

Oakland Auditor Questionnaire

c/o Green Party of Alameda County

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Current occupation: Oakland City Auditor

1. Motivations -- Why are you running for City Auditor?

I ran for Oakland City Auditor in 2014 and was voted into office by the voters. I love the job of City Auditor. We have accomplished much in the past 3 ½ years; 20 audits (including follow-up audits), 13 ballot measures and 170 closed Whistleblower cases. But there is still more to do! The Oakland City Auditor's Office is small, and there is much to cover in the City.

I am looking forward to future audits that address our housing crisis, future City debt related to promised benefits to our employees, spending by police and other departments in the City, and confirmation that bond and other measures voted by the constituents are delivering as intended.

2. Big picture -- What do you think are the major challenges facing Oakland today? Is that typical of other cities? Which cities would you consider similar to Oakland? In this context, what kind of solutions do you think we should be working on? How much, or little do you feel that this relates to the Auditor's roles and what would you change at the Auditor's Office to help resolve the challenges that you see the city facing?

The biggest single issue in Oakland is **Housing** – and this includes the un-Housed. The cost of housing in Oakland has skyrocketed in the past 4 years. Since most of our City residents are renters, they are feeling the pain of this trend, as landlords raise rents by exorbitant amounts, impacting the most vulnerable in our City.

In 2016, my Office published the [Rent Adjustment Program audit](#), with recommendations for better management of the agency, and capable of serving our community. First of all, to increase the City's fee. The agency was 'underwater' and risked laying off staff. Within days of issuing the report, City Council voted to increase the fee, as recommended by our audit.

Other recommendations included updating the agency's website and customer-facing presence and lifting it from a 'paper and pencil' operation. We advocated for using better technologies and leveraging social media to reach its stakeholders – tenants and landlords – for the education of their rights and responsibilities, so the process of filing complaints and responses in a more usable manner.

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And, of course related to housing is homeless. Are the various agencies and non-profits working together towards a solution?

Other areas of concern include our City's budget and how we spend the taxpayer's money. Many of the measures voted in by constituents include a proviso that the City Auditor must audit the programs and spending.

Other issues regularly cited by the public include the state of City streets, the worn-down appearance of our City parks and facilities, illegal dumping, and seemingly lack of support for economic development in Oakland.

Oakland is a unique city. Although we use comparisons to other cities for population, geography and other criteria, I would not use another city to compare to the challenges facing Oakland.

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?

I have been an auditor for the past 20 years, working in Federal government and with other local agencies. I am a Certified Public Accountant, a Certified Internal Auditor and Certified Fraud Examiner, and a MBA in Finance.

I have been in office for 4 years as Oakland's City Auditor. In the past 4 years, I have issued 20 high-impact audit reports, highlighting areas in need of change in the Police and Fire Departments, in Human Services, Finance & Revenue, Public Ethics, Libraries, Transportation, Public Works and Housing.

These audits identified lost revenues of \$2 million (Parking Tickets), inadequate customer-facing practices (Rent Adjustment audit), under-funded initiatives (Measure D – Kids First! Fund), lack of controls over cash handling (Revenue audit) and medications and controlled substances (Paramedic Services – OFD), poor oversight over the vegetation inspection process (Vegetation Audit) and inequities in the distribution of monies to candidates for City public offices (Public Ethics – Limited Public Financing audit).

My Office manages the Whistleblower program, with more than 170 cases investigated and closed in the past 3 ½ years. These cases are oftentimes the source for performance audits or more in-depth reviews.

Given the caliber of my team and our expertise, I am regularly called upon to consult with City managers and to offer guidance as new practices or systems are considered to ensure controls and practices will protect the City, its resources and the taxpayers' monies.

Soon after the start of my administration, I took on the task of modernizing the City Auditor's Offices. Many of our audit recommendations to other departments in the City advocate for greater efficiencies through the adoption of newer technologies and automated systems. We need to mentor the same practices within the City Auditor's offices.

I replaced the desk top computers with laptops, so auditors could work remotely around the City, as they conduct audits and reviews; I terminated a costly case file system in favor of a network-based process, with plans to move to Share Point – all of which is at no cost; I replaced the aged, outdated computer monitors with larger models, meeting ADA requirements; all staff use scanners to upload documents onto secure networked platforms, eliminating the need for filing cabinets and binders, and greatly reducing the need for paper. We have met or exceed the City's initiative for a paperless office!

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And our website is amazing! We are no longer in the 80's! Our website far exceeds the upgrades of the City – ours is replete with reports, presentations, good information about the activities of the City Auditor's Office on a year-by-year basis, with an updated platform to report fraud, waste and abuse through our Whistleblower Hotline.

This website is ADA compliant and is 'user-friendly' for portable devices. We have received numerous compliments – both from the members of the public and from other City staff.

4. Endorsements -- Who has endorsed you so far? Who do you expect to endorse you? Who do you endorse in the 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 honored to be endorsed and supported by many diverse members of the Oakland community, including John Bliss & Kim Thompson – community supporters and activists; Ken Lupoff, Executive Director, Friends of Oakland Parks & Recreation; Zack Wasserman, vice-chair of the San Francisco Regional Center that coordinates regional policies of MTC, ABAG, BAAQMD and BCDC; Kathy Teng Dwyer, Oakland Fund for Children & Youth; John Flores, former City Manager – City of Emeryville, Interim City Administrator – City of Oakland; Henry Chang Jr., former Oakland City Councilmember – City of Oakland, Planning Commissioner, Port of Oakland Commissioner; Renia Webb, neighborhood liaison, community activist; Brooke Levin, former City of Oakland, Public Works Director; Ken Benson, Oakland Budget Advisory Commission; Dinah Benson, attorney, community activist; Karen Friedman, attorney, Oakland Rent Board member, Stephen Lawrence, former Deputy City Auditor - Oakland.

I am actively engaged in securing other endorsements, including those from the Alameda County Democratic Committee and other local democratic clubs, Labor organizations, Fire – IAFF 55, Organization of Police Officers Association, and others.

In addition, my auditor colleagues support the work of my office, including the Portland City Auditor, City of Palo Alto City Auditor, City Auditor of Riverside, Lisa Violet, Chief Risk Officer – Federal Home Loan Bank

5. How much money have you raised for your campaign. Where has your campaign financing come from? Does any of it come from builders or developers? Does any of it come from corporations? Does any of it come from outside of Oakland. Please give us an overview.

My campaign committee is headed by James Ryan, a veteran political consultant who coordinated my successful campaign in 2014, when he also worked alongside the directors of the Oakland United Democratic Campaign. We have a volunteer field staff and a small army of volunteers to deploy. To date, we have raised approximately \$4,000 and expect to raise roughly \$10,000 on our way to victory.

My campaign funding comes from local residents, as those noted above as my endorsers and others. Donations from outside of Oakland are from family and friends. I have not taken any donations from land developers.

6. Who do you think of as your political friends, collaborators, allies, or elected officials that you make common cause with on City Council, School Boards, and in the other commissions and committees relating to the Port of Oakland, planning, housing and other local government officials or state and national officials who represent Oakland?

As the Oakland City Auditor, I am an independent elected official. I work with many City leaders. But this is focused on implementing better practices, ensuring compliance, strengthening controls. The City Auditor is not a policymaker but confirms that ordinances and policies put into place by City Council, and procedures adopted by the City Administrator are enacted as they should be, that monies are spent appropriately, and programs are operating as intended by the policymakers. This confirmation is conducted through our performance audits.

7. What do you feel needs an audit or re audit during the next term?

I am very proud that I have brought the City Auditor's Office up-to-date and current with all required audits. When I took office in 2015, all of these audits were behind and in arrears for completion. **This represents the first time this Office has been current with all required audits.** These 6 audits are required by ballot measure or Ordinance for: Measure M, and Measure N (Fire Department), Measure Q (Libraries), Measure D (Kids First! Fund – Human Services), Tax Refunds (Finance & Revenue) and the Limited Public Financing audit (Public Ethics Commission). This is the first time in 10 years, that these audits have been fully completed – all at the same time, and are current and reporting to the taxpayer the status of the funding and compliance with these measures. **The very first time!** Going forward, these audits will be conducted on a frequent basis, to ensure the City is meeting the requirements of the voters and legislation.

Future audits will highlight the issues of Oakland today – housing and homeless, the poor state of our City streets and sidewalks, unemployment in Oakland, Police Department Overtime spending, Blighted properties/illegal dumping, and Measure KK (approved by voters in 2016) – one of the largest public spending initiatives to update City properties and facilities, provide for affordable housing and anti-displacement programs.

Other areas/risks to consider: cybersecurity and disaster preparedness, funding (or not funding) of City employees' benefit plans – and the future financial impact to the City.

8. There have been a string of audits of the practices and policies of the city government. Does that go far enough? Is it the right focus? What would you think the focus should be of the next audits?

“Performance auditing provides objective analysis so that management and those charged with governance and oversight can use the information to improve program performance and operations, reduce costs, facilitate decision making by parties with responsibility to oversee or initiate corrective action, and contribute to public accountability.” – GAO, U.S. Government Accountability Office.

In the past 3 ½ years, my Office has issued 20 performance audit reports. All of these reports were publicly published and were addressed in my regular reporting to City Council on the status of the City and an overview of the activities of the City Auditor's Office. In many instances, City Council called the department head to the council meeting to respond publicly to the recommendations of our audit reports, the status of remediation plans, to confirm that our recommendations are put into place.

Our audit findings and recommendations are accepted by City leaders. This is important. It is not enough to publish a report. If actions are not taken, changes are not made, and we simply see more of the same – poor practices, errors, inefficiencies, lost revenues.

City Council and the City Administrator take our audit reports seriously and expect actions. These actions are 'spelled out' in a straight-forward matrix in our reports, stating the recommendations, management's plan to remediate, the date of expected correction and responsible party. All of this is intended to hold City leaders responsible and accountable.

And then, our follow-up audits confirm that these promised actions are implemented, and changes have been put into place. This is the catalyst for a better and stronger city government.

9. Do you feel that there has been proper follow-up from City Council to past audits or Grand Jury investigations? Elaborate please.

Our audits are given the consideration required to bring about improvements and better practices to the City. As noted above, I present these audits to City Council as a part of my summary updates to Council, or as separate reporting on the specific issues brought forth in these audit reports. I make these presentations to Council throughout the year.

Council then requires the City Administrator to publicly respond to our findings and will also require a regular update from the department head, responsible for the remediations until the issues and findings have been satisfactorily resolved.

Our follow up audits will confirm that actions plans have been implemented and corrections and remediations made.

10. What is your opinion of the Measure Y audit and what does the public need to know?

The former City Auditor issued the performance audit on Measure Y in 2009 and was focused on the management and oversight of grantees.

The auditor's 23 recommendations highlighted the need for better monitoring of grants and a better program evaluation processes.

City management states that at the time of audit, the Measure Y program was new - barely 3 years, with only 5 staff assigned to the program and many of the processes were still in development.

Not all recommendations were accepted or agreed to by the City Administrator – 4 unresolved, 6 partially resolved, 11 resolved and 2 closed. In the City Administrator's response, they noted some recommendations were not appropriate to put into place. For instance, the City Auditor's recommendation to require recipients provide proof of Oakland residency in order to receive services would be counter to the goals of the measure.

The former City Auditor selected five grantees to test and review. The City Administrator notes that many of the recommendations in the audit report are based on one grantee, the exception to the rule. This grantee had been identified for poor performance by the City monitoring staff; grantee payments had been reduced, and eventually, this grantee's contract was not renewed and is no longer funded by Measure Y.

11. Same question for the Hiring Practices audit.

The former City Auditor issued this report in October 2009. It is a lengthy report, covering more than 120 pages. There were 85 recommendations, which is extraordinary if not overwhelming. The City Administrator's response was 15 pages, and disagreed with many of the comments, conclusions and recommendations, stating the audit report suffers from paying excessive attention to a limited number of well known, but isolated cases, which the report generalizes to the entire system.

Nevertheless, the City Administrator committed to setting higher standards for department directors and the updating of many of the City's Administrative Instructions, pertaining to personnel and payroll processes.

12. Are there other past audits that you find important and would like to elaborate about? If so, please do.

Yes. All of the audits published during my administration are high-impact – that is, our findings are meaningful, our recommendations are intended to bring about corrective measures and better practices. The City

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Administrator has readily accepted our recommendations, with little or no dispute – indication that our audit work is solid and credible. We are an award-winning audit department. Within 2 years of my administration, we were awarded the Knighton Award for the Rent Adjustment Program audit.

The Rent Adjustment Program (Knighton Award Winner) is highly impactful to the City. Within days of its release, City Council agreed to the recommendation to increase the RAP fee (the agency was financially ‘underwater’); the agency set to work to update its website to make it not only ‘user friendly’ but as a full communication venue to its stakeholders. Now, tenants are able to file complaints and reports online, without the need to meet with City staff during office hours to complete the paperwork.

The Limited Public Financing Audit noted that the Public Ethics Commission staff distributed the monies to Oakland candidates accurately. However, our audit went further than counting the money. We identified equity gaps – that candidates from Districts 3, 6, & 7 rarely participate in this program – a program intended to help with ‘leveling the playing field’ for local government candidates.

The Vegetation Audit determined that the Fire Department / Prevention Bureau did not have a robust quality assurance plan in place to confirm that inspections of properties – vital to ensure that dangerous ‘fuel loads’ of brush and debris are removed, preventing wildland urban fires – were performed correctly. Inspection and abatement fees were foregone, totaling \$420,000 due to inaccurate write-ups. Developing an evacuation plan for the Oakland Hills, the site of the 1991 fire is critical to ensure residents can leave quickly and safely, and that First Responders can access areas in need of assistance and firefighting.

The Parking Void audit determined that due to a lack of oversight and controls, the City lost nearly \$2 million in revenues, due to voided parking tickets. Parking ticket revenue is a significant stream of revenue to the City. This agency has since been transferred to the Department of Transportation and will be reporting to City Council in October 2018 on the progress towards completion of its corrective action plans.

Measure D – Kids First! Fund identified a funding shortfall of \$2 million. The City Administrator acknowledged and accepted the finding and included this adjustment in the 2018-19 mid-cycle budget for the City, as approved by Council.

Measure N – Paramedic Services – Although the audit determined that spending of the parcel tax monies met the requirements of the measure, there were inadequate controls over medications and controlled substances used by emergency and paramedic staff.

OPD – 9-1-1 Communications – The audit determined that emergency calls went unanswered, failing the national standard of 90% of call must be answered within 10 seconds. In fact, between 9% - 13% of callers abandon their calls. The Police Chief agreed with most all of our findings, acknowledging the some of our recommendations require negotiations with union groups.

13. What is your opinion of recent reporting about the Auditor's Office in the East Bay Express?

The allegations against me, as stated in the news article are heinous. It is hurtful and painful to think people may believe these statements about me – nothing could be further from the truth. This is not who I am.

Some time ago, some employees expressed concerns about my Office. Every employee has a right to express his/her concerns. The City Administrator rightfully took these concerns seriously and initiated a full review. This review was led by an independent, outside attorney and took more than 1 year to

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complete. It was thorough, and I cooperated fully. And I was glad that all allegations against my office were cleared.

My opinion on these pieces has predominantly been disappointment: Disappointment at the Express for misstating facts and for divulging details of a confidential personnel issue. I am disappointed that the Express has not printed an apology, noting the thorough and independent review concluded that the claims made by some former employees were unsubstantiated and my office was cleared of any wrongdoing. This is unacceptable -- the East Bay Express, as an outlet that purports to pride itself on hard-hitting journalism, should hold itself accountable and responsible in its work.

But most importantly to state, I value the employees in the City Auditor's Office. I have the utmost respect for them. They are smart, kind, capable, and I am honored to work with these professionals. Their accomplishments, in audits, in reviews and in the analyses they prepare, are a source of pride for the City Auditor's Office – and acknowledged by our colleagues – we are an award-winning audit office. The findings identified in their work are a critical component to making Oakland strong. These highlight areas of concern and are communicated to City leaders to set forth the needed changes and improvements.

I enjoy working with this team of top-notch professionals. There is great camaraderie in our office. All work together and with each other, with great teamwork and pride in the work for Oakland. All of this comes about from good leadership. These professionals are not only auditors, supporting the City of Oakland, but are committing to the City. You will see them at clean-up days, volunteering at emergency shelters, reading programs for children, and in trainings, as a part of our City team working towards greater equity in Oakland.

Again, this is a fully functioning team of professionals – they enjoy working in the City Auditor's Office. And this is borne out by the high level of productivity – 20 audits in less than 4 years, in addition to 13 ballot measure analyses and managing a Whistleblower program for a City with more than 4,000 employees. This highly-functioning office reflects staff, working under my leadership, who enjoy their work, and enjoy working for Oakland.

14. What is the Auditor's obligations towards whistleblowers?

Whistleblowers represent an important and critical component to strengthening our City. Being a Whistleblower is a courageous act, with the intent to identify possible wrong-doing that should be remediated and corrected. My office takes every Whistleblower complaint seriously and devotes the needed time and effort to every report.

The City of Oakland Whistleblower programs confirms the anonymity of all Whistleblowers. Their identity is kept confidential, names are never disclosed.

Our Office uses a third party to collect Whistleblower reports. Whistleblowers may report via a webpage, through our website, or use a toll-free number (with support of interpreters, if needed). But many times, Whistleblowers,

especially employees prefer to come to my office and talk with me about their concerns. They trust that my office will keep their identify confidential and will give every report the consideration needed to investigate.

15. What is and what should be the relationship between the Auditor and the other branches of City Government? Do you propose any changes in the structure or the practices of the Auditors' Office?

No one accomplishes anything alone. We must all work together. There are many challenges in the City of Oakland. It takes many to bring about the changes needed.

I have worked to develop professional relationships among the City leaders and managers in Oakland. The role of City Auditor is to foster needed change, to protect our City. And these relationships are important as we conduct our audits. As the audit team identifies findings and exceptions, we bring these forth to the City management team. Government auditing standards require us to communicate with the auditees – and we do this regularly, throughout the course of the audit.

Our audit work speaks for itself and is not disputed. It is very common for us to report that City management has already taken the needed steps and has implemented action plans to remediate before we issue the audit report. And this represents a successful audit! The findings are highlighted and brought forth - management agreed and accepted and put the changes into place. This makes for a stronger Oakland.

The City Auditor's Office is independent. Our obligation is to report to and work for the people of Oakland.

16. What is your opinion of the contracts and contract performance of Redevelopment and post Redevelopment projects such as the Oakland Army Base, Brooklyn Basin and the Upper Broadway plan? How should Oakland Audit and oversee compliance on this kind of development plan?

The City engages in numerous contracts, in order to conduct the work of the City. Our Contract & Compliance department thoroughly reviews all contracts, as well as the City Attorney, to be sure that the rights of the City are protected before these documents are signed.

Monitoring of contract performance is the responsibility of the department engaging the contractors or grantees. As a part of the monitoring process, they must set into place procedures and steps to ensure that milestones are met, the goal of the contract and project are achieved.

Each department has developed a set of procedures for contract monitoring suitable for the uniqueness of the individual project. After 3 ½ years in the City, I am not certain there is adequate follow-through for monitoring of projects and contracts. And I believe the City can do better to establish common monitoring processes that are applicable to all projects and contracts. (See our report on Workforce Development, to be issued within the next few months)

The role of City Auditor is one of oversight. And oversight of these projects - and the oversight of procedures, as set up by the managing departments is the responsibility of the auditor.

17. Do you think that the developers and builders are in compliance with the social commitments they made to gain approval for their projects? Are the projects that finally get delivered still meet the community benefits targets originally promised? Here again, please elaborate.

Between 2010 and 2014 there were less than 750 housing units built in Oakland. In the past few years, as the economy has increased, building and development has likewise increased. Of course, developers must be held accountable to the community for not only promises made, but for compliance with regulatory requirements as

well. And – there should be public reporting showing milestones and targets met and conformance with all requirements, including impact nexus fees, numbers of affordable housing units per project, required public art, as a part of construction projects, etc.

18. How do you view the manager part of the Auditor position? What will you do to keep a good group of auditors working effectively for the city?

I have spent nearly all of my professional career in auditing. I have managed large and small teams of professionals and enjoy developing staff.

The City Auditor's staff is competent, devoted to the City of Oakland and proud to be a part of bringing about needed change for our City. Nearly all of my team are Oaklanders.

In an economy of nearly full employment, recruiting to local government is challenging – especially so, with many organizations offering competitive benefits and salaries.

But people come to work for us with more in mind than just salaries. They want the experience of working in local government. And working in the City Auditor's Office provides an expansive experience. The auditors in my Office become very proficient in the area of the audits they work on. By the time the audit is published, they know the topics and issues very well. This knowledge makes them highly valuable – both to the City Auditor's Office and to the City. It is not uncommon for managers to contact my staff, requesting guidance as they move forward with corrective action plans, based on our audit recommendations.

In the past 3 ½ years as the City Auditor, I have modernized the office. Auditors are no longer working in a pen and pencil operation. I have introduced new technologies – including data mining applications, cloud-based storage and file retrieval systems. My team represents the office at entrance conferences and exit meetings; they present our findings and reports at City Council meetings; they participate in trainings to other City staff, and are integral in the hiring of new staff to our office.

And they love the new website! This shows an updated, clean, fresh look of the City Auditor's Office – one that all of us can be proud of – and my team is certainly proud! Our website, designed with input from all of the staff is now a current look that shows the professionalism of the office. The website's upgrade was in 'lock-step' with that of the City, but we went further. Our site is fully searchable, is ADA compliant, is adaptable to portable devices and we have received numerous accolades from other City staff and the public.

I believe in training and development. All of our staff are working towards a credential. A certification shows the professionalism of the individual and as fully supported by my office, shows the professionalism of our office. My team participates in trainings that are City-sponsored, in-house based, web training, and conferences. I really believe that in-person training is the best. It is the venue for my team to network with other auditors from other jurisdictions, learn from them and share in experiences. My Office has hosted 2 auditor trainings at City Hall, bringing government auditors from all over the Bay Area, even from Southern California.

Our training program is something that came to the notice of our HR Director, stating that other than sworn officers, our department provides more training and development than most other departments in the City.

So, recruiting in times of nearly full employment is a challenge. However, when we convey the benefits – being one to impact change in the City of Oakland, able to partake of many professional development programs, able to use newer technologies and gain additional skills, we regularly receive applications from candidates eager to work for the City Auditor, including internal candidates – City employees working in other departments.

19. What have we not asked? -- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you? Is there some issue that is of importance that you want to bring to our attention?

I have enjoyed the past 3 ½ years as City Auditor, and we have accomplished so much. We are a very productive office. But – there is much more to do! I am looking forward to continuing this momentum forward, taking on the next challenges and finding solutions and action plans, making our City strong. I am honored to be working with a great team of auditors in the City Auditor’s Office – and so proud of the work they have produced over the past 3 ½ years!

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts about me and the City Auditor’s Office with you through this questionnaire. I hope you will recognize me as the Independent City Auditor – working for a better Oakland!
www.RobertsforAuditor.com

The following chart shows the number of audits, follow-up audits and ballot measure analyses over the past 10 years, showing 2018, to date. For more information about the City Auditor – www.OaklandAuditor.com

