

# Berkeley Neighbors for Housing & Climate Action

## 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Susan Wengraf

District / Office being sought: Berkeley City Council District 6

1. Please describe how you would approach addressing the **housing crisis** if elected (or reelected). How would you achieve Berkeley's RHNA targets for extremely low income, very low income, low income, moderate income, and above moderate income homes? Where should these homes go? How should this be achieved?

**Berkeley's 2014-2023 Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) calls for 2,959 units, including 1,558 for households making moderate income or below:**

**As of December 31, 2018, the need for AMI housing has been exceeded and the need for VLI housing is making good progress (at 65% of the requirement, based on approved building permits since Jan 1st 2014). However, we are still falling woefully short in the ELI, LI, and MOD categories. The Berkeley Way affordable housing project will provide 89 ELI units, bringing us to 33% of the total, but just 66 LI units have had building permits pulled and no MOD units.**

**We recently learned that we received \$42 million for the construction of 150 new affordable housing units from the State's Strategic Growth Council's**

**Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program, which will help further meet these goals; but overall, the stark shortfall of ELI, LI, and MOD units, dictates that we need new policies to ensure these units are produced without jeopardizing the construction of VLI units. VLI units are most often built in order to receive state density bonuses, with developers meeting the remainder of the affordability requirements through fees. These fees enable Berkeley to support the construction of ELI units (the city put in \$27 million for Berkeley Way), but do not address the needs for LI and MOD units.**

**Large, market-rate developers are interested in producing above MOD units with a handful of VLI to maximize their profits, so we need government subsidies and nonprofits to step up and fill in the gap. Unfortunately, we have not been able to rely upon state or federal support for affordable housing in the quantities we need. To make it more affordable to build, we should explore options such as selective upzoning if possible - i.e. zoning for increased density, like what we are doing on Telegraph Ave. We could encourage the creation of smaller apartment buildings which are more affordable by design,**

**like the 4, 8, or 12-unit buildings that are common throughout Central and South Berkeley but were prohibited by downzoning legislation. We also have unique opportunities at both Ashby and North Berkeley BART to build lots of different levels of affordable units,**

2. What actions have you taken, beyond this current campaign, in line with the approach you described above?

**I have voted to approve every housing proposal that has come before the City Council in the past four years. In addition, I developed a roadmap for a program that would grant amnesty to as many as 5,000 housing units that have been built without permits, potentially adding thousands of safe living units to the market with minimal environmental impacts.**

3. Please describe how you would approach addressing the **climate crisis** if elected (or reelected). How would you achieve the goals set forth in 2006 Measure G? What does the city need to do to reach carbon neutrality by 2045? How can Berkeley become a Fossil Fuel Free City?

**Berkeley has made good progress on the CAP to date, but we have achieved the first of the low-hanging fruit - switching to renewable energy - and now have to tackle the difficult challenges of reducing transportation and building emissions.**

**Nearly 60% of Berkeley's GHG emissions come from transportation. This must be addressed by getting people out of their cars and onto buses, BART, bicycles, or walking, and switching remaining vehicles over to zero-emission vehicles. This is in progress with the Bicycle Master Plan, Pedestrian Master Plan, Transit-First Policy Implementation Plan, Electric Mobility Roadmap, etc.**

**There are two ways we can reduce emissions from vehicles: help people to drive less, and switch people who still have to drive to zero-emission vehicles. I am proud to be supporting the Bicycle Master Plan and Pedestrian Master Plan to help improve biking and walking throughout our city, as well as to support new housing close to jobs, schools, and transit to reduce travel distances and make those modes more attractive.**

**I am also excited to see the Berkeley Electric Mobility Roadmap currently being developed by City staff, to help increase the adoption of electric transportation modes (vehicles, bikes, etc.) and the Transit-First Policy Implementation Plan, forthcoming later this year. I am also interested in seeing additional proposals from the Environment, Energy, and Transportation Commissions to help increase electric and zero-emission mobility and reduce our use of fossil fuels.**

**Biking, walking, scooters, and other personal zero-emission transportation**

devices will help reduce car trips by giving people alternatives to using – or even owning – an automobile. In order to increase their usage, we need to expand our sidewalks and bicycle lanes to make it safer and easier for people to get around without a car. Our Bicycle and Pedestrian plans are effective ways to help move this forward, and I continue to support and advocate for these proposals.

Building emissions are beginning to be addressed with Berkeley's natural gas ban for new construction. We are already seeing both small and large developments going gas-free.

However, we will also need to retrofit tens of thousands of existing buildings over the next few decades, which will require subsidies particularly for low-income property owners. The BayREN Home+ program will help with this, and over time we can identify additional monies.

4. What actions have you taken, beyond this current campaign, in line with the approach you described above?

**Wildfire prevention mitigation strategies are essential if we are to attain our CAP goals. My leadership on this issue continues. Improving EV infrastructure and installing solar on city-owned buildings, when possible are priorities. We can require solar on new construction, if the location is compatible.**

5. a) For incumbents seeking reelection: please share a vote you are most (or least) proud of in the last four years on a **housing issue**. What was the issue? Why did you vote the way you did? How do you feel about it now, and why.

**It's a toss-up between Harold way and Haskell Street. I voted the way I did because it was clear to me that the arguments against both of these proposals were not in the public interest and intended to obstruct needed new housing. Looking back, I feel at peace regarding both votes.**

b) For candidates not yet elected to the office they are seeking: in your opinion, what was the most important **housing issue** that Council voted on in the past four years, or expects to vote on before November? What was the issue? Do you believe Council's decision was the best one? If you had been on Council, what would you have done?

6. a) For incumbents seeking reelection: please share a vote you are most (or least) proud of in the last four years on a **climate or environmental issue**. What was the issue? Why did you vote the way you did? How do you feel about it now, and why?

**I know that a new modernized transfer station is crucial to our reaching our zero-waste goals, but the industry is very unstable now. We may need a whole new approach to how we collect waste and recycle. I want to be certain that the new plans for the Transfer Station incorporate a vision for the future as well as our current needs.**

b) For candidates not yet elected to the office they are seeking: in your opinion, what was the most important **climate or environmental issue** that Council voted on in the past four years, or expects to vote on before November? What was the issue? Do you believe Council's decision was the best one? If you had been on Council, what would you have done?

7. Berkeley must continue adding more homes in order to achieve its RHNA goals, especially for extremely low income, low income, and moderate income households. These new households will need ways to get around Berkeley. At the same time, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation comprise roughly 60% of total emissions in Berkeley.

How would you ensure Berkeley continues to add new homes while reducing GHGs?  
Berkeley needs **to continue to build dense housing close to public transit. Our major corridors – for example, University Ave., San Pablo Ave., Telegraph Ave., have ample opportunities to construct dense, multiple unit housing. Hopefully transportation will get a federal bailout in November and routes and service will be restored to all areas in our region. We also have a wonderful opportunity at both Ashby BART and North Berkeley BART to build lots of housing at all levels of affordability. If we created some commercial uses around the stations, car free housing could become a reality at those locations.**

8. Berkeley has a long history of segregation, racial zoning, restrictive covenants, and redlining, which continue to impact our community to this day. Much of this history was, and remains, reflected in Berkeley's zoning restrictions, with resulting implications for greenhouse gas emissions.

How would you address Berkeley's history and impacts of segregation through housing policy?

Lending practices need reform. The formation of a municipal bank could be a good start.

We also need to provide entry level home ownership opportunities at affordable prices. One way to do this is to encourage the construction of condominiums and townhouses, which are less costly to build than single family homes.

We also need to re-evaluate our condo conversion fees which are currently prohibitive, so that we can increase the inventory on condominiums in Berkeley.

I supported the "Missing-Middle" study. Allowing duplexes or two or three townhouses on a single family lot with shared open space is another option.

We need to re-write our zoning regulations through a racial equity lens. Future zoning must also take into account proximity to robust transit and also weigh the risks of building densely in areas at high risk of natural disasters, like wildfires and flood zones. We know so much more now, than we did in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We need to incorporate that knowledge into new policies and regulations.