda County-Oakland Community Action Partnership (AC- OCAP).

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?

In 2022, Voters of Oakland approved Measure U, which provides funding for affordable housing, street improvements, and funding for street safety projects. Due to the historically growing poor condition of our neighborhood streets and business corridors particularly in central and east Oakland – improvements will take some time.

All the issues cited above need to be prioritized due to public safety issues:

I will work to prioritize Blight, Litter, dumping services; Road Repair & repaving work of the Departments of Transportation and Public Work, especially for central and East Oakland given the dangerous street conditions and challenging the City administration to update its efforts based on its own Race & Equity policies. I believe that if a business corridor through its BID, merchant organization or Chamber can implement and manage streetscape improvements under standards set by the city we should allow and provide mini grants. Stormwater management must be improved since Oakland's watershed of 15 creeks, Lake Merritt and the Estuary, have had issues and perhaps combining them with blight removal responsibilities. I believe that the city has put a good effort into bike safety lanes – and better attention is needed on pedestrian safety controls as well as better coordination and accountability from our public transportation partners.



We ask the Oakland community to assist the city in many ways but given budgetary constraints, we must continue to ask for volunteers to help with blight, litter and graffiti removal. The city should make more resources available for these efforts.

I advocate for bike/pedestrian safety improvements not only through infrastructure improvements but pushing for Traffic Enforcement services – I am in favor of motorcycle patrols, walking patrol officers and joint enforcement by other law enforcement agencies.

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?

As Part of the FY 2024-2024 Mid-Year Budget deliberations, the Oakland Budget Advisory Commission recommended that the City and Council spend the next year identifying evidence-based adjustments to structurally balance the budget by an examination of both revenue and expenditures and that any structural budget adjustments are aligned with the city’s public priorities: improving public safety and reducing homelessness. I fully agree with the Commission’s recommendations. I also agree with the Commission’s recommendation that the City should stop waving provisions of the Consolidated Fiscal Policy, have more discipline in replenishing emergency funds and be more transparent and disciplined about the City’s fiscal situation.

The macroeconomics of the City’s fiscal health is like other cities, to issues still related to the pandemic recovery, coupled with interest rates, slowing real estate transactions and building



production, slow return to offices by both public and private sector companies as well as the real public safety issues and in the case of Oakland, adding the issues created by homelessness, have hurt our progress.

While some may cite the Oakland Police Department with being one of the largest contributors to our fiscal crisis, because of overtime costs, I believe that given that most Oakland residents cite Public Safety as their number 1 priority and concern, that the City should prioritize the hiring and retention of its police force, focus on joint agency arrangements with other law enforcement entities, and support violence prevention efforts. We cannot spread city's budget to cover everyone's wish list, as often the city council does.

We must be disciplined and stay focused on controlling and addressing our public safety issues which affect everyone. These criminal activity related homelessness issues, traffic enforcement, response to reported crime, especially from our impacted neighborhoods in central, east and west Oakland.

**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.

The effectiveness of the city is challenged by limited staff services. It is time for city workers to return to city work locations. I will push for the City Administrator to prioritize attention to developing in coordination with city unions a Return-to-Work initiative with a timeline. Our citizens and taxpayers deserve services, response to calls, increased performance by staff. In terms of the number of staff vacancies, I will push to ensure that key public service positions like public works, business development, police, fire, youth & senior, homelessness and violence prevention staff are hired first not department directors. I will also work with City administration to propose that department directors and their executive teams are also working in the community vs city hall.

The City Council recently approved placing a ballot measure to increase the Public Ethics Commission to expand the powers and duties of the commission, provide additional staffing, to address the backlog of cases. I voted against placing this measure on the 2024 ballot due to the City's very limited budget resources, our need to staff service staff for our neighborhoods, and the need for clarity of the Measure's purpose. I also believe that





building public trust is the responsibility of all elected officials, including the Mayor and the top City administrators.

I plan to explore the creation of a Charter Reform Commission to

**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.

There is not one vote that I can say I am most proud or disappointed in. I consult with staff, community members and affected parties to ensure that my vote is reflective of the community's needs. My vote is to support the community through funding, and I have participated in many organizations, churches, businesses, and schools in my District and throughout Oakland.

I am grateful for the discipline, education and motivation given to me by neighbors, residents and businesses of Oakland.

**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.

NA

**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?**

Oakland businesses face major challenges of public safety concerns, declining customers and foot traffic often because of the environmental issues of blight, illegal dumping, homeless or individuals in need of social services. Also affecting businesses today are changes to the workplace, limited employee options and higher operation costs. I am committed to promoting locally owned businesses, being an ambassador to interested entrepreneurs, continuing to work with existing businesses providing information, connecting them to city resources and also work with property owners to connect them to interested parties. I will support legislation that will provide incentives to businesses to locate in central and east Oakland including zoning waivers, workforce development services and access to capital. While not a new idea, new developments should be required to set aside space for Local Businesses, if appropriate. I am very supportive of The Block partnership with the Black Cultural Zone – Incubator. I will work with Visit Oakland to more strongly promote our neighborhood corridors.



**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)

In addition to the City of Oakland elections, the Presidential election, there are ten State ballot measures on the November 5<sup>th</sup> ballot. I decline to answer Items A and B since I believe that it is important for Oakland and Alameda County voters to make their own decisions regarding the performance of these two elected officials. In terms of Item C – I voted to place the Measure Z renewal on the ballot because of its importance in providing funding for public and fire and violence prevention services. On Item D I am a supporter of California Prop 36, I strongly believe that due to the increase in crime, it is time to make changes related to punishment for theft and drug crimes. Our business corridors and residents are suffering, and we should take stronger action to enforce as well as provide laws that can act as prevention or deterrence measures.