

## Green Party LAC Candidate Questionnaire

### Elections and Fair Representation

**• How will you engage residents and ensure their voices are heard in the city's policy making process?**

More than any other single principle, my campaign is built on advocacy and bringing Angelenos into our political process, educating and empowering them. We've put out explainer videos and threads on social media. We throw large events where we educate Angelenos on the power of their city government. We're teaching voters at every single door -- and we've knocked on more than 30,000 doors so far. We've even made our office an open and inviting space for people to engage with the city. I'm confident that we're engaging residents like no campaign in our city's history.

I'll bring those same values to City Hall. In crafting all of my policies to date, I've brought members of impacted communities to the table and implemented their suggestions -- I'll make that a central tenet of my legislative process as a Councilmember. I've also put forward a number of policies aimed at increasing transparency in my [Make City Hall Work for Us platform](#), which you can find on my website, NithyaForTheCity.com. Among them are moving one council meeting a week to the evening, so that working Angelenos are able to attend, and hosting biweekly town halls at rotating locations around the district.

For too long, regular people have been walled off from the decision making process at City Hall. This is easiest to see in our council's 99.37% unanimous voting rate. Every decision is made in back rooms, out of the public eye. I will end this culture and help usher in a new era of local, radical transparency.

**• What is your position on the size of the Los Angeles City Council and the use of ranked-choice voting for Los Angeles City Council elections? Please include a response to the Green Party's positions on these issues:**

<https://losangeles.cagreens.org/issues/los-angeles-city-council-size> and <https://losangeles.cagreens.org/issues/los-angeles-elections-ranked-choice-voting>

I wholeheartedly endorse your position on the size of our City Council. It reflects my own -- I advocate for increasing the number of council seats in my [Make City Hall Work for Us platform](#). 15 city councilmembers is far too small a number for 4 million residents. New York has 51 councilmembers. Chicago, a city with a million fewer people, has 50 aldermen. Any increase would be a benefit, but I'm not against LA having 50 councilmembers itself.

I also support ranked-choice voting. The outcomes of this system far better reflect the will of voters.

**• How well are Neighborhood Councils working? How might their role be improved? Do you see a role for Neighborhood Councils in conducting City Council candidate forums, as has been advocated by Common Cause**

<https://www.commoncause.org/california/democracy-wire/how-to-ensure-la-matching-funds-candidates-appear-in-town-halls-and-debates?>

I absolutely support Neighborhood Councils taking the lead in hosting candidate forums -- and was disappointed that my opponent, David Ryu, chose not to appear at an NC-hosted forum because he felt the council didn't support him.

I co-founded SELAH, a homeless services nonprofit in my area, through merging the homelessness committees of our local Neighborhood Councils -- I was a member of the committee for Silver Lake. The initial funds we needed to open an Access Center, after our efforts were ignored by the city, came from Neighborhood Council Purpose Grants -- that gave us the ability to start offering showers, hot meals, case management, clothes, and entertainment to our homeless neighbors, and the organization now operates the Access Centers four days a week.

This is all to say that Neighborhood Councils are close to my heart, and I believe there's power in their ability to organize locally. Councilmembers can use them as a sounding board for their ideas, and should go to them frequently to build up support for progressive initiatives. But too often I feel that Councilmembers allow Neighborhood Councils to become a reactionary force -- without needed outreach from elected officials and participation from a socio-economically diverse group of residents, NCs can push back on needed resources like supportive housing, and slow progress rather than enable it. But Neighborhood Council collaboration has been a hallmark of my organizing in Los Angeles, and I'd bring that same approach to City Council. As a member of my own NC's Homelessness Committee, I have pushed for the Council to speak out loudly in favor of resources for neighbors experiencing homelessness, and created pathways for Council members to volunteer regularly.

**• What is your stance on city councilmembers accepting money from developers and companies who frequently have business before the council? Did the ordinance the City Council approved in 2019 go far enough? How do you stand on the issue of behested payments? Is the Los Angeles system of public financing of elections sufficient or could it be improved - and if so, how?**

The campaign finance reform ordinance approved by City Council in 2019 was, to be kind, a joke. It bars only developers with projects in front of the city from making individual donations, but does nothing to prevent a flood of money from their family members and associates, which continue to fill the coffers of my opponent, David Ryu -- conveniently, the councilmember who put forward this toothless reform.

I'd go much farther. As part of my previously-mentioned Make City Hall Work For Us platform, I've called for [fully publicly funded elections](#), with requirements of small-dollar donations within the City and signatures from district residents to earn larger matching funds. This will continue to ensure a degree of candidate viability and keep ballots from getting overly long.

I believe that behested payments are an inappropriate conflict of interest, and should be done away with entirely. Councilmembers should focus on governing, not seeking handouts from the same corporations who seek to benefit from access to their office.

## **Public Bank**

**• How do you envision the public process to occur in determining how the Los Angeles Public Bank will be established? What values do you believe should be embedded in the bank once established?**

The research shows that a public bank is only as good as its charter. The Public Bank of Los Angeles must ban all investments in fossil fuels, predatory financial practices, and luxury development. Instead it should prioritize funding much needed infrastructure, public housing, and the urgently important work we must do to get carbon neutral by 2030.

The public bank's establishment must be done democratically and be representative of every part of Los Angeles, especially historically marginalized communities. It's also not wise to put elected representatives in charge of the process -- a commission of experts, not cronies, should be formed to manage the build-out of the bank and appoint its leadership.

## **Housing, Transit, Planning and Development**

**• What are the causes of LA's homeless crisis? How will you ensure that Los Angeles provides adequate housing options for residents and families of all income levels? What are the causes of gentrification and how can future growth be achieved without undermining existing residents and communities?**

I've made the fight against homelessness my life's work in Los Angeles. There are so many causes behind this humanitarian tragedy, but there are three core problems at the center of this crisis, all of which fall under the City Council's control:

- We don't have enough housing that the working people of Los Angeles can afford. And new building, which has been increasing in recent years, has not met that need either. In my opponent's term in our district, 93% of new housing was luxury or market-rate, while only 7% was affordable. We also haven't built a single unit of public housing since 1955. Southern California now has a deficit of approximately 500,000 affordable units.
- Rents and evictions are rising at a breakneck pace. Even rents on rent-controlled units have been allowed to rise far faster than inflation for the last decade -- and can now rise 4% in one year, even though studies have shown that every 5% rent increase in LA leads to 2,000 more people becoming homeless. Accordingly, Angelenos have suffered

half a million evictions in the last eight years, and we've seen a mass displacement of low-income people and people of color.

- People who are homeless simply do not have access to needed services. I wrote a report while I was working for the City Administrative Office in 2014 that showed that 87% of the money that LA was spending to manage homelessness was going to the cost of arresting, and jailing people who were experiencing homelessness - while a far smaller amount was going towards the services and housing needed to get people out of homelessness. There were also only 19 outreach workers for the entire county at the time. That's why I started SELAH in my neighborhood -- there was minimal outreach to encampments, and no walk-in resources within three miles for the 1,000+ people who are homeless in our area. People who were seeking help getting off the streets had virtually nowhere to turn.

But just as there are many problems, there are also many solutions to this crisis, and I've laid them out in great detail [in my Housing and Homelessness platform](#). It's not easy to summarize briefly, but some of the main policy proposals are:

- a) A network of Community Access Centers providing walk-in homeless services, which I elaborate on in Question 4 of this section.
- b) Removing the three-percent minimum cap on rent increases for rent-controlled apartments
- c) A temporary zero-percent rent freeze, as was implemented in New York in 2014 and 2015
- d) Right to eviction counsel for all Los Angeles residents who seek it
- e) Expanding temporary rental assistance to a wider range of income groups
- f) Increasing tenant protections, including the right to organize and the right to make complaints about conditions
- g) Making 100% affordable construction by-right
- h) New zoning codes along transit corridors allowing for what I'm calling "First Step Housing": designated affordable housing with shared spaces, smaller units, and other features that allow for cheaper per-unit construction. This type of housing is currently illegal to build in almost all of LA.
- i) Removing density limits (without necessarily increasing height limits)
- j) Eliminating parking minimums and minimum sizes that make housing more expensive
- k) a new city fund for acquiring, refurbishing, and managing affordable properties: a Public Option for Housing. LA hasn't built any new public housing since 1955: an expansion of our decommodified housing stock is long overdue.

• **What was your position, if any, on state bills [SB 50](#) in 2019 and [SB 827](#) in 2018? Do you believe state legislation is necessary to help California cities address the state housing crisis. If so, what kind?**

I believe SB 50 is a significant improvement on SB 827, and I do believe that state legislation is useful to pressure smaller, wealthier municipalities that simply have not done their part to increase housing stock.

But I'm running to represent LA, and our problems here go far beyond a simple supply shortage. We desperately need to target deep affordability in our new construction, and SB 50 simply doesn't address the root causes of homelessness. Whether or not SB 50 passes, we're going to need our own set of policies in Los Angeles to make sure we're putting up as many affordable units as possible and keeping current residents in their homes. I lay out a number of those policies in my housing platform.

Here's the truth: Los Angeles doesn't have to and cannot afford to wait on the state to start moving aggressively on housing affordability. Our city government has the power to make these changes ourselves. I choose to spend my political energy on emphasizing the power we hold locally and the policies we need to implement at the city level rather than on a state bill over which I have no influence.

**• What was your position, if any, on Measure S in Los Angeles in 2017? The Green Party position was to oppose**

**([http://losangeles.cagreens.org/ballot-measures/2017-03-07/no\\_on\\_s\\_los\\_angeles](http://losangeles.cagreens.org/ballot-measures/2017-03-07/no_on_s_los_angeles))**

I opposed Measure S as well. While Measure S identified many of the problems plaguing our city, it went about addressing them with an ill-conceived, overly broad approach that would have severely limited the city's ability to construct new affordable units. We can't meet our housing or climate goals without adding deeply affordable density -- but Measure S's proposal was to freeze the city in amber, which would have caused widespread harm. I'm glad it failed so dramatically.

**• Regional land use and transportation planning is critical to liveability in Southern California. Yet the City of Los Angeles has not always vigorously participated in the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). How do you see the role of the City of Los Angeles in SCAG?**

Los Angeles is by far the biggest single entity represented by SCAG, and we should participate in its activities accordingly. Shirking that responsibility and letting smaller municipalities have disproportionate influence over the planning process has been a factor in the many housing and transportation crises we face today.

But SCAG participation was one of the few areas of improvement in our city government in the last year -- our representatives actually attended meetings and fought for higher RHNA requirements in Southern California coastal cities, rather than more sprawl. Our participation led to a positive outcome. Now it's incumbent on us to make sure those new units are the deeply affordable housing we need.

**• As Los Angeles densifies by building more housing, the need for more open and green spaces increases. The Green Party views the sale of the South Central Farm land back to the prior landowner - and the subsequent approval by the City Council of a warehouse on its site -- as [a loss of historic proportion](#) to the community and to the nation as an example of community-based urban agriculture. How would you ensure that new community-based urban agriculture sites can be established and maintained?**

Too often the leaders of our city choose quick money at the expense of our future. The story of the South Central Farmland is one of far too many. Every neighborhood council in the district wanted this farm restored, but the city wouldn't listen. If neighbors want to come together to engage in something as joyous as community farming, I would do everything in my power to support their efforts, and as city council is in charge of all land use, that power would be considerable.

**• What do you see the role of the City of Los Angeles in the long term re-purposing of the Los Angeles River; how can this occur without gentrifying away existing residents and communities?**

The City of Los Angeles plays an important role in the LA River, particularly around issues of gentrification. This is especially important to consider in the context of the river because there are likely to be many more projects like the Casitas Lofts project that will want to take advantage of greater investments in improving the river and in the availability of formerly industrial land that can be used for large developments.

Unfortunately, the City has historically allowed development to occur without thinking about how that development will impact local communities. In recent months, given how extreme our housing and homelessness crisis has gotten, there have been steps towards curtailing some of the excesses of gentrification. Recent Council President Herb Wesson introduced a motion to [create anti-displacement zones](#) around new large developments, and to limit rental increases in all units within a 1 mile radius of new developments. However, it is not clear whether such rules are legal. In response to reports of evictions and rent increases in advance of new state legislation banning rent gouging, the City Council also established a temporary rental assistance program that would enable people to stay in their homes. It's not clear to me how effective such measures were.

I think that far stronger steps should be considered to protect communities in places where river investment is taking place from gentrification. Limiting evictions, providing legal counsel to those facing housing issues, supporting tenant organizing, and providing rental assistance to those struggling to stay in their homes are good first steps. Real estate speculation, such as flipping homes, is an important piece of why home prices have risen so much in LA. Stronger rules against all kinds of real estate speculation in the neighborhoods around large scale investments in improving river access may support existing residents to stay in their homes, and enable local residents to benefit from increases in property values rather than outside investors.

**• How can planning for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles lead to increasing the long-term quality of life for residents and [not lead to disruption and displacement](#) of the most vulnerable?**

The 2028 Olympics were foisted on Los Angeles residents with the bare minimum of thought and transparency -- I absolutely would not have voted for them with the rest of the Council after such a rushed process.

But if my one vote on the Council isn't enough to prevent the Games from happening, I'm certainly going to fight to make sure the damage is minimized and all benefits are allocated to the city's neediest. Mayor Garcetti says he believes the Olympics will earn Los Angeles a billion dollars -- if that's true, we should start spending on that expected income now to build out housing and services to get every single person in Los Angeles off the streets -- rather than criminalizing and warehousing them as we have in past Olympics.

**• Progress on Vision Zero and cycling safety [appears to have stalled](#). What is your plan for increasing cycling use and safety in Los Angeles?**

The reason LA's streets are so deadly is a bleak and simple one: our city's leaders have chosen the preferences of car drivers over the safety of everyone else. Just recently, a councilmember said outright that if they slowed down car traffic to make the streets safer for other modes, voters would "[have our heads on a rail](#)." As a result, we are facing a reality where Angelenos, [primarily residents of color](#), put their bodies at serious risk every day just trying to cross the street. And instead of working to slow down traffic, the city has [increased speed limits all over the city](#).

However, we do know how to solve these problems. We know [where the dangerous streets are](#). And we know how to design roads to discourage speeding and other forms of unsafe driving. There are a number of evidence-backed methods at our disposal, including protected bike lanes, raised medians, bulb-outs, and daylighting intersections, just to name a few.

As councilmember, I'd move to get safety improvements on every High Injury Network street in my district, and fight to get similar infrastructure in place across the city. I also would not support changes in other parts of the city that will decrease the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

The Mobility Plan 2035's network of biking infrastructure is an incredibly powerful weapon we have as a city to improve our air quality and combat climate change. If the City made all of the plan's recommendations, we would easily meet the goals set by Mayor Garcetti in his Green New Deal to reduce vehicle miles traveled by 2035.

The biggest impediment to building out the network, in my view, is our city's reluctance to part with on-street parking on major boulevards. There are simply better uses for the space, and no excuses not to have bike lanes on Hollywood and Wilshire Boulevard. There isn't a recommendation in the Plan that I wouldn't fight for, though.

## Climate Change

### • What does a 'Green New Deal' mean to you on the City of Los Angeles level - and how would you realize it?

A Green New Deal means we must get our city fully carbon neutral (without tricks like carbon swaps) by the IPCC report deadline of 2030 -- much faster than the city's current goal of 2045. We must make sure the people who do the work of this transition have good union jobs. Our [platform](#) details our vision for a Green New Deal more fully, but here a few of our proposals:

- A mixture of large-scale renewable energy projects like the recently-approved Eland solar project and local solar grids.
- A bold stormwater capture system to finally make Los Angeles water-independent, finally funding the "Aggressive" path of the city's Stormwater Capture Master Plan.
- A significant increase in the scale and usefulness of public transit to get cars (which cause 90% of our smog!) off the road -- including protected bus lanes, increased pedestrian protections and sidewalk improvements (including plenty of new trees, which also help capture stormwater and clean our air), and protected bike and scooter lanes.
- A massive overhaul of our city's energy efficiency to reduce energy demand. Not only will these programs save ratepayers money (on average \$280 dollars a year), and save the city energy, but they also can create thousands of high paying [manufacturing and construction jobs](#).

### • What will you do to preserve, protect and grow LA's tree canopy?

We go into great detail in our environmental [platform](#) about this, but I will summarize the key points here. Trees are incredibly important for our environment. They purify the air, cool our streets, capture water, and reduce energy use for nearby homes. But we are not taking care of our tree canopy here in LA. Our mature [tree canopy is shrinking](#), and climate change is [impacting many of](#) our remaining trees.

I would remove legal loopholes that have allowed for construction to reduce our tree cover. Developers had to plant two trees to replace any they removed. Now, they can simply opt to pay a fee. We should remove that loophole immediately, and ensure that new construction is not adding to our loss of trees.

Mayor Garcetti has appointed an Urban Forestry Officer and has committed to planting 90,000 more trees by 2021. While this is good news, I think we could be far more ambitious - committing to double or even triple that number. Los Angeles has a generous tree giveaway program. I would raise awareness of that program and look for ways to ensure that such planting is not limited to those who own their own homes.

I would also be aggressive about planting and tending to trees in neighborhoods that currently have far less tree cover. Our neighborhoods in Los Angeles have significant disparities in



access to public amenities like trees, and it is important to ensure that our future investment rights those wrongs.