

**Kenneth Houston**

sonofOakland@gmail.com

510-690-5499

Councilmember, District 7

KenHouston.org

**Social Media Handles**

Twitter: [YourTwitterHandle]

Facebook: KenHouston sonofOakland

Instagram: KenHouston #sonofOakland

LinkedIn: [YourLinkedInHandle]

TikTok: [YourTikTokHandle]

**Expected Total Fundraising Amount:** [Amount]

**Funds Raised to Date:** [Amount]

---

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

As a lifelong Oakland resident and third-generation community member, my background includes 12 years as a union plumber and my current role as the director of the Beautification Council, a nonprofit dedicated to employing justice-impacted (formerly incarcerated) and unhoused individuals. Our work focuses on job training and community development, which helps to beautify our city and build stronger, more resilient communities.

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

1. **Crime and Public Safety:** The rising crime rates and public safety issues are affecting the quality of life and the stability of local businesses.
2. **Homelessness and Illegal Dumping:** Addressing the complex issue of homelessness, which includes illegal dumping and ensuring public safety, remains a significant challenge.

**Bright Spots:**

1. **Community:** Oakland is home to a vibrant and diverse community with a rich cultural heritage that provides a strong foundation for positive change.
2. **Natural Beauty:** The city's beautiful lakes, hills, and overall natural charm offer great potential for enhancing quality of life and attracting tourism.

**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 running for office to address the urgent challenges in District 7 with practical, community-based solutions. My deep-rooted connections with the community, extensive experience with local nonprofits, and successful track record in addressing homelessness and public safety make me uniquely qualified. My established relationships with state, county, and city officials enable me to secure necessary resources and funding effectively.

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

I have been actively involved in local government and community projects, achieving:

- **Clean California Maintenance Agreement:** Successfully secured funding to address blight and homelessness.
- **HEMS Program Implementation:** Launched the Homeless Encampment Micro-Cleaning and Sanitization program, employing formerly incarcerated and unhoused individuals to enhance community cleanliness.
- **Collaborations for Additional Resources:** Worked with state and county officials to secure additional funding and resources for homelessness initiatives.

---

**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.**

**In 2 Years:**

- **Increase:** Support for non-sworn response teams such as Urban Alchemy and Roots, providing holistic wrap-around services including mental health and addiction support.
- **Reduce:** Reliance on temporary, less effective crime suppression tactics.
- **Eliminate:** Programs that have not demonstrated tangible results in improving community safety.

**In 4 Years:**

- **Increase:** The number of sworn police officers to 1000, emphasizing community policing and proactive crime prevention.
- **Expand:** Workforce development programs targeting the root causes of crime through job training and employment opportunities.
- **Enhance:** Use of technology for crime detection and prevention, including drones, surveillance cameras, and data analytics.

## Perspectives:

- **Non-Sworn Responses:** Continue supporting effective programs like Urban Alchemy due to their success in providing immediate and comprehensive support.
- **Staffing Level:** Aim to achieve a staffing level of 1000 officers by December 2028 to ensure adequate coverage and response capabilities.
- **Crime Strategies:** Focus on targeted enforcement and partnerships with the county and state to address gun violence, retail theft, and vehicle break-ins. Work with the DA to have effective deterrence for crime (e.g. gang and gun enhancement charges) and further develop mutual assistance with the Sheriff's office as well as with CHP assistance from the state.

## 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?

### In 2 Years:

- **Increase:** Investment in affordable housing initiatives and supportive services for the homeless. Ramp up implementation of safe parking approach which I am already doing and coordinating delivery of services as well as cleaning up our streets.
- **Expand:** Job training and housing programs specifically designed for justice-impacted and homeless individuals which my programs do.

### In 4 Years:

- **Develop:** A comprehensive strategy to boost low-income housing availability and streamline the permitting process for new developments. Open up city hall to increase permitting of new housing and new businesses.
- **Improve:** Policies for managing encampments humanely and effectively, balancing enforcement with supportive services. I believe in embracing people with the proper support services so they can move out of homelessness rather than just displacing them from one place to another.

## Challenges and Solutions:

- **Affordable Housing:** Address the affordability crisis by supporting Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and advocating for zoning reforms to facilitate more housing development.
- **Homelessness Investments:** Focus resources on programs with direct, measurable impacts, including mental health and substance abuse treatment.

## Perspectives:

- **Affordable Housing:** Promote a balanced approach between market-rate and affordable housing to meet diverse community needs at all affordable housing levels (low-income, very low-income, middle-income, and market-rate housing).
- **Housing Element and Zoning Reforms:** Support reforms to increase density and affordability in housing projects. That's the only way to meet the 26,251 units Oakland is mandated to build in its current housing element cycle.
- **Encampment Management:** Implement effective policies for managing and transitioning encampments such as RV camp sites with wrap-around services.

**7. What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver with respect to Oakland's public infrastructure in 2 years? 4 years?**

**In 2 Years:**

- **Blight and Litter:** Ramp up city-wide clean-ups with increased frequency and effectiveness, employing unhoused and justice-impacted residents and preparing them for other career opportunities.
- **Road Repair:** Prioritize critical road repairs and address major potholes.
- **Bike/Pedestrian Safety:** Enhance infrastructure and safety measures for cyclists and pedestrians.

**In 4 Years:**

- **Streetscape Improvements:** Invest in beautification projects including tree planting, parklets, and community spaces.
- **Stormwater Management:** Upgrade infrastructure to improve stormwater management and reduce flooding risks.

**Experience:** My work with the Beautification Council demonstrates my ability to manage and implement significant infrastructure projects effectively.

**8. Please describe how you plan to address Oakland's immediate fiscal budget crisis AND long-term structural budget deficit.**

**Immediate Actions:**

We need to eliminate Non-essential spending and streamline city operations for greater efficiency. We can reduce expenditure by renegotiating major city contracts. We have to tackle the structural deficit by looking at the pension liabilities and outsized expenditures that are not aligned with inflation. The city must trim fringe benefits and overall spending that are disproportionate to spending in other similarly-sized cities. If the city is bankrupt, dedicated city staff will lose their jobs. We need to provide fiscal responsibility so that we can have job security for city staff and provide city services. We need city leaders dedicated to the long-term fiscal well-being of the city and its residents, rather than legislating for political expediency. We need to get the city open again with regular business hours and re-staff city hall to pre-COVID-19 levels.

### **Long-Term Solutions:**

- Identify and cut underperforming programs while focusing on high-impact areas. Look at the recent new approaches that the city tried and see if the results are proportional to the money put in. We need to see what aspects work and what doesn't with the DVP programs and see how they can be improved or changed as needed. It would be important to explore dedicated funds to address pension liabilities and deferred maintenance effectively.
- We need to support and incentivize local businesses to build our tax base and provide jobs to our residents. Clean up the streets around businesses and provide increased safety around business corridors. We need to encourage residents to keep their businesses in Oakland and at the same time open new businesses in our community.

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

For about a decade, I have dedicated myself fully to community service. I started working with supervisor Nate Miley in 2016 to tackle homelessness and blight by employing our justice-impacted and unhoused residents, to embrace people with supportive services and provide job training so they can have opportunities and move up in society. We need effective initiatives now more than ever and because I'm already doing the work in the trenches, I know what works and what doesn't. I have the relationship connections to implement immediate effective solutions. My work is recognized by Governor Newsom who is funding my efforts. He wants to reduce ineffective spending and support initiatives we are working on to truly tackle the program and deliver tangible solutions.

### **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.**

While progress has been made, there is room for improvement in transparency, efficiency, access and community representation.

### **Proposed Changes:**

- **Performance Reviews and Audits:** Implement regular performance reviews and audits for city departments and programs to ensure effectiveness and accountability. It is not acceptable that we cannot account for the \$69 million spent over 3 years on homelessness. That money did not reach our most vulnerable and they deserve better. We need to defund the grift and help our unhoused residents with temporary shelters, housing, and support services as well as job training while cleaning up our streets and restoring public safety.
- **Public Engagement:** Increase community engagement through town halls and open data initiatives to foster greater transparency. Community policing by encouraging residents

to enroll in police academy and work within their own communities, responding to 911 calls.

- **Oversight:** Strengthen oversight of contracting and grant-making processes to ensure proper use of resources and accountability.

**10. What are the major challenges faced by Oakland businesses? What specific steps will you take to ensure that Oakland businesses can thrive and create more jobs and improve the Oakland economy?**

**Challenges:**

- **Crime and Safety Concerns:** High crime rates are a significant concern for businesses.
- **Economic Instability and business support:** Structural deficit and business closures.

**Steps:**

- **Enhance Public Safety:** Improve safety measures in business districts to protect businesses and employees.
- **Support Local Businesses:** Provide grants, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and create incentives for businesses to invest in Oakland, thereby boosting job creation and economic growth.

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

**a. Recall District Attorney Pamela Price:** Yes. I exclusively hire people who are formerly incarcerated and/or unhoused to clean up our streets. I believe in supporting people coming out of incarceration. I also strongly believe in accountability to the victims and their families. There is also the need to deter crime and address the growing violence in our communities.

**b. Recall Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao:** I will let the public decide at the ballot box, The mayor has been in leadership for six years, two years as mayor, and four years on the city council. Public safety has been greatly compromised affecting residents and businesses as a whole where is the accountability.

**c. Pass the Oakland Measure Z Renewal:** No. We need to restore public safety through a partnership between the community and law-enforcement and rely on proven approaches with data. The current proposal as written is too vague on accountability and how the funds will be used to produce tangible results. I think we need to develop it further to ensure the effective use of resources and a successful outcome for our residents and struggling businesses.

**d. Pass California Prop 36:** Yes. Prop 36 addresses the unintended consequences of Prop 47 by providing accountability for repeat theft offenders by requiring drug treatment. It will help reduce retail theft while helping people with substance addiction. The \$950 theft limit is still there but it will now be cumulative for repeat thefts before it becomes a felony charge.