

Rent Board Convention Questions 2016

1. Tell us something about yourself and why you have decided to consider running for Rent Stabilization Board Commissioner.

My decision to run is based on my lifelong commitment to help disenfranchised communities. Even though our slate was sued the last time I ran for Rent Board, I have no hesitation running again. As a candidate for Rent Board, in 2012 and for Council in 2014, I have worked hard to push the progressive agenda and share information to Berkeley residents. I decided to run again in 2016 because I want to continue pushing for equity in Berkeley and working to help the Rent Board grow. In the next four years the Rent Board will hire a new Executive Director. It is imperative that this years' pro-tenant slate understand that who ever they choose for Executive Director will shape the Rent Board for many years.

As a housing activist and Rent Board Commissioner, I utilize my knowledge and contacts within the City to help tenants. I have specifically prevented evictions, stopped tenant harassment, and held housing inspectors accountable.

As a legislative aide to Berkeley City Council member Kriss Worthington and as a Housing Advisory Commissioner since 2009, I have a holistic understanding about housing in Berkeley. I believe that this experience is valuable during our discussions at Rent Board meetings and to the community at large.

2. How much time are you able to devote to the campaign? A contested campaign can consume 20 hours a week of your time until the election. As a Commissioner, you'll be attending one lengthy evening board meeting a month and a minimum of two daytime committee meetings (plus preparation time!) Are your hours flexible? Are late meetings a problem? Can you attend daytime meetings?

If the pro-tenant slate has opposition similarly to the 2012 election, I, as in the past, will dedicate the necessary hours to support the entire slate. If elected, I will be able to attend nighttime and daytime meetings.

3. What experience have you had with Berkeley's rent control ordinance, the Rent Board's staff, or the elected Board?

A. As a Rent Board commissioner for the last four years I have explained certain details of the ordinance to both tenants and landlords. I have supported the executive director in executing the ordinance. In doing so, I've voted to pass and modify regulations, update the staffing model, and increase the registration fee. I've worked to make sure that the ordinance is executed as Berkeley voters originally intended.

B. I work with Rent Board staff in various ways. I have worked with staff assigned to standing committees. When a renter asks me for advice I direct them to specific staff members. I have a great relationship with staff and value their professionalism and responsiveness to my referrals and specific requests for advice that I may have at any given time.

C. As a Rent Board commissioner for the last four years, I have worked with a variety of commissioners to co-sponsor rent board items.

4. Tell us about at least three issues that you consider important to tenants in Berkeley.

A. Affordable Housing – The need for affordable housing is the number one issue in Berkeley. As a Rent Board Commissioner, I will continue to advocate for more affordable housing. We need to continue organizing our community to pressure the council to fund affordable housing and enact policies that contribute to the development of affordable housing.

B. Eviction Protections -During our current housing crisis, it is very important to protect tenants from evictions either constructive or illegally. We need to expand the Rent Board's services, particularly since the Rent Board has seen over 2,000 more people last year than average.

C. Safe Housing- As housing stock ages, the Rent Board and city inspectors have an important role in making sure that people live in safe housing. Sometimes unsafe housing, unmitigated, can lead to constructive evictions. We must continue to work to keep housing safe.

5. What is the role of the Rent Board Commissioners? What powers do they have? What changes do you think should be made in how the Rent Board operates?

The nine Rent Board commissioners enact and revise regulations, hear petition appeals from both landlords and tenants, and help the executive director administer the ordinance. Due to the high increase of clients, the Rent Board will need to increase its staff. In doing so, we must find a way to consistently increase the registration fee that doesn't invite a lawsuit from landlords.

5. (a) How do you feel about affordable housing? (b) What do you think about low-income housing?

I have been a strong advocate to building new affordable housing. We need to require developers to pay housing mitigation fees to the Housing Trust Fund based on the Nexus study published in March 2015. We need to urge the City to fund non-profit

housing providers predevelopment funding so that they can compete for funding competitions. We need to require developers to provide inclusionary units that are for a variety of levels under the low-income umbrella.

There are numerous models of low-income housing. My preference is for the City to build large complexes of dense low-income housing near transit. As we to move away from the use of oil powered vehicles, providing dense housing with minimal parking requirements can provide the most units and move toward a greener city. Further, we need to make sure that Section 8 vouchers holders can find a place to rent in Berkeley. The BOPA has lobbied its members not to rent to Section 8 tenants. We must help the Berkeley Housing Authority and Section 8 tenants find ways to find housing throughout Berkeley.

6. The Berkeley Housing element says, "*Ensure that below-market-rate housing is distributed as evenly as possible throughout the community.*" What are the pros and cons of distributing low-income units as parts of new projects, and what are the pros and cons of using set-aside fees from those projects to build mixed low- and medium-income buildings around the city? We want to emphasize that this question is unsettled area and there are no right or wrong answers.

I believe that the City should prioritize inclusionary units over mitigation fees. However, both are important. Inclusionary units are the fastest way to get affordable housing. When a new development is built, we have a new affordable housing unit immediately. The problem is that the City would only realize a limited number of inclusionary units for the life of the building. Mitigation fees placed in the Housing Trust Fund can be effectively by non-profits to get other funding streams to build more units. However, it takes much longer for a non-profit to build units from mitigation fees. Generally, mitigation fees are used for the creation or maintenance of permanently affordable units. When a developer opts to pay a mitigation fee, their project will be entirely market rate.

I personally prefer inclusionary units to mitigation fees. The City should use general fund money to help finance non-profits rather than encourage developers to pay the mitigation fee.

7. Is a pro-tenant Rent Board capable of treating both large and small landlords fairly? Explain.

Yes. As a commissioner, I have treated both large and small landlords fairly. The law is the law. If I were fortunate to be selected by the convention and re-elected by the voters, I would continue to treat large and small landlords fairly.

8. How do you think that rent and eviction controls are related to homelessness? Can the Rent Board have any effect on the homeless situation?

Berkeley's rent and eviction controls prevent homelessness because they require just cause for eviction. Given the high cost of housing, some landlords are trying to constructively evict tenants in a variety of ways. The Rent Board has been instrumental in preventing evictions and unlawful rent increases. The Rent Board does a great job of proactive education by providing workshops for landlords and tenants. Homelessness has been prevented through the many services provided by Rent Board.

9. What do you consider to be your constituency or base of support? What organizations are you affiliated with? What qualities would you bring to the slate?

My base of support comes from North and West Berkeley. I am active with the Latino community. As a baseball coach, I am part of the little league baseball community. I also have two children in Berkeley public schools.

I come from an activist family and believe that public service is a duty. I bring passion to boards I sit on. I also examine situations through an equitable lens.

10. Please check links on our website (berkeleytenantconvention.net) to two potential ballot measures affecting tenants that will be on the ballot in November: (a) Safe and Affordable Homes tax, and (b) Amending Measure Y to increase relocation payments and prevent family evictions during the school year. Explain your position on both.

I support both. Given the windfall profits of many landlords in Berkeley, it is fair and equitable that the City increase the tax rate of rental property. However, I disagree with the exemption on new construction. New construction will charge the highest rents in Berkeley. There is no logical reason for this exemption because this proposed tax would not discourage new development.

Amending Measure Y is necessary. The current amount of relocation assistance is deficient to help relocate tenants. The automatic inflationary tool is a very smart way to have relocation payments keep up with inflation.

11. The Convention asks all candidates to sign a pledge to not run against or endorse against the slate the Convention selects. Will you sign it? Do you think that the pledge is important? Do you think it's fair?

Yes, I will sign the pledge. The pledge is important because the tenant rights community should decide on who represents the pro-tenant slate. The pledge is absolutely fair.

12. If you are nominated by the convention, will you agree, in concert with other slate members, to hire a coordinator with full authority to make campaign decisions in consultation with the slate? The slate will retain the power to determine an overall budget and replace the coordinator.

I agree with the intent behind this question but it should be up to the selected candidates to determine whether they hire a coordinator. I'm not sure what "full authority" means in this context. Often times a piecemeal approach are the appropriate, proper and the best strategy.

Please return to berkeleytenantconvention@gmail.com by 10 AM on April 5th

Late responses will be distributed at the convention but may not be in time for the screening by community groups. ALL responses will be posted on the website.