

## **Berkeley Neighbors for Housing & Climate Action 2024 Candidate Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name:** Soli Alpert

**District / Office being sought:** Berkeley City Council District 4

**1. Berkeley's Housing Element lays out the city's plan for new housing construction through 2031, ensuring the city can meet its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of ~9,000 homes.**

**The Housing Element commits Berkeley to a number of major policy changes in order to meet state requirements for affirmatively furthering fair housing, including citywide zoning for "missing middle" housing, a San Pablo Specific Plan, an updated Demolition Ordinance, and upzoning along North Shattuck, Solano, and College Ave, among other items.**

**What is your view on the Housing Element and these policies? Please discuss your ideas and priorities around:**

- a. Missing Middle housing**
- b. San Pablo specific plan**
- c. Demolition ordinance**
- d. Zoning for housing in high-resource neighborhoods like North Shattuck, Solano, and College Ave**

Walking through the McGee Spaulding neighborhood of District 4 it is clear that, while it is currently R2, many different building forms have been constructed over the years that beautifully integrate into the neighborhood. Fourplexes, condo courts, and mid-rise apartments are throughout central Berkeley. I support allowing this kind of construction, provided that tenant protections and demolition controls for rent controlled and affordable units are in place. I support the combination of the strong Missing Middle and Demolition Ordinance revisions as presented by the Planning Commission.

I support allowing "Missing Middle" density housing throughout Berkeley, so long as it is coupled with demolition and tenant protections as have been proposed by the Planning Commission, with the exception of extreme fire risk areas like Panoramic Hill. I support concentrating highrise construction in the Southside, Downtown, and along commercial and transit corridors like Shattuck, Telegraph, San Pablo, and University.

The Elmwood or North Berkeley, high income areas that have little risk of gentrification, should be priority sites for dense new development. Likewise, the Southside area is uniquely experiencing a student housing crisis, and concerns about gentrification are not as relevant there or in the Downtown. Meanwhile, South and West Berkeley face higher risk of gentrification and displacement. I support mandating that inclusionary requirements be met with on-site development in South and West Berkeley to reduce displacement and ensure social integration, while favoring fees in the Downtown and Southside.

As Vice Chair of the Rent Board I am proud to have worked to advocate for a strong set of amendments to the Demolition Ordinance at the Planning Commission. I am adamant that we achieve true one-for-one replacement of demolished rent controlled units, and robust tenant relocation and right of return protections. The beauty of a strong Demolition Ordinance is that it takes much of the conflict between tenant advocates and YIMBYs out of debates around new

construction. I strongly opposed the amendments from Councilmember Kesarwani to the Demolition Ordinance amendments as proposed by the Planning Commission, as I believe they undermine if not violate SB 330's requirement that all rent controlled and affordable units be replaced 1-for-1 and weaken tenant protections.

**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?**

There are many ways, big and small, that we can end Berkeley's dependence on fossil fuels:

#### New Building Electrification

With respect to new building electrification requirements, the City should immediately adopt interim policy measures to fill the vacuum left by the Ninth's Circuit's deeply misguided decision overturning Berkeley's groundbreaking natural gas prohibition ordinance. Other cities across the Bay Area and beyond are adopting local zero NOx and performance standards. I will help introduce and carry such legislation in partnership with our staff and City Attorney's office.

I am also interested in exploring some of the novel approaches that were alluded to as part of the panel's decision such as prohibitions on gas hookups (distribution) beyond the meter. The panel suggested that such an approach is not preempted by ECPA.

#### Existing Building Electrification

While Berkeley has been a national and international leader on new building electrification, the bulk of emissions from natural gas are from the existing building stock. Adjusting for downstream and upstream methane leakage, natural gas is likely one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas attributed to Berkeley. There are a number of critical measures that I will champion to remove methane gas at an emergency pace to include:

- Amending the Building Energy Savings Ordinance to require reasonable and cost-effective mandatory electrification and building envelope measures upon the sale of certain properties. I am very disappointed with the Mayor and Council's recent decision to put staff-proposed amendments on an indefinite hold at the request of landlords and realtors. We cannot let special interests stand in the way of addressing the climate emergency;
- Expanding funding for the Pilot Existing Building Electrification and Just Transition Program using unionized trades to upgrade affordable housing units. The Council seeded this program with \$1.5 million, but we know that the estimated cost to electrify the entire low-rise residential building stock is upwards of \$1.4 billion. I also support expanding funding for the Climate Equity Fund;
- Supporting the Fossil Free Berkeley ballot initiative to tax the largest polluters in Berkeley (buildings 15,000 feet or larger) for their methane combustion and leakage.

This measure will bring in \$23 million per year (.575 billion over 25 years) for union electrification and building upgrades. The measure would also expand the City's climate department. In the past, City Management have unacceptably circumscribed the size and funding of the Office of Energy and Sustainable Development. These municipal jobs are critical to help administer these new electrification programs. I am very proud to have connected the proponents of this measure to Rent Board counsel to ensure that the measure language would maximize eviction protections and anti-displacement measures to protect both rent controlled and non-rent controlled tenants;

- Formalizing policies that will encourage utility and neighborhood-scale gas system pruning following retrofits. We need to leverage our franchise agreements with PG&E to ensure coordination and results;
- Supporting a potential policy and community organizing effort (in consultation with the City Attorney's office and AVA Energy) to initiate a Prop. 218 process to secure support from residents and businesses to explore cost neutral options to electrify buildings. Private for-profit companies like Bloc Power have utilized on-bill financing efforts to electrify buildings; but there's no reason the City working with Ava Energy could not do the same thing without a need for profits;
- Safeguard bold regional measures such as BAAQMD's zero-NOx standard from efforts to delay or water them down.

### Transit, Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Vehicle Mobility & Vision Zero

Berkeley is significantly behind other global cities in terms of improving the safety of its streets for zero and low-carbon mobility and transit. Paris for example has recently implemented an unprecedented transition away from vehicle congestion to a transit and mobility-first city with significant climate benefits.

The 2017 bicycle plan suggested that some 90% of Berkeley residents would consider biking if only it were safe to do so. While the City has made improvements such as the Milvia St. protected bikeway, much of the plan has been left unfunded. Bicycling, and other forms of low-carbon mobility are key to getting folks (who can) out of their cars. The same is true for the pedestrian plan. On Council, I would support budget legislation and additional ballot measures as needed to ensure that the City's bicycle, pedestrian, and vision zero plans are fully funded *this decade*.

I also support revisiting transit impact fees associated with new development. These fees can be used to improve traffic, pedestrian and mobility safety surrounding new dense housing. The Council has unfortunately deferred this issue, which is undoubtedly contributing to injuries, fatalities, and increased emissions.

In terms of transit, I am deeply concerned with the budget constraints facing AC Transit during the pandemic and believe that as a City we need to explore options expanding transit service. I support Councilmember Harrison's proposal to provide free AC Transit for Berkeley residents on certain times or days of the week using City funds. I am disappointed that this important

measure was stalled. I strongly support continuing to use our Uber/Lyft tax revenues to support key mobility transit upgrades at bus stations and bus lanes, and for bus rapid transit upgrades.

I support exploring additional car free zones such as the proposal for Telegraph Avenue.

With respect to vehicle electrification, I will champion efforts to pilot electric vehicle charging at the street level to help support tenants and homeowners without garages with low-cost level 2 charging in residential preferred parking zones. Our electric street poles offer a great opportunity to charge vehicles at the street level.

### City Fleet Electrification

I support expediting the transition of the City's small vehicle fleet to zero-emission, and would invest in finding zero-emission alternatives to larger and more specialized vehicles like garbage disposal trucks. The current goal of electrifying the fleet by 2030 is not ambitious enough. Unfortunately, City Management has arguably not pursued heavy vehicles electrification at an emergency pace. Dozens of highly polluting diesel trucks are routinely approved at Council each month without discussion. I will vote to pull these items off the consent calendar (and ideally launch an item at the FITES Committee) so that the public and staff can have a frank discussion about all the available options and opportunities. There are so many new all-electric pickup trucks on the market now from the likes of Tesla, Rivian and Ford. I understand that there is limited availability for larger pickups like Ford F-250, but we ought to take a close look to see where we can make important shifts. In cases where we absolutely cannot immediately purchase all-electric versions, we should look at prolonging the life of existing ICE vehicles or buying used ICE vehicles in anticipation of the availability of new all-electric models. This would reduce expenditures of embodied carbon. For the first time, the Inflation Reduction Act now provides Cities like Berkeley with millions of dollars in subsidies for purchasing EVs. In 2024, there is no excuse for slow walking vehicle electrification.

I have been thrilled by the work that Berkeley has already done with AVA (formerly East Bay Community Energy), and support expanding those partnerships. This includes more municipally owned electric car charging stations, and grants for private charging stations. More broadly, we need to work with Ava towards the municipalization of our grid and fully break away from PG&E.

### Consumption Emissions and the Climate Action Plan

While Berkeley cannot directly control supply chains, air traffic, industrial agriculture, and other industries, we need to be conscious of Berkeley's impact on scope three greenhouse gas emissions.

I support measures to continue tracking such emissions in Berkeley by partnering with UC Berkeley and other experts. Climate change cannot be tackled simply through technology; we need to look holistically at our economic policies and systems at the local level.

I support the ballot measure to ban Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations in Berkeley, and have previously worked on the Green Monday's resolution to require the City to serve plant-based meals once per week. I support additional measures to reduce carbon-intensive food procurement across city operations.

I also support revisiting our Climate Action Plan (CAP). Former Councilmember Harrison sponsored important legislation to enact annual greenhouse gas limits (binding emission reduction targets for sector-based and consumption emissions). I support revisiting this legislation. Our existing CAP is not ambitious enough. In fact, it calls for only reducing emissions 80% below 2000 levels by 2050. The plan was ambitious for its time, but events and emissions have made it obsolete. More ambitious recent pledges by the Mayor and Council are completely unfunded and unstaffed. I believe that such proposals do a disservice to the public because they mislead the public into thinking that the City is taking bold action and that the situation is under control. We need to put our money where our mouth is by enacting bold binding targets that are funded and adequately staffed.

### Renewable Energy

I strongly support recent policy changes to enact citywide upgrades for all Berkeley electric accounts to Ava Community Energy's Renewable 100.

### **3. In your opinion, 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 reject the premise of the question. There is no one issue, one policy, one law that will solve or even mostly solve our housing crisis. It will take changes to our zoning policies, direct investment in affordable, social, and permanent supportive housing, strengthening our tenant laws, investing in rental assistance, and converting housing currently on the private market to public, cooperative, and land trust models to fully address the housing crisis.

To give a handful of examples:

- I support TOPA and believe the current council has made a mistake in delaying it.
- I support missing middle zoning changes but believe the council should have been more diligent in bringing strong demolition and tenant protections alongside those changes, rather than bringing them later
- I support the Vacancy Tax, and was proud to help draft it. I want to expand it to include vacant lots in the future

### **4. In your opinion, 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.**

To tackle climate change, Berkeley must address two main factors: emissions from buildings and emissions from transportation. The Council's biggest victory in recent years on building emissions was the Natural Gas Ban put forward by Councilmember Harrison, which has spread across the country and the globe. I support making modifications to the ban to respond to the

federal courts misguided ruling. On transportation, there hasn't been one single vote in the past 4 years with as much impact, but looking farther back the Council's rejection of BRT along Telegraph was a huge mistake that must be corrected. I support exploiting BRT and bus lanes along all our major corridors.

**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?**

From above:

Transit, Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Vehicle Mobility & Vision Zero

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I also support revisiting transit impact fees associated with new development. These fees can be used to improve traffic, pedestrian and mobility safety surrounding new dense housing. The Council has unfortunately deferred this issue, which is undoubtedly contributing to injuries, fatalities, and increased emissions.

In terms of transit, I am deeply concerned with the budget constraints facing AC Transit during the pandemic and believe that as a City we need to explore options expanding transit service. I support Councilmember Harrison's proposal to provide free AC Transit for Berkeley residents on certain times or days of the week using City funds. I am disappointed that this important measure was stalled. I strongly support continuing to use our Uber/Lyft tax revenues to support key mobility transit upgrades at bus stations and bus lanes, and for bus rapid transit upgrades.

I strongly favor car-free Telegraph along the first four blocks, and am proud to be endorsed by its main proponent, Telegraph for People. For the rest of Telegraph, I strongly favor BRT that connects to Oakland. Previous Councils blocking of BRT was a huge mistake for our community. I would also like to explore car-free areas in the Downtown along Kala Bagai Way and/or Center Street. I support bulb outs, red curbing, and other methods of increasing pedestrian visibility at intersections. I support bus lanes and BRT along all bus corridors. I

support building a robust network of protected bike lanes throughout the City so that as many people as possible can safely bike to work, school, businesses, and activities.

With respect to vehicle electrification, I will champion efforts to pilot electric vehicle charging at the street level to help support tenants and homeowners without garages with low-cost level 2 charging in residential preferred parking zones. Our electric street poles offer a great opportunity to charge vehicles at the street level.

**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.**

**Recent research by the Turner Center at UC Berkeley suggests that inclusionary zoning requirements, which mandate on-site restricted affordable housing in new developments, may have the effect of reducing overall housing construction, including the production of affordable units. However, on-site affordable housing can also be an effective tool for desegregating neighborhoods.**

**What is your perspective on how Berkeley should use inclusionary zoning requirements, versus other affordable housing development options (such as in-lieu fees)?**

The Elmwood or North Berkeley, high income areas that have little risk of gentrification, should be priority sites for dense new development. Likewise, the Southside area is uniquely experiencing a student housing crisis, and concerns about gentrification are not as relevant there or in the Downtown. Meanwhile, South and West Berkeley face higher risk of gentrification and displacement. I support mandating that inclusionary requirements be met with on-site development in South and West Berkeley to reduce displacement and ensure social integration, while favoring fees in the Downtown and Southside.

**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?**

For most of the hills, fire risk is driven by narrow winding roads and street parking, not the mere fact of density. I support increasing allowable density significantly in the western hills with less fire risk. In moderately high fire risk zones, some increase in density is still feasible, but it should be coupled with expanded red curbing. Only Zone 3, the highest risk area, should have strict limits on new building.