

**Green Party Questions  
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**INTRODUCTION:**

Oakland is like an old building. It is a great building, but is in dire need of a retrofit. I am a contractor and a life-time builder, but that has only been my job. Who I am is an Oaklander, and a life-long community advocate. As a community advocate, I have taken my skillsets as a builder, a superintendent, and a contractor, and I have implemented many positive changes for Oakland, and throughout the campaign the people will learn about all of these things.

I know Oakland's problems because I live where they are and with them. I see them each and every day. The biggest problems in Oakland are its unemployment rate, its image, and its lack of public safety. Public safety is actually not a problem, but a result of the first two problems. As a community advocate, I helped change this a little through spearheading policy changes and leading the East Oakland Beautification Council, but I can only do so much as a community advocate. This is why I decided to run for mayor. As Mayor I will succeed in reducing the high unemployment rate in Oakland and change the face and image of the city because I know how to draw up plans and execute them. I know how to complete projects to turnkey, and when I have completed the Oakland, the retrofit project, I will turn the key back over to you -- the people and residents of Oakland -- just as I do at the end of every construction project because you are the owners of this great city.

**1. Motivation - Why did you choose to run for City office?**

This is the hardest question to answer. I don't know how to explain it, but I will do my best.

**"Sometimes"** you do things you have to do. **"Sometimes"** you cross lines you don't want to cross. **"Sometimes"** you have to think about others more than yourself. **"Sometimes"** you do what you really don't want to, but the need is there, and it's bigger than you. **"Sometimes"** you have to sacrifice yourself to make change.

I am running for Mayor and it is not to oppose the other candidates. The actions of other candidates and some career politicians triggered my decision to run because their actions reminded me how badly disconnected our city leaders are and how poor the leadership has been. Their actions showed me that even our most well-intended leaders do not have the skill sets needed to take the necessary steps to change Oakland.

We have deficiencies at City Hall from the top to the bottom, and they can only be fixed through new leadership, new vision, new ideas -- not career politicians. Do I have new plans for the city? Yes, but first we need to change unemployment and the face and image of the City, to make us proud when we walk out of town and say, "Yes, we are from Oakland!"

Our city has been growing, but not everyone has been included. Many of the people have been left out. I have reached the point in my travels of life where disparity has reached its peak. I am here to stand firm to assure that our people will no longer fall to the wayside. This campaign is not about me and who I am -- I am here to represent the voiceless, the ones who have not been heard for decades. I am their voice. I am their **"Sometimes."**

**2. Program and Priorities: Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected? What do you believe are the main priorities for the City?**

**Priority number 1: Put Oaklanders to work.**

Jobs are not trickle-down economics – they trickle from the ground up! Jobs affect everything from public safety to reducing crime, saving businesses, increasing revenues, better education, to creating quality of life. When you put the people back to work, you don't have to worry about how many police officers you have. It's the inequality that is causing disparity in Oakland – not the lack of police officers!

Unemployment in Oakland is the result of lack of policies to include local participation. Policy is how you create jobs, not promises. Policy + skillsets + opportunity + access = success. As a community advocate, I worked diligently to spearhead the policy change from 30% "due diligence" local participation to 50% mandatory local participation. As Mayor, I will raise this to 75% mandatory local participation and make it successful through policy changes.

Oakland has the most construction projects of all of Alameda County. How can it be that Oakland has all these billion-dollar projects and yet the unemployment rate is at 9%, and even higher for African Americans and Hispanics? How can that be? As a contractor, I am engaged in the process and I know how these contractors get around the rules. There is a billion dollars right now in the construction industry in Oakland and in the near future. There is a window opportunity for all, but it is a short window. We need to use that window to put Oaklanders to work so that when the window closes they will have the skillsets and the experience to get other jobs! We have to take advantage of this now, because these projects won't be here in the future. Across the country the construction industry has systematically excluded African Americans and Latinos, women, and other minorities. They have used their tricks in Oakland for years to exclude them. They will not get away with this when I am the mayor!

Construction runs the whole country. It is the most profitable industry in America. It is more lucrative than green jobs and high tech -- in fact, it *includes* high tech and green jobs. When people hear the word "construction" they think dirty. They think hammers and nails. But construction is much more than what's on the ground -- it's engineers, construction lawyers, human resource departments, accounting, administrative staff, superintendents, project managers, drafting, detailing -- a whole host of jobs come out of the construction industry and these jobs here in Oakland right now should be benefitting Oaklanders. As Mayor I will ensure that all future major construction projects will benefit Oaklanders first. That is the best way that Oakland can end disparity in unemployment.

### **Priority number 2: Changing the face and image of the city.**

Basic safety begins with changing the face and image of the city. I am already doing this. As Chair of the East Oakland Beautification Council, I understand the minds of the blighters. I am down on the street with them, and we are successfully eradicating graffiti and illegal dumping in adopted areas ("footprints") across the city because the image is one of Oakland's primary problems.

Blight cannot be fixed by the present system. I know how to attack it from the ground level by what I have already been doing. Let's face the facts: Blight affects public safety, crime, health, business revenue, tourism, and image. The only way to change the image is to stop the graffiti and illegal dumping by attacking the vandals and bringing them to justice. By invoking Penal Code section 594 and the Graffiti Vandal Ordinance, mandatory clean up sentences can be imposed in lieu of jail time. Restorative justice of this kind is just the first step in readjusting the paths of people caught up in this criminal mindset of destroying personal property and displaying their "art." There also needs to be outreach programs, reentry programs, programs that serve people, not corporations. These programs are all needed, but for gross blighters -- the real villains of the city -- there need to be stricter penalties.

In summary, the city cannot grow until it changes its image, it cannot change its face until we stop the graffiti and dumping. Residents, prospective homebuyers, businesses, and other cities will not respect Oakland until they see that we have control over gross blighters who are destroying our image. Oakland is a joke in the eyes of other cities and people alike because of its bad image! I am the only mayoral candidate that knows how to stop illegal graffiti and dumping -- not with just throwing money at it, and not because I am a politician, but because I have already been doing it without just throwing money at it as a community advocate. I have been on the ground getting my hands dirty and getting the job done!

### **Priority number 3: Public Safety**

As I said before, lack of public safety is not a problem -- it is the result of the first two problems which is the high unemployment rate and the image of the city. Public safety is not attained through hiring more police, but by better policing. Despite what the city leaders are saying about how they've implemented community policing, as a resident of East Oakland I can tell

you that community policing has not happened where it needs to be happening the most. Just as change needs to be from the bottom up, community policing needs to start from the outer edges and come in, not start in the good neighborhoods and branch out. When you do it this way, it always falls short because the people who don't need it as much always demand more from the police! The communities on the outer edges of Oakland that are most affected by crime need to be addressed first -- not the areas where the community is already in dialogue with police officers. It needs to begin where the worst crime is happening. Further, when these terrible crimes occur, as the Chief Elective Officer, the mayor should be there out at the scene because the only way the Mayor can touch the people whose lives have been severely impacted by crime is to be an advocate for the people. I am not afraid to be out there where the most violent crimes are happening. I am from there. No other candidate has this courage. It's not their fault, and yet it is because they have not made the necessary steps to engage with the communities that need them the most.

Public safety is also about rebuilding the city. If the city is on a fractured foundation, it will fail and all of the elements of public safety will be affected: crime, housing, illegal dumping, graffiti, loss of business revenue – all these things that have happened in Oakland is a direct result of the failure of the leaders to rebuild and reclaim our city. Most of the leaders, they don't understand what it really takes to rebuild a city. Oakland is like a construction site – you need all elements of the building to be up-to-date and working: electric, plumbing, low voltage, HVAC, structure. Each of these is a department, like the city has departments, like Public Works, City Administrator, Code Enforcement etc. -- they all need to work functionally. Many of them need to be remodeled and brought current. Oakland is like a project that was built in the 1940s and is in need of an upgrade. It needs to be run by today's codes in order to run properly. It is no different retrofitting an old building. Just as I am running a campaign of a different kind, the changes I will make in Oakland will be different.

**3. Qualifications – Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of City Mayor. If you are a current city government elected official, what issues can you point to in your time as an elected official that have had a positive impact.**

I am not currently an elected official, however, as a community advocate, I am familiar with many of the processes of the City. Also, I have the ability to bring people together to solve problems. As Chair of the East Oakland Beautification Council (EOBC), I brought together Oakland council members, Public Works, the Oakland Police Department, Alameda County District Attorney, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), Peralta Community College, BART, AC Transit -- even the FBI -- all to discuss the gross problem of blight.

The mayor's job is Chief Elective Officer – a public servant -- who oversees the city much as a superintendent oversees a construction project. The skill sets of a superintendent and mayor are virtually the same. A superintendent and mayor both require leadership skills to run the day-to-day operation of the city, and visionary skills to see a final, functional product, to see what is working and who is looking out for the best interests of the city. I am on the ground

every day interacting with staff at City Hall. As Mayor this would not change. The Mayor needs to be on the ground to see how the project is being led and whether you are creating a functional final product. The functional product includes the homes where you raise your children, hospitals where the sick are cured, and schools where your children learn. I am a contractor and a life-time builder, but that has only been my job. As mayor my job will be to act as superintendent of the city while at the same time remain a community advocate for the people.

**4. Local Groups – Are you affiliated with any of the active Oakland groups, such as TOLA, Make Oakland Better Now, Block by Block, Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, GO Public Schools, OCO, or any other. Describe your involvement and why you feel this group is worthy of your support.**

No. While I feel the mission of all the groups named above are worthy of support, I am running a different kind of campaign which is 100% endorsed by individuals, not organizations.

**5. Local activities – Other than local politics, are you involved in any other Oakland-based community activities that you would like to share with us? This can range from volunteering in your school to being in your church baseball league.**

I am presently the Chair of the East Oakland Beautification Council (EOBC) (created in January 2014), working to eradicate graffiti and illegal dumping in Oakland. I am a member of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) at the Oakland Coliseum that has brought opportunity to underserved children and hosted events that they could otherwise not attend. I have participated in the CAB's shadowing program where youths are given an opportunity to "shadow" adults in their careers. For the past 14 years I have supported and participated in a program called New Beginnings, a nonprofit that assists youths that are in transition to moving away from incarceration. I have worked with NACA to help elderly people at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure. I am presently involved with Operation Dignity to assist disabled veterans. I have been building houses my whole life and have always hired neighborhood youths to assist me in rebuilding homes so that they can feel a sense of ownership and pride in seeing blight turned into a final beautiful home.

**6. Budget – If you were on council for the next budget in 2015, how would you act differently from council members dealing with the budget in 2013. What do you think is the cause of the current budget crisis?**

Given that I was on the Budget Committee in 2013, it is difficult for me to say how I would act differently. However, I believe that the cause of the budget crisis is not in the allocation of funds but rather the mismanagement of those allocations. The reason we have not been as successful as other cities is because our budget has been mismanaged. As a contractor, I know the importance of tools. The budget is a tool. We have the tool, but the people that have the tool need the skillset and the mission to get the job done. Oakland has the budget

to provide basic safety, clean, undamaged streets, and decent education; the people managing the budget are the problem. Unfortunately, the job isn't being done properly. Certain city employees, including department heads, are too comfortable in their positions and are not doing what is best for our city. They need to either "step up their game" or get out! We have to ensure that we have the best staff for the job for the budget to be managed properly.

**7. Youth. Describe the condition of youth in Oakland? What would your priorities for youth be for Oakland government and how would they get implemented and paid for?**

I am in favor of youth programs, from reentry programs for young adults to school-based programs to reduce gang involvement. The new Measure Y will help pay for these programs, although there needs to be transparency and strict accountability so that the funding for any and all programs is not misused.

It is a travesty that the high school graduation drop-out rate in Oakland for Hispanics and African Americans is nearly 50%. That is an embarrassment to our City! We need to get proper education for all students, and this needs to be done in collaboration with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). The mayor does not oversee the OUSD; however, the leadership of the City can affect education. For example, after the 50% local participation policy was adopted by the City, the OUSD followed suit. As mayor, I can push for policy that will create access and opportunity for youths coming out of Oakland high schools, colleges and trade schools and also push to increase training programs in the schools. Oakland is in a crisis, and the answer to that crisis is to provide access and opportunity for all youth – not just the ones who have always enjoyed privileges of good education and jobs. The answer is in changing the access of these opportunities.

**8. Police – How do you think our community policing is currently going and what are the next steps? Describe the current relationship between the residents and the Oakland Police. Do you suggest any changes? Do you support Restorative Justice programs and how should the city be involved, if at all.**

The 2004 Measure Y was supposed to address this, and it failed. This failure was due to lack of oversight, which should not happen with the next Measure Y (assuming the voters pass the new measure). Assuming the new measure passes, I would be sure that all of the Measure Y programs are audited for improvement. Other candidates claim that community policing is working in their neighborhoods, but community policing has not happened in the neighborhoods where it is needed most. As Mayor, this would be a top priority. Until we have equality and respect within the OPD, we cannot overcome the obstacles of our past.

**9. Development Projects. What are your thoughts and views about the West Oakland Army Base, the upper Broadway-Valdez triangle, the Oak to 8<sup>th</sup> and other projects?**

Development Projects should be financial opportunities for all Oaklanders. Unfortunately, many of the projects excluded many Oaklanders. All development projects should be about jobs for Oaklanders. Also, when you hear promises of jobs, the question that needs to be asked is what types of jobs and the duration? Are they two weeks, two-months, or permanent positions? Have you given proper notice to the public? Has there been proper flow of information to all residents of Oakland about forthcoming opportunities? Oakland is the only city in the Bay Area whose unemployment rate is up, not down! As a community advocate, I have been fighting for inclusion, not exclusion, of all minority participation, for women, Asian, Hispanic and African Americans who are not being hired for these jobs. As mayor, I will ensure that contractors hired on all future jobs, abide by local participation policy on all scopes of work, from the field to administrative staff, and that all future Development Projects consider the welfare of Oaklanders.

**10. Police Misconduct. What are your thoughts and how do you feel Oakland should deal with it? How would they get the Oakland Police past the current oversight under Judge Henderson?**

The Chief of Police needs to be a strong and ethical leader. From City Hall leadership to the leadership of the OPD, we have to be strong and ethical. The way to move past the current oversight under Judge Henderson is ensure that the Chief of Police will hold his officers to a high standard of ethical conduct. But this will not work if the Chief of Police is not a strong leader who commands respect. They will follow their chief if he shows strong, ethical leadership. The best way to do this is build a bridge between the community and the police. If the police would just talk to the people, that alone would serve to reduce crime.

**11. Housing & Gentrification. Increasing rents, dislocation, and gentrification have been in the news. What policies do you advocate to assure that Oakland tenants are protected and that Oakland remains an economically and racially diverse city?**

If you were here in the bad times when Downtown Oakland was a ghost town, you are the people that kept this city alive. You are the ones that need to be served. You and your families should be rewarded. Policy needs to be changed to implement reparations in some fashion and form. Some of these solutions include working with banks to first-time home buyers, and buying foreclosed property and reselling it to low and middle-income residents. As mayor, I will collaborate with the voters for more solutions so that that gentrification is minimized.

**12. Environment – What do you think that Oakland City government should be doing about the environment?**

“Environment” is a broad term, but I will answer it in terms of how a construction superintendent would respond. First, the City government needs to stop the environmental crimes. There are visual environmental crimes (graffiti) and physical environmental crimes (illegal dumping), and we need to stop both in order to be a clean and safe city. In addition to this, other environmental issues should always be a priority, including recycling, recycled waste water programs, air quality programs, etc. As a construction superintendent, I am familiar with LEED projects and green construction. Clean environment in the City begins with green construction! I worked to install LED lighting in Oakland and facilitated a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). I worked with the City of Oakland and California Water Quality Control Board with 100% participation to put unskilled Oaklanders to work at the Oakland Army Base. I was also part of a federal investigation concerning illegally dumped dirt in West Oakland, among other activities to support the environment for a clean and safe Oakland.

**Satisfaction of Residents – How do you think the average resident feels about city government? How would you rate the satisfaction level?**

I feel that the average citizen is not satisfied with city government. As Mayor, I am a public servant, and my first priority will be to listen to the needs of the People. But don't beat me up! I am willing to listen to what the people want, and lead from their interests, not the interests of funded organizations or corporations. It should always be about the people.

**13. How do you propose to make yourself accountable and accessible to the citizens of Oakland?**

Transparency. As Mayor I will ensure that the people will know what is going on – good or bad. I am not afraid to share my accomplishments nor admit any mistakes made along the way. I am already accessible to the citizens of Oakland. As Mayor, I would not change who I am or how I relate to people. I will have an “open door policy” to the citizens meaning I will not turn away people who want to know the state of the city. Oaklanders deserve to have a mayor who is accessible

**14. Do we need an Oakland Progressive Alliance akin to the one in Richmond, and if so, who should be members?**

I thought we had an Oakland Progressives Alliance. As far as who its members should be, I wouldn't know at this time.

<http://acgreens.wordpress.com/tag/oakland-progressive-alliance/>

**15. Governance – What kind of relationship could you have with other office holders? Who do you see as working majority on council, and who can you work with?**

I have an excellent relationship with all city council members and I know how to foster teamwork. I can work with anyone whose interests are aligned with mine, which is, in the best interests of the city.

**16. Endorsements – Who has endorsed you so far? Who do you expect to endorse you? Who do you endorse in other City races? Include your #2 and #3 choices for your own race and note that this year the City races are Mayor, Council seats, School Board seats and City Auditor.**

I am not seeking endorsements. Please see my statement of no endorsements which was provided to you.

**17. Campaign Funding – How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contribution for your campaign that you would refuse to accept?**

Please see my statement of no endorsements which was provided to you. Presently I have raised no money and all of the work on my campaign has been by my volunteer staff.

**18. Checks and balances – How do you view the current relationship between the Council and Mayor? Any comments on the same question for the Auditor and City Attorney? Are there any changes they would propose to the city charter?**

I believe the relationship today between the Mayor and City Council is fractured. Proof of this is the fact that two city council members and the city auditor are running against the mayor for her office! I may seek changes to the city charter, but this question is premature. I would first and foremost take steps to improve communication among all departments, including the Mayor and City Council, the Mayor and City Auditor, and the Mayor and the City Attorney. Communication needs to improve first before any proposed changes are made to the City Charter.

**19. Money in Elections – Does Oakland need campaign finance reform? If so, what kind?**

As a candidate running on no endorsements, it is clear that the people want to elect a mayor that addresses the needs of the people not the desires of the organizations that endorse them. However, this is also a premature question. If elected mayor -- as a

candidate with no endorsements on a budget under \$1,000. -- I would certainly revisit this question!

**20. Anything else? Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?**

Please see my website at

[www.kenhouston4mayor.org](http://www.kenhouston4mayor.org)

**Yes or No Questions:**

- **Do you support the renewal of Measure Y?**  
Yes, but only with strict accountability and oversight.
- **Do you support the minimum wage proposal?**  
Yes, but only with express consideration to small, local companies that may suffer from its effects.
- **Are you in favor of a police commission?**  
Yes.
- **Do you support Dan Kalb's proposal on oversight and transparency?**  
Yes.
- **Are you in favor of receiving public complaints against police officers at the Civilian Police Review Board?**  
Yes.
- **Would you vote for using eminent domain to abate foreclosure crisis?**  
Yes, but it cannot work because it breaks too many laws.
- **Do you support Ranked Choice Voting?**  
Yes, but only for this election. Just kidding. In theory, I don't believe it is the best system.
- **Would you support Proportional Representation?**  
No. I think it divides the city and works against its intended benefit.
- **Do you support diverting people from prosecution if they participate in a restorative justice program?**  
Yes.

- **Do you support Community Choice Aggregation?**

I think it is a good idea that needs more public discussion

- **Would you vote to allow more grey water systems?**

Yes. I would invest in more grey system technology, especially with the present water shortage. As a plumber, I understand grey water very well.