

Berkeley Neighbors for Housing & Climate Action 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Rashi Kesarwani

District / Office being sought: Berkeley City Council, District 1

1. Berkeley is required to adopt an updated Housing Element by January 31st, 2023. This Housing Element lays out the city's plan for new housing construction through 2031, and must ensure the city can meet its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of ~9,000 homes.

Please discuss your approach for using this Housing Element as an opportunity to address Berkeley's housing crisis:

a. How would you achieve Berkeley's RHNA target?

I believe we cannot rely on the existing zoned capacity of our City if we intend to affirmatively further fair housing and reach the target of creating 9,000 new homes. Nearly two-thirds of the housing sites proposed in the draft sites inventory were located in West and Central Berkeley, including in formerly redlined and yellow-lined neighborhoods. In the highest-resourced area of Northeast Berkeley—where single-family zoning was historically used to exclude racial minorities by banning lower-cost multi-unit housing types—just 2 percent of total housing capacity is located. This housing pattern directly violates the principle of affirmatively furthering fair housing and instead, reinforces historic housing patterns that are predicated on racial segregation. One of the primary opportunities to undo this harmful pattern is to rezone to allow for greater housing capacity along the transportation and commercial corridors of Northeast Berkeley, including Solano Avenue and Shattuck Avenue. The commercial corridor of College Avenue in the Elmwood District can and should be grouped with Solano Avenue and Shattuck Avenue as a highest-resourced commercial corridor that should be rezoned to accommodate greater housing capacity. Since my comment letter was submitted, I'm pleased to report that our draft Housing Element has been revised to include the following sentence: "The City will evaluate zoning map and development standards to accommodate housing capacity and growth on transit and commercial corridors, particularly in the highest resource neighborhoods." This is an important addition, and I am pleased that my comment letter made important arguments that led to this change.

b. Where should these homes be built?

In general, I believe every neighborhood must share in the responsibility to create homes. I support missing middle (i.e., duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, etc.) in residential zones and higher density on all of our transit and commercial corridors.

c. How would you fund ~4000 low & very low income affordable units called for in the RHNA, given currently high construction costs?

We need an all-of-the above strategy that involves the following approaches: bond funding, market-rate projects that cross-subsidize below-market-rate units and/or pay the affordable housing mitigation fee, and rezoning our transit and commercial corridors in order to enable more opportunity sites for affordable housing.

I supported the Measure O affordable housing bond, which provided \$135 million for affordable housing. Voters will have an opportunity to consider Measure L on the November ballot, which would provide an additional \$200 million for affordable housing. The average total cost to create a unit of housing is about \$750,000, and the typical local public subsidy per unit of affordable housing is \$200,000. This means that \$200 million in bond proceeds could produce roughly 1,000 units of affordable housing. Market-rate housing that pays the affordable housing mitigation fee of roughly \$39,000 per unit, or includes those affordable units on site, is another strategy we must continue to pursue in order to reach our RHNA goals. Rezoning transit and commercial corridors to enable more opportunity sites for affordable and market-rate housing is yet another important avenue for the City to encourage the creation of more affordable housing.

d. What is your view of the ~5000 market rate homes called for in the RHNA?

Over the last decade, the Bay Area has created more than three jobs for every unit of housing. If we do not build enough market-rate housing to accommodate job and population growth, then new residents will inevitably bid up the cost of the existing housing stock. We have seen this phenomenon play out, leading to increasing numbers of homeless individuals and low- and middle-income workers being pushed farther out to far-flung suburbs. Creating new market-rate housing in the inner Bay Area to accommodate job and population growth is important to ensuring that there is adequate housing availability for all.

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?

Transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, representing about 60 percent of total emissions in Berkeley. At the same time, climate scientists at U.C. Berkeley have examined what local policies would have the greatest impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and urban infill housing development was found to yield the greatest reduction by far in the City of Berkeley. As such, I believe we need to focus on promoting transit-oriented development and greater development along transportation and commercial corridors so that residents will be able to live a low-carbon lifestyle with less reliance on a personal automobile. I have been a leader in creating homes at the N. Berkeley BART station in District 1, and I have successfully advocated for rezoning commercial and transit corridors through our Housing Element. In order to accommodate growth, we also need to make greater investments in our bike and pedestrian infrastructure in order to ensure that residents can move around our city safely without needing to rely on a car, if they so choose. I also support enhancing our e-charging network in order to move away from fossil fuels.

3. Regarding City Council votes on Berkeley's housing crisis:

a. For incumbents: What is a vote you're MOST (or LEAST) proud of regarding Berkeley's housing crisis in the last four years. Briefly describe the issue, why you voted the way you did, and what you think now about that vote.

I take pride in being a strong voice on the Council for the creation of homes, with a voting record to back it up. In particular, I'm extremely proud of my record on creating homes at the N. Berkeley BART station, and the unanimous Council vote on June 2. In the lead-up to this vote, I spent hours knocking on doors in the neighborhoods around the station to make sure I heard from a diverse cross-section of the community. I held numerous small-group Zoom meetings to listen to concerns and answer questions from any constituent who requested a meeting. I took the time to explain very complicated state law in my May e-newsletter. At the same time, I engaged my Council colleagues - to the extent that I could under the Brown Act - and I spent hours negotiating directly with BART in order to ensure that a seven-story design will be enforced by BART on a developer team. This design will yield about 800 new units of housing, about as many as have been created at the MacArthur BART station.

- b. For new candidates: 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.

4. Regarding City Council votes on the climate emergency:

- a. For incumbents: What is a vote you're MOST (or LEAST) proud of regarding a climate or environmental issue faced by the Berkeley City Council in the last four years. Briefly describe the issue, why you voted the way you did, and what you think now about that vote.

Housing policy is climate policy. As I've noted, climate scientists at U.C. Berkeley have examined what local policies would have the greatest impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and urban infill housing development was found to yield the greatest reduction by far in the City of Berkeley. As such, I am most proud of co-authoring a Council item that put forward important zoning concepts to consider during the City's Housing Element update, including allowing for "missing middle" housing in residential zones and rezoning transit and commercial corridors to allow for more housing. I am also extremely proud that the Council unanimously adopted my recommendations for backyard cottages, which give homeowners greater flexibility to create an accessory dwelling unit that is up to two stories.

- b. For new candidates: 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.

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?

Berkeley needs to make a concerted effort to enhance its bike and pedestrian infrastructure as it accommodates more development along transit and commercial corridors. I fought to ensure that Measure L, the bond on November's ballot, allocates \$231 million for street paving to reach a good pavement condition and \$69 million for sidewalk repair and bike and pedestrian infrastructure that will save lives. If approved, this funding will enable the city to dramatically increase its capacity to deliver improvements specified in our Bike and Pedestrian Plans. I also support partnering with AC Transit and the Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC) to improve bus service. Specifically, I partnered with advocacy groups to ensure that ACTC would pilot a bus lane and a bike lane for a portion of San Pablo Avenue as part of its San Pablo Corridor Project.

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.

Berkeley has recently resolved to eliminate exclusionary zoning throughout the city, and is developing new rules to allow small multiplex buildings (2-4 units) throughout R-1 and R-2 zoning. However, this still does not allow for mid-rise apartment buildings, and hence affordable housing, in traditionally higher income neighborhoods. The current draft Housing Element currently plans for most new housing to be built along Berkeley's most heavily trafficked and polluted corridors: San Pablo, University, and Shattuck Ave.

Do you believe the City's current plans are sufficient to address Berkeley's history of segregation? If not, what would you propose?

I do not believe the initial draft of the Housing Element was sufficient, and that is why I wrote a detailed letter (available here: <http://www.rashikesarwani.com/issues/housing-element/>) that recommended rezoning the highest-resourced commercial and transit corridors. The Housing Element is our city's plan for housing at all income levels for the next eight years. If we do not take major steps now to affirmatively further fair housing, specifically by rezoning the highest-resourced commercial and transit corridors to allow more dense housing, we risk violating state law and continuing the pattern of not meeting our RHNA target for below-market-rate affordable housing. Rezoning the highest-resourced commercial and transit corridors—Solano Avenue and Shattuck Avenue in Northeast Berkeley and College Avenue in the Elmwood District—is a step towards truly integrating our city and reversing the housing pattern of racial segregation through exclusionary zoning.

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?

I specifically recommended rezoning the commercial and transit corridors of the highest income neighborhoods (rather than the residential neighborhoods) in my Housing Element letter because I believe we need to be sensitive to wildfire risk. The commercial zones I cited—Solano Avenue and Shattuck Avenue in Northeast Berkeley and College Avenue in Southeast Berkeley—are not located in the very high fire hazard zone, and therefore they present an important opportunity to allow for more

housing capacity in highest-income neighborhoods. If I'm re-elected, I look forward to helping to shape thoughtful development standards for missing middle housing in the hillside overlay zone where fire risk is greater.