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Occupation: Legislative Assistant

2018 Rent Stabilization Board Candidate Questionnaire

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 longstanding commitment to amplify and empower marginalized communities. As a Rent Board Commissioner since 2014, I have worked hard to build and elect a progressive coalition, push a progressively inclusive agenda, and make Rent Board resources more accessible to Berkeley residents. In the next four years, Californians may repeal Costa Hawkins, so it is imperative that this years’ pro-tenant slate understand their scoop of power, push for protections for all renters, and fight rapidly increasing costs of rent. Now is the time to be unafraid of blow-back and backlash in fighting for renters’ rights. Now is the time to empower underrepresented communities and the people who are disproportionately affected by systematic gentrification including the elderly, people with disabilities, low/limited income recipients, and communities of color?

As a queer social justice activist, housing rights advocate, and Rent Board Commissioner, I utilize my knowledge and network within the City to help tenants in need. As a Berkeley resident and legislative aide to Berkeley City Councilmember Kriss Worthington, I have a comprehensive understanding of the housing crisis affecting Berkeley and the rest of the Bay Area. I believe that this perspective is crucial during our discussions at Rent Board meetings and to the community at large.

1. How much time are you able to devote as a Commissioner? Are your hours flexible? Can you attend meetings until as late as 11:00 pm? Can you attend a two‑hour twice‑a‑month daytime meeting?

If elected, I will be able to continue to attend the two-hour, twice-a-month, day or nighttime meetings. If the pro-tenant slate has opposition similarly to the 2016 election, I will dedicate the necessary hours to support the entire slate.

1. What experience have you had with Berkeley’s Rent Stabilization Ordinance, the Rent Board’s staff and the elected Board?

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

I work with Rent Board staff in numerous ways. I have worked with staff assigned to standing committees. When renters ask me for housing advice, I specifically direct them to the appropriate staff members to get the right information. I have a great relationship with staff and value their professionalism and responsiveness to my referrals. As a Rent Board commissioner for the last four years, I have worked with a variety of commissioners to co-sponsor rent board items.

1. Tell us about at least three issues that you consider important to tenants in Berkeley.
2. Being Priced Out of the Community- The rent is too damn high, and that’s also affecting the price of goods around the neighborhood. We need to at least protect small business owners who have historically kept prices low and affordable to serve existing community members. The best thing to do is to make sure that we fight to continue to make rent as affordable as possible because that is most often a renter’s biggest expense.
3. Rental housing habitability- The most important thing to any tenant is the habitability of their homes. Whether it is heating & ventilation, safe running water, functioning roofs, or safety from dangerous chemicals, we must not forget to address the most basic needs that directly affect the lives of tenants.
4. Protecting tenants from harassment by landlords or agents of property owners- Many tenants often face bullying from landlords, and that affects the psychological comfort and habitability of their homes. Tenants should not be subjected to intimidation tactics or encounter any hostile attempts from their landlords to remove them from their homes.
5. Outreach, Education, and Coalition building to all Berkeley tenants

For tenant rights to be easily accessible and actively protected, tenants must first know their rights. Foremost, the easiest target for outreach and education is first-time renters. Young, first-time people are often taken advantage of in housing lease contracts in the face of a shortage of habitable affordable housing, while having none to little knowledge of their rights as renters. The Rent Board has been a space for educating Berkeley tenants on their rights by providing legal advice and/or dispute mediation, but in order for the Rent Board to become more influential, people have to be made aware of the services offered, use the services, and fight to keep them. Helping students also helps community members because when everybody has a common goal, the coalition around tenant activism becomes much more powerful. The goal is to strengthen the Berkeley Tenants Union and create a database of tenants who will show up to meetings, rallies, and actively participate in the political process in order to expand affordable housing laws and spaces for renters.

1. What is the role of 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 does not invite retaliation from landlords.

With the repeal of Costa Hawkins, we will see a huge shift of power given to Rent Board Commissioners. The Rent Board will have the ability to expand what is defined as a Rent Control Unit and even deal with vacancy decontrol.

The biggest change I would like to see in how the Rent Board operates is the interactions among commissioner. I hope to work with the Executive Director to help the board do trainings and retreats to strategic plan and team build to ensure a more cohesive rent board.

1. What experience do you have organizing tenants? Please describe and include any thoughts you have on how to better engage Berkeley tenants.

As the former Vice President of the Berkeley Student Cooperative, I know how to organize tenants around issues-based campaigns. I helped them get 2014’s Measure S on the ballot, and I also helped them secure over $400,000 in grant funding to help the collective grow. Better tenant engagement means direct actions. In many perspectives, we are truly blessed to have an active rent board that mediates on behalf of both tenants and landlords. However, we need to better educate tenants about their rights. As the Chair of the Outreach Committee on the Rent Board, I helped secure more funding for online access to the Rent Board and I helped establish the Tip of the Month that engages and educates Tenants about their rights to housing.

1. Market developers argue that building more market rate multifamily units is the only way to lower the price of housing. What is your position on this theory? Please discuss your thoughts on how Berkeley can increase the housing available and affordable to tenants living on very limited income such as those living on government benefits, retirement pensions, and others with very limited resources.

I would argue that we cannot build our way out of this situation. Building more market rate housing will not lower the price of housing. I do NOT believe in trickle down housing economics.

However, I do believe in Intentional Development. I believe in building for the next generation of renters and homeowners, and ensuring that the development is in line with the principle of making Berkeley a place we can all call home. We have a growing and aging population. The question we should always ask is who is development for? If a development is pushed through with 50% affordable housing and no office space, we should welcome it. If a development that accommodates more jobs than housing units, then we should be against it. We should always support Mixed Income housing because it builds empathy and community.

Berkeley has done an amazing job with its market rate housing development, we must push other cities, especially wealthy cities like Orinda, Marin, and Walnut Creek to take up more development in their neighborhoods. I am all for market rate development, just not at the cost of poor neighborhoods. Intentional Development is very important. For example, in the Mission District of San Francisco, community members (not politicians), directly negotiate development projects in their neighborhoods, I believe we should prioritize those voices. Regarding affordability for tenants living on limited income, when we talk about affordable housing, we need to make sure the units are not just for those making 120% of AMI. We need to make sure they cover all levels. That way, seniors, people with disabilities, and those with limited incomes can afford to live in Berkeley. This is why I am proud to have the endorsement of SF Supervisor Jane Kim. Supervisor Kim has seen the largest number of development in her district, and she’s fought hard to stop divisive development and fought for the highest 40% affordable housing in the new developments next to AT&T Park. The type of leader I pledge to be is one who is unafraid to stand up to developers, unafraid to walk away from bad deals, and unafraid to advocate for intentional development in our city.

1. Is a pro‑tenant Rent Board capable of treating tenants, small, and corporate landlords fairly.

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. The misconception of landlords not being treated fairly come from laws surrounding renter protections. Landlords should also understand that they need to be treated fairly in the same way that we treat all other forms of revenue generating business with consumer protection regulations.

1. How do you think 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 rising cost of housing, some landlords are scheming to 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 many services provided by the Rent Board through eviction defense.

1. 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 main constituencies are young professionals, students, APIs, and LGBTQ constituencies. Having graduated from UC Berkeley years ago, I am still connected with progressively minded students in spaces such as CalSERVE (progressive multicultural community.)

I am the Vice President of Finance for the East Bay Young Democrats, the Secretary for the East Bay Stonewall Democratic Club, and an active member of API groups like the Asian Pacific American Democratic Club. I also serve as the Northern California Chair for the California Young Democrats LGBTQ.

I bring a strong background of community organizing to the slate. I could be very useful in the endorsement process, especially relating to Democratic Party Organizations. I would bring an enthusiastic energy to the slate through more young participation. I am a communicator: working and talking with people is one of my favorite activities I love meeting new people and building new bridges. I am good at articulating complex messages in simple terms, and I enjoy listening and learning from others.

I passionately believe in increasing more affordable housing at all levels, especially for low-income families. I believe young leadership makes the difference in Berkeley, and I want to ensure that Berkeley remains a progressive space. I am wholly committed to devoting all of my time to campaigning from now until November 6th and beyond.

1. Do you support the repeal of the Costa‑Hawkins Housing Act? If it were repealed, what changes do you believe Berkeley should make to its Rent Stabilization Ordinance?

Yes, I fully support the full repeal of the Costa-Hawkins Housing Act. If repealed, I believe all residential market units should be under Rent Control, regardless of when a unit is built. Additionally, I believe that we need to revisit vacancy decontrol to actually stabilize rent.

1. The Convention asks all candidates to sign a pledge NOT to 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 is 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 fair.

1. 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 may replace the coordinator by a democratic process

Yes.