



## Empower Oakland 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

*Empower Oakland is a movement fueled by Oakland residents who recognize that “business as usual politics” will only further perpetuate Oakland’s downward spiral. We believe in empowering Oaklanders to amplify their collective voices for greater political impact and influence.*

*All submissions will be unedited for spelling, grammar, and format and published on [empoweroakland.com](http://empoweroakland.com) to educate Oakland voters. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their Candidate Endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made by early September.*

*Please email the completed questionnaire as a .doc or .pdf document to [info@empoweroakland.com](mailto:info@empoweroakland.com). Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.*

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**Candidate Name:** Casey Farmer

**Email:** Farmer4Parks@gmail.com

**Phone Number:** 510-863-4059

**Office & District Sought:** EBRPD Director Ward 2

**Campaign Website:** [www.Farmer4parks.vote](http://www.Farmer4parks.vote)

**Social Media Handles**

- Twitter: caseyfarmer510
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/farmer.for.east.bay.regional.parks?mibextid=LQQJ4d>
- Instagram: caseyfarmer510
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/casey-farmer-she-her-34427029/>

**Expected total Fundraising Amount:** \$80k

**Funds Raised To Date:** \$51,000

### General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

**Special Education Teacher** (high school students with learning disabilities) in Oakland Unified School District (2007-2009) Youth Empowerment School (King Estates Campus)

**Campaigns / Local Politics:** I've managed 6 campaigns (4 candidates / 2 ballot measures)

- Including Measure A in 2018 (for childcare programs and wage increases - alongside SEIU Local 521 and Local 1021)
- Lynette Gibson McElhaney for City Council 2012

**State Senator Nancy Skinner** - Campaign Manager, and later Communications Director



**Executive Director of Alameda County's Complete Count Committee for Census 2020**

- Led communications, community engagement, and grantmaking for the county's first ever Census outreach program. Trained 2,000 stakeholders. Presented at Alameda County Labor Council

Since 2021, I've worked as a consultant on a variety of projects. Some clients have included:

**-Office of Supervisor Dave Brown** (For the legacy of Wilma Chan, my mentor)

- Facilitated a team of former foster youth to write Alameda County's guaranteed income plan for former foster youth, which was funded by the Board of Supervisors <https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/california-guaranteed-basic-income-17291418.php>
- Community Engagement for the Alameda Coalition of Children Youth and Families

**-Office of Alameda County Healthy Homes** - Stakeholder Outreach to promote HUD-funded Lead Hazard Control Grants (Oakland has a serious lead issue in our soil and the paint of many housing units where low income tenants live. Alameda County is struggling to build trust amongst landlords to access these resources)

**-Office of Alameda County Treasurer Tax Collector Hank Levy** - Working with housing and community stakeholders as well as state agencies on the cleanup and transfer of tax defaulted properties/ for affordable housing or open space.

2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?

- Challenge 1: Homelessness/Housing - increased numbers of unhoused residents and encampments, limited innovation and funding to build new housing, and still broken systems internal to the Planning Department for permitting (Accela)
- Challenge 2: Basic services are not delivered: 911 response, police response, crime prevention, park maintenance, and many other basic services that make people feel unsafe.
- Bright spots:
  - i. The Mosswood Rec Center is being rebuilt after 8+ years. It was sadly one of the 4 city recreation centers destroyed by warming fires, which severely impacted families relying on parks for recreation and afterschool care,
  - ii. The market is addressing the need for workforce housing (market rate units that can't be rented at market rates rents are supporting the needs of middle income earners).
  - iii. Forest Avenue just got paved so I no longer have to drive recklessly to avoid potholes to get my kids to and from school



3. Why are you running for office and why are you uniquely qualified to fulfill the office you are running for at this time?

**I am running for EBRPD to connect my environmental activism with my vision of a just and equitable future for all of our communities in the East Bay. I'm running for EBRPD because I believe our parks are the treasures of the East Bay and they deserve a strong advocate who will work hard to keep them thriving, resilient, accessible to all. The Board sets a budget, reviews policy, advocates for more resources (at the local, state, and federal level), and addresses internal and external issues. In running for this board, I bring professional skills of policy analysis, advocacy, communications, and community engagement to ensure the best service to the public and to champion our incredible park district. I'm a thoughtful leader and collaborative teammate with a solutions-oriented spirit. I ask tough questions and I'm not afraid to take on tough and complex issues, as I've done in critical issue areas: housing in Rockridge, lead poisoning prevention, brownfields, foster youth services, counting unhoused residents in the 2020 Census when the Census Bureau was not prepared to do so, and tackle illegal dumping.**

I'm running for my children and all children - As a mom of four year old twins, I know how vital parks are for our family's well being and how fortunate we are to have a thriving EBRPD park system and how tragically our City of Oakland parks are falling apart, full of trash, or unsafe for children. Having a parent of young children on the EBRPD Board will benefit the large constituency of families who visit our parks. (I'm also a dog mom and have worked with dog owners and those seeking stronger regulations against dogs to create dog parks when I worked for the City of Oakland)

I'm a problem solver who seeks innovative solutions. I value the skill of listening - to internal staff, community members, advocacy organizations, and outside experts. I'm a collaborator and a team player, driven to make positive change collectively.

4. Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?

**Major accomplishments:**

-Census 2020: In 2018, I was hired by the late Supervisor Wilma Chan to serve as Executive Director of Alameda County's Complete Count Committee for Census 2020, I was responsible for developing and implementing our vision, galvanizing support from County departments and external partners, presenting to the County Department Heads and the Board of Supervisors, developing a grant program to pass through State funds to nonprofits in order to reach historically undercounted populations, such as immigrants and seniors. I launched 15 subcommittees to ensure partners supported the development of messaging, served as thought partners as we analyzed potential challenges to



participation, and crafted their own ideas on how to activate their communities. I managed internal and external communications, in which I learned about the most meaningful and utilized communications channels for our various partners and stakeholders. **According to the State of California, 25% of Alameda County's population was considered "Hard to Count," or had been historically undercounted. However, due to my leadership, the hard work of my staff, the incredible nonprofit partners and grantees, as well as our collective resilience to pivot our efforts amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we were the 7th highest performing county in the state and we performed 5.5% better than the previous Census.** Here is an example of taking on issues in the weeds that no one else was championing: [counting the unhoused](#)

-Collaboratively writing Measure Z in 2014 with community and city leaders, then leaving the Council office to be able to manage that campaign, which won with 77% of the vote.

#### Volunteer Roles:

- EBPRD Park Advisory Committee Member, Appointed by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors
- Elected 3 terms to the Rockridge Community Planning Council, Chair since 2022
  - See articles about our successes [here](#) and [here](#)
- Board Member and Fundraising Co-Chair, Family Violence Law Center, May 2023-present

## East Bay Regional Parks

5. What are the top needs of East Bay Regional Parks? What is your vision for the agency in 10 years?

- Increased funding for stewardship: increasing trail maintenance, combatting sea level rise and other major impacts from climate change, and revamping our approach to wildfire prevention (by increasing hours of EBRPD Fire Department operation and building the public's investment in necessary park closures on Red Flag days)
- My vision is to see our District is continue to thrive and to grow to key areas along the bay shoreline (Golden Gate Fields and Point Molate)

6. What specific and measurable accomplishments will you deliver to address those needs? In 2 years? In 4 years?

-Ensure the Park District takes meaningful and intentional steps to ensure access to our parks through expanded public transportation and community partnerships.

7. What is your perspective of the **fiscal budget** of the East Bay Regional Parks? How will you think about budget priorities?

-\$300 million from local taxes, bonds and parcel taxes, and State and Federal grants (grants are mostly for habitat conservation, fire prevention, expansion of new parks, etc)



- I will prioritize investments that leverage additional grant funding (one example is by electrifying our fleet)
- I will advocate for stewardship efforts which evaluate the impacts of both short term user benefits (such as trail maintenance) and long term climate resilience planning (removing eucalyptus and replanting species which will exist in the climate of the future).

8. Please describe how you plan to address **service quality** if elected (or re-elected). Summarize the problem(s) East Bay Regional Parks faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable).

- o New Ideas:

- Create a mental health and wellness program specifically geared toward tweens and teens enduring a mental health crisis. Let's get them off screens and into nature so they can learn about the many ways to find self care in our parks: recreating, hiking, meditating, journaling, etc. Work with mental health agencies to sponsor middle / high school trips (ex: Wellness Wednesdays).
- Park Express bus sponsorship program: I was informed by an OUSD program that EBPRD's program needs enhanced communication so that schools receive notice of their bus sponsorships with sufficient time to change school schedules, alert students and families, and find substitutes.
- Reservation system: website overhaul to be more user friendly

9. Please describe how you plan to address **equity and expanding access** to East Bay Regional parklands, recreational and cultural resources if elected (or re-elected).

### Getting folks to our parks

-Helping more people experience the East Bay Regional Parks for the first time: Sponsor field trips with trusted community partners (such as afterschool providers, preschools, faith based organizations, and others) I met a young African American woman who grew up in Oakland and is now in college who said *"I've always wanted to go up into our hills and spend time in the beautiful trees, but I don't know how to get there and if it's a public space I can go to."* I know this one anecdote is emblematic of countless East Bay residents who don't feel our parks were designed for them. We must think outside the box and proactively address these usage gaps and do so through trusted partners in the community

-The new park at the Concord Naval Weapons Station (Thurgood Marshall Park, Home of the Port Chicago 50) will be a remarkable space honoring the legacy of heroes who resisted a court marshal in order to oppose racist policies, which led to the desegregation of the Navy. Our park will educate thousands about this historic influence in our backyard, as well as the tragic loss of life from the explosion. (I'll work to ensure we have adequate resources for tours and field trips - I attended one last year that was deeply inspiring)



-I'll enhance partnerships with public health agencies such as "Park Prescriptions" to help more residents benefit from wellness within nature

- I'll ensure our parks are more accessible to youth, many of whom are struggling with mental health (Let's get them off screens and into our open spaces!).

-I'll work to expand the great educational programming our EBPRD Naturalists provide for more students from low-income communities. Currently we cannot meet the demand for field trips to our Ohlone exhibit at Coyote Hills in Fremont. We need to track data and metrics on how many Alameda County and Contra Costa County youth attend field trips in our parks or who engage in programs hosted by EBPRD Naturalists at their schools or libraries, and the income levels of the youth we serve

-As our District embarks on its "Second Century Plan," (a pivotal master plan) I'll ensure all East Bay communities are at the table - environmental groups, labor, historically underserved communities who are not using our parks or trails, & more.

-I will champion our District's DEI work (Under Director Rosario's leadership, the District hired a DEI director this year)

-I work with Tribal leaders to co-author meaningful policy around tribal relations and programming (which could include land back efforts)

10. Please describe how you plan to address **climate change and the threat of wildfires** in your East Bay Regional Park district if elected (or re-elected).

**Wildfire Prevention and Protection:**

EBPRD must continue to pioneer efforts to reduce wildfire risk, through continued vegetation management and fuels reduction, as well as innovations like the Carbonizer (which is a machine that converts fuels into nutrient-rich biochar which can be used to enhance the soil throughout our parks). We must work in partnership with local agencies and our neighboring jurisdictions on fire safety planning. We must continue to close parks during "Red Flag" days and build the public's awareness of how these closures prevent harm to our residents, emergency responders, wildlife, and "natural infrastructure" within our great parks. Our fire prevention must evolve as our risk factors and climate are changing.

**Climate Resilience:**

I will champion more innovative and resilient policies to expand EBPRD's stewardship, restoration, and growth. My framing questions are: How can our parks be better protected from climate change? How are we planning for the climate of the future? How can we enhance carbon sequestration and reduction of greenhouse gasses in our parks, through stewardship of our natural infrastructure like redwoods and marshlands?