

Berkeley Neighbors for Housing & Climate Action 2022 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: *Mark Humbert*

District / Office being sought: *Berkeley City Council, District 8*

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?**
- b. Where should these homes be built?**
- c. How would you fund ~4000 low & very low income affordable units called for in the RHNA, given currently high construction costs?**
- d. What is your view of the ~5000 market rate homes called for in the RHNA?**

I want my children and their friends to be able to live in Berkeley and if we don't create a variety of housing, they won't have that option. I believe in equitable growth throughout the city and believe that homes should be centered around major transit corridors and bus lines. I believe we can meet the City's RHNA targets by allowing for a combination of: increasing capacity home building in Downtown and on Southside; allowing for gentle, missing middle homes in Berkeley neighborhoods; encouraging more housing over shops along our commercial corridors; and overall improvements to speed up our permitting and approvals processes.

I don't believe it is possible for the City to achieve its low-income housing goals solely through taxpayer funds. While many advocates have pushed only for 100% subsidized housing throughout the city; that is not feasible. As an example, a 100% subsidized BART project at North Berkeley and Ashby would cost the city \$300 million and take approximately 20 years. We have a housing crisis now and the best way to approach building affordable housing is by cross subsidizing by "taxing" market rate units and also using various funding sources like Measure O in 2018, Measure L this election cycle, as well as state and federal matching funds.

Although some claim market rate homes are unnecessary, I disagree. The reality is that 99% of our population lives in market rate units and there is a shortage of those units as well. One only has to watch the lines snaking around city blocks to enter into an affordable –subsidized– housing lottery. Thousands of people wait to get into those affordable units with no success. The only other option are units rented on the market. New market rate units take pressure off the overall housing market so that the people who can afford those new units are competing with others for previously existing housing units. That said, we also need to ensure that we maintain our strong protections against displacement, because the creation of new housing units should

not come at the expense of low-income renters who could be forced out of Berkeley if they lose their homes.

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 emissions account for the vast majority of Berkeley's emissions. Climate scientists at Cal have examined what local policies would reduce our transportation emissions and have determined that infill housing, alternative transportation, electrifying transportation are the best ways to do so. The majority of remaining emissions come from non-electrical building energy use, which will require a transition away from fossil fuels and toward building electrification.

Too many people currently have to commute into Berkeley from far away, which contributes to GHG emissions as well as congestion and air pollution. Allowing housing in our transit corridors near jobs is key to solving this problem. We also need to create transit infrastructure and street improvements that will allow people to safely and conveniently travel around our city without using cars. I was instrumental in writing our pedestrian and bicycling plan because I'm committed to making sure that our kids, seniors and all residents have other safe, reliable non-automotive options.

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.**
- 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.**

I think the approval of potentially thousands of units of housing on the BART station parking lots is an enormous victory for housing and I commend the Berkeley City Council, specifically Mayor Jesse Arreguin, Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani, and Councilmember Ben Bartlett for moving forward unanimously with a plan that balanced the views of a large number of diverse stakeholders. As Nobel Prize [winning climate scientists have confirmed](#), building housing on top of BART stations is the best –and one of many–ways to address climate change. I support the plans for the BART Stations and look forward to working with my colleagues as the final design proposals are brought forward.

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.**

- 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.**

Besides supporting infill housing, the May 2016 recommendation by the Community Environmental Advisory Commission (CEAC) —written by one of your board members Ben Gould—which recommended that the City Council direct the CEAC and Energy Commission to develop a ban the use of natural gas in new construction, as well as the subsequent 2019 Council vote to implement that ban were the most important pieces of legislation that the City Council took action on in recent years regarding climate change. I commend Councilmember Kate Harrison in her efforts to see this legislation across the finish line and galvanizing unanimous City Council support for it.

Aside from transportation, natural gas use is the number one source of GHG emissions in Berkeley. But transitioning away from it presents a number of challenges, especially for existing buildings. By taking action to ban natural gas use in new buildings, Berkeley both took an important step toward a broader transition, and also helped lead the way for other cities around the country and the world.

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?

Reducing emissions from transportation will require Berkeley to make good on its transit-first and Vision Zero policies. We have a fair way to go to address the City of Berkeley's Vision Zero commitment and make sure people in our city feel safe walking and biking in our city. I support protected bike lanes where possible and a strong focus on pedestrian improvements. Right now, the City faces critical shortages in staffing in Transportation and several projects are at a standstill. I will support any managerial efforts to help fill those positions so we can deliver on projects. I will also support efforts to support Bus Rapid Transit and improve bus infrastructure throughout the city.

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.

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

No, Berkeley's plans for this are not currently sufficient. 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 will not sufficiently allow for modest multi-family buildings, and hence affordable housing, in traditionally higher income neighborhoods. As Berkeley's historic buildings show, there are ways to create beautiful multi-family homes that occupy roughly the same area as existing houses.

Additionally, 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. I believe that Berkeley should build off AB 2011 to allow for the creation of more traditional housing over stores along other commercial corridors in the city.

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 strongly supported Lori Droste's efforts to incorporate an objective analysis of Disaster Preparedness and Safety for the hillside region. I also support focusing development outside of very high fire danger areas. While some have expressed concern over state law allowing two units per parcel in the Hillside Overlay, only two permits have been requested for the entire Hillside Overlay for projects involving more than an accessory dwelling unit. So, I think the level of concern doesn't reflect the reality on the ground.

That said, I don't support any further Wildland Urban Interface development outside of what state law mandates. We need to focus intensive development outside of the Wildland Urban Interface—especially since lower-income households are less likely to have the means to easily evacuate or pre-evacuate during dangerous weather or fire conditions. Moreover, despite being high-resource areas, the upper hills lack access to high-quality public transportation and services. Although we need more homes and those homes should be distributed fairly, consistent with our other goals, we should be locating most new homes near jobs, transit, shops, and services.