

Candidate Questionnaire

Name and email address

Syrak Micael - syrakforsouthside@gmail.com

What Berkeley City Council District do you live in?

District 7

Do you have any background in Berkeley politics or community organizing? Please describe.

At UC Berkeley, I was a member of YDSA, where I picketed alongside union workers, and helped lead the creation of a Divestment advisory referendum, which just passed a student body vote. I was also the elected Transfer Student Representative, where I was involved in the "Black Triad", a collective of Black organizations on campus, leading recruitment and retention efforts for groups like Underground Scholars (previously incarcerated students) and Student Parents.

As the Vice Chair of the Berkeley Housing Advisory Commission, I've fought to hold landlords accountable, fund improved housing infrastructure, and support affordable housing development and the renovation of existing affordable housing.

Additionally, in my role in Berkeley CopWatch, I have worked to bridge the gap between student activists and the broader Berkeley activist community, particularly in the Stop Flock Campaign. I've led and supported letter writing campaigns, social media series, and have talked to dozens of businesses and community organizations to show alternatives and highlight the dangers of police militarization.

With my work with East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, I partnered with Teamsters members to outreach to Amazon workers, letting them know about their rights, identifying issues in the workplace, and training them to be able to organize their workspaces. I also volunteer with their Black worker organizing outreach program, empowering Black workers in the East Bay with information and resources to mobilize their community members and lobbied for consistent funding for the California Worker Outreach Project. In Fall 2025, I was a Campus Organizer with UAW 4811 and the Alameda Labor Council to pass Proposition 50 and hold Trump accountable. I was part of a team that got over 3000 students to commit to vote yes; I personally helped bring in over 400 of those commits.

What local issues are most important to you?

My three priorities are 1) Affordable Housing and Tenant Protections, 2) Building Public Safety through Community Trust, and 3) Meeting Basic Needs by Supporting Organized Labor.

Addressing Berkeley's affordable housing crisis requires both strong tenant protections and real investments in housing that keeps students and long-term residents in the city. Throughout my work in the Associated Students of the University of California, I have consistently challenged the University when students' needs are at stake, in particular advocating for the quality of life of transfer and non-traditional students. As a Councilmember, I will use those relationships and that experience to work with partners inside and outside the UC system to advance meaningful solutions for affordable student housing in Berkeley and across the state. That includes investing in seismic safety renovations for the Berkeley Student Cooperative, instituting a commercial vacancy tax and directing the revenue to affordable housing.

Additionally, I believe that public safety in Berkeley should be grounded in community trust, transparency, and solutions that address the root causes of harm rather than in punitive approaches with limited long-term success. The Police cannot solve all our problems. A safe District 7 and City of Berkeley is one where our residents, students, and local businesses feel supported through public health responses, accountable policing, and public spaces designed for community well-being. Public safety is incomplete without safeguards for civil liberties, true Sanctuary City protections, and an effective social safety net rooted in community organizations. Among other policies, I advocate for a car-free Telegraph to improve pedestrian safety, boost local businesses, and create a safe community third space. I also oppose mass surveillance.

Finally, as someone who has grown up in Berkeley my whole life, I understand that a thriving District 7 is built on the dignity of its workers and the strength of its unions and small businesses as pillars of the community. When wages are fair, workers have the power to organize, and local businesses can grow; the entire community benefits from this investment. Ensuring that residents can meet their basic needs – from food to healthcare to stable housing – requires policies that strengthen worker protections and expand access to essential resources. I will treat economic stability for working people and students as a foundation for a healthy and resilient Berkeley community. I will require large employers and developers receiving city incentives to meet living-wage standards and demonstrate meaningful local hiring commitments, ensuring jobs for D7 and Berkeley residents, and supporting the One Fair Wage campaign in Alameda County (\$30/hour by 2030). I will work to empower small businesses by introducing legacy business grants and lease protections to reduce barriers and costs for locally owned businesses in high-rent corridors like Telegraph, stabilizing storefronts and sustaining the neighborhood institutions that generations have relied on and are fundamental to Berkeley history.

Will you opt into public financing of your campaign?

☒ Yes

☐ No

What policies would you put forth/endorse regarding housing and rent control?

In order to facilitate a truly liveable Berkeley, I strongly support expanding rent control. In accordance with Measure BB passed by Berkeley voters in 2024, I support tenants' right to organize and I would advocate for educating tenants on their rights and stronger measures to enforce those rights. I will also strongly advocate for unionizing UC Berkeley's Resident Assistants (RAs) to demand equitable payment for their labor and better housing conditions. I support the current effort to create a public bank, which could provide low-cost, flexible financing to public development.

I believe in the three Ps: preservation of existing housing, protections for tenants, and production of new affordable housing. I support Community Land Trusts that allow for resale restrictions of existing properties and will keep homes affordable for low-income residents and allow them to build equity in perpetuity. I am also a proponent of the robust co-op infrastructure in Berkeley, which collectively lower costs for current and future residents. I would strengthen CLTs and co-ops in District 7 to preserve existing affordable housing and expand opportunities for these forms of affordability.

I strongly support the City of Berkeley's Demolition Ordinance, which requires one-to-one replacement of rent-controlled units or units occupied by low-income residents as allowed under SB 330, and substantial relocation assistance for displaced tenants. I support repealing Costa-Hawkings, and in the meanwhile expanding rent control to all units allowable under Costa-Hawkins.

I support the production of affordable housing by creating new revenue streams for the Housing Trust Fund, such as a commercial vacancy tax. I will allocate dedicated Berkeley Housing Trust Fund predevelopment loans for D7 non-profit projects and establish an Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) Task Force to strategically pair the D7 housing proposals with transit investments so that affordability also includes common-sense mobility measures for residents. Building affordable housing is incomplete without transit-oriented development, and I will actively work towards measures that simultaneously drive both policies.

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What are your views on upzoning and support of local businesses?

Local businesses are a core pillar of our community and I am excited to stand with them. I believe in improving and maintaining the quality of life in my district and across our city, and that is only possible when we have local businesses to patronize. Proposals to upzone commercial corridors must come alongside real and effective measures to preserve local small businesses.

Changes to state law mean that Berkeley must increase its density. It is my view that upzoning must be done in a way that increases affordability and protects longtime residents and local businesses. The Demolition Ordinance was an important step in that process. A commercial vacancy tax can also help with reducing small business displacement by penalizing developers for leaving storefronts vacant for long periods in anticipation of future development. I also support zoning that explicitly prioritizes 100% affordable development in order to make those projects more competitive.

How do you plan to make yourself available to and interact with constituents, particularly those that disagree with you?

Interacting with people of all views, including those I disagree with, is a core part of a healthy democracy. I plan to hold regular office hours and be out in the community at street fairs, parades, and other events.

I am committed to a transparent government. One way I wish to pursue that goal is through a housing dashboard, allowing residents to clearly see where housing is being built and what type of housing it is.

What are your views on police accountability? Please discuss both surveillance and crowd control measures (Flock cameras, tear gas) as well as fiscal accountability.

I am firmly opposed to any efforts to roll back the current ban on the use of tear gas. I oppose all three proposals from Councilmember Kesarwani to weaken police oversight and regulations on the use of militarized tactics and equipment, and the effort by BPD to undermine the Use of Force policy. I also oppose Flock Surveillance specifically and mass surveillance overall. I have stood against this unjust surveillance time and time again and am excited to continue to do so, both as a member of Berkeley CopWatch and a leader in my community. I am proud of Berkeley's sanctuary city status; we should not be contracting with companies that share data with ICE and make it easier to surveil citizens. I support increased efforts to keep BPD fiscally accountable, enforcing greater overtime oversight and better recognition of long term costs of officers; and support the independence and oversight of the Police Accountability Board, including through independent legal counsel.

How do you view the role of the City Council in Berkeley's long history of standing up for international human rights? How will you deal with outside foreign lobby groups, such as the JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Council), when evaluating such concerns?

I am proud to continue our city's tradition of standing up for International Human Rights and am firmly committed to upholding everyone's right to free speech, regardless of if that speech is politically convenient or not. We were the first city to call for an end to South Africa's apartheid government and support current efforts to call for an end to genocide in Gaza. I have never taken money or accepted gifts from foreign lobby groups and I have no plans to do so in the future. I oppose JCRC and AIPAC aligned efforts to influence our local government.

How do you plan to campaign? What are your strengths as a campaigner?

I love having conversations with voters and being out in the community! In my district, many of them will be students whom I still consider my peers. In campaigning to pass Proposition 50 in Fall 2025, I personally gathered over 400 vote commits from other students to vote yes. This coming election cycle, I plan to recruit and train a robust canvassing team and plan to personally talk to over 200 voters in my district.

Do you have any community, labor, etc. groups that you anticipate will endorse your candidacy?

Yes! I have been endorsed by the following community groups:

ASUC Executives
Cal Berkeley Democrats
Telegraph for People
Berkeley Tenants Union
Future Urbanist Club

I am also endorsed by incumbent D7 Councilmember Cecilia Lunaparra

I anticipate an endorsement in the coming weeks from United Auto Workers Region 6, which includes the union of academic workers and career staff at the University of California. Additionally, I have worked closely with the Alameda Labor Council in the past, including Black Worker Organizing and in the fight to pass Proposition 50 last fall. I will also be seeking endorsements from the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, East Bay DSA, and SEIU 1021.

How can we help you with your campaign?

You can donate up to \$60 to my campaign! I am relying solely on small donors and public financing to power my campaign. You can do so here: <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/syrak-micael-1>

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