

Green Party Candidate Answers

Rebecca Kaplan, Oakland City Council, at-large

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1. Motivation -- Why did you choose to run for City office? If you are running against an incumbent, what are your main dis-satisfactions and differences with him or her?

I am running for re-election to the Oakland City Council at-large seat in order to continue and strengthen our ability to bring more social equity, environmental justice, non-violence, and grassroots democracy to Oakland and our region. I have worked together with a broad coalition of activists, including Green Party members, to successfully advance vital votes in Oakland, including banning coal, and passing an important renter protection measure onto the November ballot. I have recently been elected to major leadership positions at the regional level, including as Chair of the Alameda County Transportation Commission, which oversees the \$8 billion in Measure BB transportation funds, and as a Boardmember of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, (BAAQMD), where Oakland has not had a seat in two and a half decades, and which controls both law and funding related to air quality and transportation. By obtaining these vital seats, I am now able to advance important priorities, including getting free bus passes for our schoolchildren, improved area transit, clean up idling trucks in our communities, expand pedestrian and bicycle safety, and to launch a Bay Area crackdown on pollution from oil refineries. Being re-elected to the Oakland City Council would allow me to keep these regional leadership roles, and thus keep Oakland representation, and progressive representation, on these powerful boards.

It is also my goal to expand local efforts to continue to end the wasteful and racist war on drugs, to launch public banking, to protect and expand community job centers and youth summer jobs programs, and for independent community oversight of the police department, and expand use of restorative justice.

I have been proud to work together with the Green Party on many important issues – many of which I learned about together with you as a Green, from Ranked Choice Voting to improving bike lanes to legalizing cannabis and banning coal. I worked with many Greens and other allies to first pass (in 2002), and now to expand, Just Cause for Eviction. I know that together we can continue to make advances.

I recognize that it has sometimes been awkward between us that I am no longer registered as a Green Party member. But I have never stopped fighting for Green values, and I would like to work together to do so in the future. As Greens over the years we repeatedly helped the campaigns of local progressive Democrats running in non-partisan races. I now ask for us to work together as allies, for the values we share, to adopt important real goals, from public banking to affordable housing and cutting the prison industry, to a Bay Area-wide reduction in dangerous pollution from oil refineries. And so I ask for your #1 endorsement for the Oakland City Council At-Large seat.

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?

I have led major changes to laws in Oakland which advance our shared values, including passing Ranked Choice Voting for local elections, adopting local hiring laws and “ban the box” rules so that ex-offenders are not denied the opportunity to turn their lives around, and more. In the coming term it would be my intention to continue to strengthen efforts at the regional level to fight back against the oil industry and their environmental racism, to help the army base project transition to non-coal-oriented future and get the idling trucks out of our communities which have some of the highest asthma rates in the nation, to expand affordable housing, and continue the work to end the war on drugs. To strengthen the deployment, both on public and private property, of solar power and greywater systems, and launch public banking.

3. Qualifications -- Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of City. 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?

Bachelor's degree, M.I.T. (Psychology/women's studies)

Master's degree, Urban and Environmental Policy, Tufts University

J.D. Stanford Law School

State Assembly Legislative Aide to Assemblymember Audie Bock (G - Oakland/Piedmont)

Boardmember, AC Transit

Oakland City Councilmember at-large

Boardmember, Stopwaste.org

Chair, Alameda County Transportation Commission

Boardmember, Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board

4. Local groups -- Are you affiliated with any of the active Oakland groups? Such as TOLA, Make Oakland Better Now, Oakland Justice Coalition, 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.

I am a member of a variety of local groups, including the ACLU, Oakland Justice Coalition, Wellstone club, Kehilla Synagogue, Just Cause/Causa Justa.

My history also includes leadership in organizations devoted to fighting successfully to get my college to divest from apartheid-era South Africa, to defend women's rights, LGBT rights, and reproductive freedom, and to oppose fracking and other environmental devastation.

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.

Kehilla Community Synagogue, East Bay Church of Religious Science, the Sierra Club, anti-fracking coalition, tenants' rights coalition (including previously, as a housing rights attorney, and more recently, as the lead advocate on the city Council for protecting renters from displacement).

6. Budget -- If you were on council for the next budget in 2017 how would you act differently from the council members dealing with the budget in 2015? How much additional revenue should the City aim to take in, and how would you generate it?

We need to tax "new economy" industries which are making millions off our community while failing to pay taxes. This includes making sure all firms using the internet to provide or connect people for goods and services should be paying no less than traditional providers. Short-term residential rental providers should be made to pay no less tax rate than hotels, and rideshare firms should not be evading taxes either. In addition I have been leading the effort to tax and regulate the production of cannabis which can provide substantial new jobs and revenues for our community. In addition, I would like to work to create a "flipping" tax rate on residential property which provides higher tax rates when the property is not retained for at least a year or two, and to have progressive rates for real estate transfer taxes (so properties with higher sales prices pay higher rates). In addition, a significant amount of money that is being spent/wasted by Oakland does not show up in the regular budgeting, but instead is spent over time as many millions go for police misconduct lawsuits. By working to provide independent community oversight of the police and other policy changes (including hiring changes) to reduce police misconduct, and reduce police use of vehicle stops as a focus of enforcement, we could save our city millions.

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?

Youth in Oakland are unfairly blamed for crime and treated poorly, even though they are not responsible for it (crime by youth is down dramatically, but people still stereotype youth as the cause of crime). This past year, Oakland youth were horribly abandoned by the administration, when they failed to submit the proper paperwork to the federal government to receive over \$ 2 million in youth summer jobs funding. I have responded by submitting a budget amendment to increase local funding for youth summer jobs, and by researching and identifying new grant opportunities and other work to expand youth opportunity. In addition, many of our young people have trouble getting around or affording transportation, which is why I am proud to be working with a wide community coalition to provide free bus passes for our young people. I have fought for and won funding for a variety of programs serving some of our most struggling youth, including LGBT youth who suffer from disproportionate rates of bullying and homelessness, and to end the criminalization of sexually exploited minors, and instead fund alternatives to allow them to rebuild their lives.

8. Police -- How do you think our community policing is 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. What are your thoughts about police misconduct and how do you feel Oakland should deal with it?

The relationship between our police department and community needs to be substantially improved, and I am fighting for several changes. Part of this is that we cannot use police to solve every problem, and I fully support expansion of restorative justice efforts. This is part of why I advanced a budget amendment which shifted funds toward youth programs and violence prevention programs rather than focusing primarily on more police. In addition, I fought actively for strong community oversight of the police department with a new police commission. I have also submitted a policy proposal, coming this fall, to change police hiring practices to recruit substantially more people from Oakland, and to address the under-representation of women, LGBT people, and people of color in the police department. It is not surprising that many people feel the department is an 'army of occupation' when it should be a group of public workers who serve and protect the community – as long as there are not enough bonds of community and trust, and if police spend too much time speeding past in cars (or worse, helicopters) rather than walking and interacting with people respectfully.

9. Development Projects -- What are your thoughts and views about the West Oakland Army Base, The upper Broadway-Valdez Triangle, Oak to 9th and other projects?

Project decisions should be made in a way that benefits the community. This includes having local hiring and good jobs standards on projects – something I have fought for, so that economic benefits circulate throughout the community, and including housing that is affordable to all income levels. In terms of the army base specifically, I have actively fought for project specifics to make sure we improve air quality and quality of life for the community, rather than worsen it. This includes specifically including programs to reduce truck pollution and pollution from ships, which have historically been associated with the surrounding community having one of the highest asthma rates in the nation. I have fought for, and won, a Council resolution opposing the transportation of hazardous fossil fuels through our community, and successfully advanced a ban on the handling and storage of coal in Oakland. I have also fought for the project to include components to improve the community, including re-routing freight onto rail, and improved changes to truck access points and parking, so there will be less truck idling and trucks backing up into the community.

10. 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? Do you favor rent control?

I have been the strongest voice and advocate on the City Council to protect renters from displacement, including fighting against unjust evictions and excessive rent increases that are pushing people out of our community. The displacement crisis is hurting individuals and families, while also undermining the fabric of neighborhoods and communities, and making it hard to attract and retain vital public workers. Even before being elected to the City Council, I worked together with a community coalition, including many Green Party members, to pass the original Just Cause for Eviction ballot Measure in 2002, despite being massively out-spent by the opposition. In the current term, I was the lead author of the Renter Protection Measure on the November ballot, together with a community coalition, to help reduce the wave of rent increases and evictions. I have also fought for budget amendments which increase funding for community-based renter rights education and enforcement, and for affordable housing inclusion in development projects. I support rent control and have taken these actions at the local level, and I also recognize that we have a problem with State law, known as Costa Hawkins, which limits the abilities of cities to protect renters. Therefore, I have introduced a Council resolution to amend Costa Hawkins, so that we can expand these protections.

11. Environment -- What do you think the Oakland City government should be doing about the environment?

I have fought for and won policies opposing the transport of fracked fuels, and successfully banned the handling and storage of coal in Oakland. I have worked to expand water-saving and energy-saving technologies on public buildings, and am working to expand them on private facilities and more public ones. I personally bicycle most of the time, and when I drive, it is an electric car powered by solar power. I have worked to expand diversion of food waste from the landfill, and instead have it used to produce green energy, and I am working to expand bio-fuel and electric vehicle programs, as well as new bike stations and bike lanes, and more. Since I have now managed to obtain leadership roles at the Alameda County Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, I am now able to expand my work to also include cracking down on pollution from oil refineries and other major sources, and providing funding for projects to reduce truck emissions and other related environmental hazards, and expand transit, walking, and biking in our communities.

12. Public Banking -- Will you introduce, co-sponsor and/or support an ordinance or charter amendment to create a Public Bank of Oakland, inspired by the Bank of North Dakota [\[1\]](#) (BND), a 100 year old public institution? The Public Bank of Oakland would hold the city's deposits - in contrast to having them held by Wall Street Banks as currently done. It would make fiscally responsible loans in the best interest of the residents of

Oakland - in contrast to Wall Street banks' record of risk and ruin. Profits made by the Public Bank of Oakland would be returned to the General Fund of the City of Oakland, or used to further buttress the loan capabilities of the bank, much as the BND does (the BND has returned over \$400,000,000 to the General Fund of the State of North Dakota over the last 21 years,^[ii] while substantially increasing its capitalization and its loan outreach)

^[i] <https://bnd.nd.gov/>

^[ii] <https://ilsr.org/rule/bank-of-north-dakota-2/>

Yes! I do support Public Banking, and would be thrilled to work with you to help bring this important step to Oakland. When I brought this idea to Council previously, staff stated that they wanted to wait for San Francisco to complete their local banking analysis, which we could then copy or join. However, I now believe we should push for more action at the local level, and this would be a great project to work on together. Oakland has been a leader on other progressive issues, and can help push public banking forward. We have many local residents who are having trouble getting mortgages or small business loans from traditional banks, and creating our own local public bank can be an important part of the solution, while moving public money into an institution that responds to public needs.

13. Local Payday Lenders -- Oakland is awash with for-profit Check Cashing and PayDay Loan emporiums (a simple Google query^[i] shows 20). These outfits provide emergency cash and other financial products to those who cannot obtain it otherwise - at outrageously high interest rates and/or extremely high fees. Professor Mehrsa Baradaran, in her book *How the Other Half Banks*,^[ii] quotes the astounding statistic that those who use these services spend on average over \$2000 per household per year.

It is not widely known but Oakland is home to the only non-profit check cashing and payday lending storefront in the country - Community Check Cashing^[iii] (CCC) in Fruitvale Plaza. It provides the same services for-profit operators do at 33% - 50% of the cost, while paying its employees a living wage. Will you support build-out and capitalization loans by the City of Oakland to expand CCC to other storefronts around Oakland (much as the City Council gave a 50-year, \$3,300,000 interest-free loan to the E 12th St. developers^[iv])?

^[i] Type 'Oakland Payday lenders' into Google Search and click on the resulting map.

^[ii] NALC.org "Author makes the case for postal banking" <http://tinyurl.com/h9e6a2p>

Baradaran noted that the average unbanked family with an income of around \$25,000 spends about \$2,400 per year on financial transactions like these, even more than it spends on food.

^[iii] <http://communitycheckcashing.org/>

^[iv] Oakland City Council agenda, June 15th, 2016 <http://tinyurl.com/jzy398p>

Yes. Payday lender/check cashing companies are very destructive in our community, taking money out of the hands of those who can least afford it. Part of the work of the Public Bank described above could be as an alternative to those companies, and we should also expand Community Check Cashing.

14. Satisfaction of Residents -- How do you think the average resident feels about city government? How would you rate the satisfaction level?

The satisfaction level varies dramatically depending on the community. Many renters are suffering right now, and residents of lower-income communities experience lower levels of public service and less responsiveness. Providing illegal dumping removal and pothole filling on a complaint-based system has worsened these disparities, by rewarding communities with the free time and technology access to file complaints, and these should be changed to a "zone based" instead of complaint based system to provide more equitable and efficient service. Protections for renters need to be expanded and housing for all income levels increased. More basic city services need to be easily available, including online business permitting, and the ability to reach someone by phone to get information.

15. Accountability -- How do you propose making yourself accountable and accessible to the citizens of Oakland?

As the city-wide elected Councilmember I am chosen by, and responsible to, all the communities of Oakland city-wide. I participate actively in many community events and meetings, and make myself available by phone, email, and in person meetings. For example, when working on the renter protection measure and the coal ban, I met repeatedly with community members and advocates, so that my proposals reflected both my own ideas, and also very extensive input from community.

16. Governance -- What kind of relationship could you have with other office holders? Who do you see as a working majority on council and who can you work with?

I have very effective governance relationships with other Councilmembers, having obtained a unanimous vote of Council for the Renter Protection Measure and for the coal ban, and other vital initiatives. I am endorsed by a majority of the Council.

17. Endorsements -- Who has endorsed you so far? Who do you expect to endorse you? Who are you endorsing, from President all the way down ballot to local races? Include your #2 and 3 choices (if applicable) for your own race and note that this year the City races are Council seats, School Board seats and City Attorney.

Major endorsements I have received so far:

- California Nurses Association
- The Sierra Club
- SEIU Local 1021
- Alameda County Building and Construction Trades Council
- NUHW
- The League of Conservation Voters
- ACCE Action

- Senator Loni Hancock
- State Assemblyman Sandre Swanson
- Council President Lynette Gibson McElhaney
- Councilmember Noel Gallo
- Council member Dan Kalb
- Council member Annie Campbell Washington

18. 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 contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

I am working to raise between \$180 - \$200K total for this race, which covers the entire city of Oakland. Contributions are limited to no more than \$700 per person, up to \$1400 for a broad-based political action committee. My fundraising includes reaching out to hundreds of individuals for contributions, and my largest donors are progressive organizations like the California Nurses Association.

19. Checks and balances -- How do you view current the 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 am committed to working effectively for the people of Oakland, including with all of the other elected officials. I believe working respectfully does not mean I have to agree about everything, and when I see a need to defend community values and goals, I am not afraid to [say so](#), and I am also able to work together to effectively advance vital projects.

I have worked successfully in collaboration with all of them on a range of issues. For example, I worked with the City Attorney together effectively on Oakland's landmark Federal case to prevent federal seizure of permitted cannabis dispensaries. I worked collaboratively with the City Auditor to advance practical changes to the Rent Adjustment Program to make it more effective and reduce backlog of cases not being heard on time. I worked to obtain a unanimous vote of Council for important renter protections. I collaborated with the Mayor's office to expand recruitment to fill boards and commissions, and launch a department of transportation. When the Administration was in a crisis of vital transportation infrastructure projects running out of funding, I led the effort to bring a vote to the Alameda County Transportation Commission to solve the funding crisis and keep important projects moving forward.

20. Money in elections. -- Does Oakland need campaign finance reform? If so, what kind? Do you support amending the Constitution to end corporate Constitutional rights and getting money out of politics? Have you [Taken the Pledge to Amend](https://movetoamend.org/take-pledge-amend)? (<https://movetoamend.org/take-pledge-amend>)

Yes, I have taken the Pledge to Amend. I support clean money elections, including public financing, and supporting a constitutional amendment to fix major problems in the system, including to overturn Citizens United, and to make it clear that money is not speech, and corporations are not people.

21. Anything Else? -- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

I was born in Ontario, Canada and grew up living with a universal healthcare system, in a family and community which encouraged me to fight for the rights of workers, and not to cross picket lines, etc. Stories about the history of worker abuses and the fight for worker rights, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, as well as people giving their lives for social justice, such as the murder of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner were part of my upbringing and inform my values.

I attended MIT as an undergraduate, where I was actively involved in organizing for women's rights and reproductive freedom, LGBT equality, and part of the successful effort to get my campus to divest from apartheid era South Africa. I volunteered on the re-election campaign of Senator Kennedy, and worked for the City of Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women. I obtained my law degree from Stanford Law School, where I had the opportunity to learn from teachers like Michelle Alexander (author of *The New Jim Crow*) and became involved in advocacy for worker rights, prisoner rights and against mass incarceration. I worked for the labor law firm Altshuler, Berzon, and helped win worker safety protections.

I worked in Oakland as a tenant's rights attorney and advocate, and helped pass "Just Cause for Eviction" on the ballot. I served for over seven years on the AC Transit Board of Directors, an elected position, and expanded late night bus service, opposed outsourcing, expanded bike-transit connections, solar power, and sustainable fuel initiatives.

I now serve as Oakland's citywide elected Councilmember, elected November 2008. Recently, I have been elected Chair of the Alameda County Transportation Commission, which represents all the local government agencies and transit providers in our area, and administers the \$8 billion transportation improvements funded in Measure BB. I am now working to launch a program of free bus passes for schoolchildren, and improvements to our freight systems to reduce toxins, make life better for workers, and reduce truck idling in our neighborhoods. Recently, the Alameda County Conference of Mayors appointed me to represent all of the Cities in our County on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board.

Yes or No questions (follow with an explanation if you want to add one)

- Do you support raising the minimum wage to a living wage? YES
- Are you in favor of a police commission? YES
- Would you vote for using eminent domain to abate foreclosure crisis? YES
- Do you support Ranked Choice Voting? YES
- Would you support Proportional Representation? YES
- Do you support diverting people from prosecution if they participate in a restorative justice program?
YES
- Do you support Community Choice Aggregation? YES
- Would you vote to allow more grey water systems? YES