

## **Berkeley Neighbors for Housing & Climate Action 2024 Candidate Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name:** Rubén Hernández Story

**District / Office being sought:** Berkeley City Council District 4

**1. Berkeley's Housing Element lays out the city's plan for new housing construction through 2031, ensuring the city can meet its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of ~9,000 homes. The Housing Element commits Berkeley to a number of major policy changes in order to meet state requirements for affirmatively furthering fair housing, including citywide zoning for "missing middle" housing, a San Pablo Specific Plan, an updated Demolition Ordinance, and upzoning along North Shattuck, Solano, and College Ave, among other items. What is your view on the Housing Element and these policies? Please discuss your ideas and priorities around:**

### **A. Missing Middle housing**

- Moderate-income middle housing and housing typologies that accommodate moderate income households should be throughout Berkeley's neighborhoods, especially high-resource affluent neighborhoods, to complement more dense transit-oriented development along commercial and transit corridors and near BART.

### **B. San Pablo specific plan**

- To achieve our environmental justice and carbon emission reduction goals, every area plan in Berkeley must aim for a reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled while contributing to our Regional Housing Needs Allocation mandated by state law. The San Pablo Specific Plan offers a key opportunity to advance these goals as it will be closely informed by the county's San Pablo Corridor Plan, a major investment in public transit access and pedestrian safety. With a growing base of specialized jobs in Berkeley and a thriving retail sector, the San Pablo Corridor is ideal for transit-oriented development where we should be increasing housing opportunities across the income spectrum, including permanent supportive housing, senior housing, and starter homes for young families.

### **C. Demolition ordinance**

- I support a smart demolition ordinance that ensures we build on dilapidated and under-utilized sites while still protecting tenants and creating affordable housing. The demolition ordinance is complicated and there are competing proposals coming to council soon that I want to review. My focus is on ensuring that "tenant occupied" is properly defined, such as it was in the 2022 Measure M vacancy tax, and that we are being mindful of any changes that could make ADU and Golden Duplex owners consider pulling their housing supply out of the market, therefore undoing the work we have done to address the housing crisis. If this issue is still not addressed after the election, I look forward to working with the authors to help craft and support a reasonable and balanced policy.

**D. Zoning for housing in high-resource neighborhoods like North Shattuck, Solano, and College Ave**

- I support Councilmember Kesarwani's amendments to Berkeley's Housing Element Update calling for "parity" between commercial corridors in high-resource areas and those in historically redlined neighborhoods. San Pablo Avenue is already seeing projects proposed in the 7-story range; that is the minimum that should be allowed on Solano, College, and North Shattuck as well. I have no opinion on the optimal number of units on these corridors—only that there should be no vacant lots, and the density should be sufficient to support high-quality 24/7 public transit and nightlife. Berkeley's RHNA obligation of roughly 9,000 new homes in the next 8 years is the floor, not the ceiling, of our housing supply ambitions.

**2. Please describe how you would approach addressing the climate emergency if elected (or reelected). How would you achieve the goals set forth in 2006 Measure G, which set a goal of 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050? What does the city need to do to reach carbon neutrality by 2045? How can Berkeley become a Fossil Fuel Free City?**

- Our largest source of greenhouse gas emissions originate from the transportation sector, followed by emissions from residential and commercial gas. We should continue work to support transit oriented development, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure, expand public EV charging, achieve a multimodal, green, and fossil-free city, increase our investment in ongoing zero waste strategies, such as compost bins for retailers and multifamily apartment buildings, and update our natural gas prohibition and energy efficiency standards to advance building decarbonization. As a renter, I strongly support all-electric in new multifamily construction. I am committed to working in close partnership with stakeholders in the commercial and industrial sectors to meet their needs in transitioning away from fossil fuels and the phasing out of natural gas and work alongside labor partners in the building and construction trades to create union jobs and grow the green workforce. As a regional and global climate leader, Berkeley is uniquely positioned to model the transition to a fossil-free future for other cities. In 2016, Berkeley joined Ava Community Energy to offer cleaner energy to residences and businesses. In June 2021, City Council voted to set the default electricity option for Berkeley residents to Ava's Renewable 100 service starting in March 2022 and for commercial customers starting in October 2022. I will also seek appointment to the Ava Community Energy board to not only advance the transition to fossil-free energy sources but foreground and elevate the voices of marginalized frontline communities.

**3. In your opinion, what was the most important City Council vote on Berkeley's housing crisis in the past four years? Briefly describe the issue, what you think of the Council's decision, and what you would have done had you been on the Council.**

- In addition to the City of Berkeley's Housing Element Update, Councilmember Kesarwani's amendments calling for "parity" between corridors in high-resource areas and those in historically redlined neighborhoods is perhaps the most significant, specific commitment Berkeley has made to redressing its history of exclusion and racial segregation. This sets a high bar for all future rezonings, and I hope to be able to vote on future reforms that hold firm to this commitment.

**4. In your opinion, what was the most important climate or environmental issue faced by the Berkeley City Council in the last four years? Briefly describe the issue, what you think of the Council's decision, and what you would have done had you been on the Council.**

- Housing, climate, and mobility justice are all interconnected. The regulatory landscape at local, federal, and state levels has maintained a status quo bias that favors automobiles over human beings in most zero-sum material tradeoffs. Laws have required parking in urban areas where most residents don't drive, raising housing costs and reducing road space for pedestrians and cyclists to travel safely. It has turned into a repeated tragedy of the commons as motorists also suffer from the increased congestion that auto-centric policy enables. A world in which cars win is a world in which we all lose. In any vote that weighs the tradeoffs between private automobile parking against the safety and wellbeing of human beings, I would have and always will vote for human beings. That is the public good we are sworn to uphold.

**5. To achieve its RHNA goals, Berkeley must continue to build homes for all income levels. These new residents will need to travel within Berkeley. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation comprise roughly 60% of total emissions in Berkeley. How would you ensure that Berkeley continues to reduce GHG emissions while adding new homes?**

- As a full time pedestrian and transit rider who proudly has never had a driver's license, I strongly believe we should support transit-first policies and infrastructure, such as bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, bus rapid transit, pedestrian plazas, transit oriented development, and more. Berkeley still has a severe jobs/housing imbalance. Every day, thousands of people commute into Berkeley, many of them by car and some from as far away as the Central Valley. Every unit of housing we build here in Berkeley is potentially one more worker who will now have the freedom to walk, bike, or take transit to work instead of drive. Building more housing near jobs, transit, and amenities feeds three birds with one stone: it improves housing availability and affordability, it reduces traffic into Berkeley, and it lowers emissions.

**6. Berkeley has a long history of using zoning, restrictive covenants and redlining to achieve racial and economic segregation. This history continues to shape Berkeley today. Recent research by the Turner Center at UC Berkeley suggests that inclusionary zoning requirements, which mandate on-site restricted affordable housing in new developments, may have the effect of reducing overall housing construction, including the production of affordable units. However, on-site affordable housing can also be an effective tool for desegregating neighborhoods. What is your perspective on how Berkeley should use inclusionary zoning requirements, versus other affordable housing development options (such as in-lieu fees)?**

- Inclusionary housing should be optimized for meeting our RHNA obligations for low-income housing as well as our obligations to redress segregation under Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH). Nevertheless, it will always be somewhat of a blunt instrument, because the degree to which these goals are maximized either by on-site inclusionary housing or in-lieu fee payments would likely vary by area (for example, on-site inclusionary housing would do more to desegregate a relatively wealthier area, but that doesn't mean we should otherwise reject on-site units). Therefore, I believe

inclusionary housing requirements should be set in accordance with the results of the upcoming feasibility study to ensure that first and foremost, the housing gets built ASAP. To the extent that there are any tradeoffs between on-site or in-lieu fees, these should be mitigated by building more housing everywhere in the city. State law prohibits cities from requiring on-site units over in-lieu payments, and the latter can be leveraged with other funding sources for 100% affordable projects, so we should welcome both.

**7. Many of the highest income neighborhoods in Berkeley are also in the Hillside Overlay, portions of which are in the California Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (CalFire VHFHSZ). How should we balance fire risk with affirmatively furthering fair housing?**

- Subsidized below-market and new multifamily housing should be prioritized for high-resource exclusionary areas, including formerly single-family home neighborhoods, to increase economic mobility and redress the region's legacy of racial segregation. In order to balance fire risk, we need to expand bus service into these neighborhoods so that folks who do not need or cannot afford a car have transit options. Additionally, we need to work with the Fire Department to enforce red curbing in high severity fire risk zones and eliminate street parking along evacuation routes to address impediments to ingress and egress.