



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 unedited for spelling, grammar, and format and published on empoweroakland.com to educate Oakland voters. 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 .doc or .pdf document to info@empoweroakland.com Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.

Candidate Name: Alex Spehr

Email: alex@alexforalameda.org

Phone Number:

Office & District Sought: EBMUD board, district 5

Campaign Website: <https://alexforalameda.org/>

Social Media Handles

- Mastodon: @alex4alameda@sfba.social
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61565089416612>
- Instagram:
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/spehr/>
- TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@alex4ebmud>
- Twitch: <https://twitch.tv/alex4alameda>

Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$25,000

Funds Raised To Date: \$0

General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

I lived in Oakland for 11 years. I now live in Alameda (7 yrs). When I first came to the Bay Area, I stayed at a house on High St. I've lived downtown and in Adam's Point.

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

Perceptions of public safety and balancing the city budget. Oakland is still a vibrant place to live.



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

How many people do you know that would think water and sewage are interesting? I think they're fascinating! Which is why I decided to run once I learned the incumbent was not running and only one person had filed to run. Instead of being stuck with an appointee, I thought the voters should have a choice.

I have advocated for good water policy in the SF Bay and Delta, and have a deep passion for clean water and plentiful fish in the SF Bay. I have taken graduate level classes in climate science and environmental engineering at UC Berkeley, so I have a technical background and understand the realities we are facing. While I have participated and seen the local and state political process in action, I am an independent and have no scandals, corruption, or political obligations to special interests. Vote for me!

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

In Alameda, I have advocated for native plants, bikes and housing:

- native plants - encouraging the city of Alameda to use native plants in their City Hall lawn redesign - since 2022, 50% of all new city plantings must be natives
- bikes - fighting for separated bike lanes and pedestrian improvements on the Alameda Grand Street Project - passed July 2023
- housing - advocating for higher density in the Alameda Housing Element - passed November 2022

I volunteer in my child's elementary school, organizing and coordinating volunteers so that the school garden can be open during lunchtime recess.

I regularly attend city council meetings.

EBMUD

5. What is your vision for East Bay MUD in 10 years? What specific and measurable steps will you take to advance toward realizing that vision in the next 4 years? Please describe the experience(s) from your past that will give Alameda County residents confidence you can deliver on these goals?



EBMUD has serious challenges: its water supply is at risk from the impacts of climate change. Fortunately, there is a Climate Action Plan that has identified the many risks, now it is up to us to implement fixes and preventives. There are many risks, including: effects on fisheries, extreme wet weather, nutrient loading, infrastructure risks, infiltration into sewage pipes, dam safety, risk to the Delta, etc. Plus having less water due to higher temperatures: both lower snowpack and higher evaporation rates will contribute. EBMUD has done an excellent job in compiling various risks, and needs to continue adaptation and mitigation work.

One of the most significant risks is wildfire in the Mokelumne watershed area - classified as "high to very high" fire threat. Post-fire the loss of vegetation cover will cause more sediment and pollutants to flow into the Mokelumne River. These pollutants could include firefighting chemicals, which would then get into our water supply.

Wildfire is also a risk in the East Bay, and I would check that the brush management being done is following current best practices. Are we removing old-growth fire-resistant chaparral shrubs and leaving a vacuum where invasive grasses will take over? Some chaparral plants can withstand direct fire, but invasive grasses dry out and will burn yearly. I have studied Greg Rubin's work in landscaping with native plants for fire prevention, and would encourage staff and EBMUD partners to use current science in forest management. I would also look for local indigenous tribes to partner with to help with management: they know their land.

Traditionally high levels of nitrogen have been discharged into the SF Bay from our sewage. During heat waves, this can lead to algae blooms and cause mass fish die-offs. There has been some work done on this problem by EBMUD, and I hope to speed it up and encourage it. I never want to see another mass fish die-off again.

EBMUD has many moving parts, so it is important to have long-term employee retention. EBMUD has excellent wages and benefits, however union contracts have been taking longer and longer to negotiate, needlessly stressing workers. I will encourage stakeholders to meet deadlines in a timely fashion.

I hope to protect our water from emerging contaminants such as microplastic and "forever" chemicals. The science is rapidly coming in on their hazards, and we need to make sure that people aren't being exposed. As a board member on the Navy's Alameda Point Restoration Advisory Board, I've learned about firefighting chemicals permeating the groundwater, and their experimental treatments to neutralize them. I will encourage more testing for the whole class of PFOS/PFAS chemical compounds, not just one or two. We need to look at probable methods and industrial actions that could contaminate part of the watershed, and then work to prevent them.

6. What are the top needs of East Bay MUD? What specific and measurable accomplishments will you deliver to address those needs? In 2 years? In 4 years?

Within 2 years, union contracts will need to be renewed. I will work for timely union contract negotiations, instead of the currently typical year's delay.



Within 2 years, I will encourage staff to increase testing for the whole range of the family of PFOS and PFAS chemicals in our water. EBMUD has done limited testing. EBMUD has been a leader in testing for microplastics, and I will encourage this to continue.

Within 4 years, I will work for progress in the decrease of nitrogen discharge into the SF Bay. There is an existing plan, and I will push to speed it up as much as possible. Cleaner Bay water and plentiful LIVE fish is something we all deserve.

Within 4 years, I will push for an improved rate structure.

7. Please describe how you plan to address **service quality** if elected (or re-elected). Summarize the problem(s) your agency faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable). Please discuss your perspectives on how EBMUD is currently managing:
 - a. Aging infrastructure repair/replacement

EBMUD is increasing the rate at which it is replacing pipes. It is switching from preventive maintenance to predictive maintenance. This means that instead of replacing a pipe on a timed schedule (whether it needs to be replaced or not), they replace the pipe if the soil type means the pipe is likely to have corroded. This allows EBMUD to identify the pipes most likely to fail and repair them. This is much better than replacing pipes whether they need it or not.

Infrastructure renewal is always going to be a big ticket item. You have to keep everything working: replacing, re-enforcing, rebuilding, etc.

- b. Drought resiliency

We need to develop more diverse water supplies that are resilient to climate change impacts. We should look into using more water conservation, recycling, groundwater remediation, and managed aquifer recharge. With climate change, we will see fewer storms but they will be much "wetter" and stronger. We should have active groundwater recharge projects so that we can store water without losing it to the greater evaporation that warmer temperatures will bring. In the recent past we had a big drought, but EBMUD was relatively unaffected because they'd thought to get a connection and access to the Sacramento River. Forward looking plans to future-proof our systems are key.

- c. Maintaining affordable utility rates

Rates have been going up higher than the rate of inflation for too many years. We need to hold rates down. Furthermore, water is priced cheaply enough that conservation doesn't save a



customer much money. Our pricing schedule needs adjusting so that it doesn't burden low-income families, but falls mostly on heavier users.

d. Attracting and supporting the workforce of the future

Since EBMUD operations are so complex, it is important to retain employees and have low turnover. Good wages and benefits are key, and EBMUD currently has them. I will encourage timely negotiation when union contracts expire, so that workers don't have to wait a year to get their salary increases, as has been the case. My experience in the tech industry, which is traditionally hostile to unions, has taught me how important unions are, and I will support the EBMUD unions.

8. What should be EBMUD's role in sustainability and climate resiliency? Are there any specific policy changes or investments you will champion as a board member to improve sustainability and resiliency across EBMUD's Territory?

The 2024 Climate Action Plan Update is excellent in pointing out various failure modes. I will encourage further work in water conservation, recycling, groundwater remediation, and managed aquifer recharge so that we can store water from deluges.

9. How will you build and maintain relationships and ensure there is good communication with the SMT (Senior Management Team)?

I will learn as much as possible about EBMUD, its plans, and its culture before starting. I will ask questions and be eager to learn. EBMUD has many different pieces, and there is a lot to learn! It is important to balance financial constraints with service and maintenance. I will seek SMT advice so that good policy can be crafted.