

A Report on the Talking Transition Survey

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Introduction

In Summer 2023, nearly 10,000 Oakland residents participated in the *Talking Transition* survey to share their perspectives on critical issues such as housing, public safety, and economic opportunity. This brief presents key findings, challenges, and community-driven policy recommendations to address the city's needs.

Methodology

The Talking Transition survey was conducted as a collaborative effort to engage Oakland residents across neighborhoods. Data collection focused on ensuring diverse representation, with outreach targeting marginalized communities often excluded from decision-making processes. Surveys were distributed both online and in person, gathering qualitative and quantitative responses on pressing issues.

Key Findings

Housing and Homelessness

- Over 75% of respondents identified affordable housing and tenant protections as top priorities.
- 50% supported converting existing buildings into affordable housing units to increase supply.
- 43% called for reducing permitting fees and easing restrictions for developers to build affordable housing.
- 58% of Oakland's homeless population is unsheltered, with 70% of those experiencing homelessness identifying as Black, despite making up only 24% of Oakland's population.
- Oakland spends \$120 million annually on homelessness efforts.

Community Safety

- 52% supported reallocating resources from traditional policing to community-based safety programs.
- 36% prioritized programs to reduce gang-related shootings, and 39% emphasized reducing gun violence.
- 50% advocated for improving 911 dispatch systems to ensure faster and more reliable response times.

Economic Opportunity

- 56% of respondents highlighted paid job training for youth as essential to economic mobility.
- 42% emphasized increasing police foot patrols in commercial corridors to support small businesses.
- 45% prioritized increasing access to affordable child- and senior-care services for working families.

Policy Recommendations

Housing and Homelessness

1. Increase the stock of affordable housing:

Convert existing buildings into affordable housing units, a policy supported by 50% of survey respondents, particularly in neighborhoods with high vacancy rates.

Streamline permitting processes and reduce development fees, a priority for 43% of respondents, especially in higher-income zip codes.

Leverage underutilized religious and institutional land for affordable housing construction as outlined in state legislation like Senate Bill 4 ([passed in 2023](#)).

2. Strengthen tenant protections:

Expand rent control measures and eviction defense programs to prevent displacement, which 35% of respondents identified as critical.

Enhance enforcement against discriminatory practices, including those targeting race, eviction history, or incarceration status.

3. Address homelessness:

Build temporary shelters such as tiny homes and safe RV parking, a priority for 35% of respondents.

Increase funding for wraparound mental health and substance abuse support services for unhoused residents.

Advocate for housing programs that integrate holistic services and ensure dignity and long-term stability for unhoused individuals.

Community Safety

1. Reallocate resources to community-based safety programs:

Expand mental health crisis intervention programs, such as the MACRO initiative, which effectively reduced police interactions in non-violent cases and garnered 38% citywide support.

Enhance restorative justice initiatives in schools and communities to address root causes of conflict and reduce incarceration rates.

2. Reduce violence and improve neighborhood conditions:

Implement gun violence reduction programs and gang intervention strategies, which 39% and 36% of respondents supported, respectively.

Activate public spaces with better lighting and maintenance, supported by 28% of respondents, to promote safer and more welcoming neighborhoods.

3. Improve emergency response systems:

Invest in upgrading 911 dispatch systems to handle calls within 15 seconds, a statewide mandate supported by residents.

Train dispatchers to connect individuals with appropriate community-based services that reduce reliance on traditional law enforcement.

Economic Opportunity

1. Expand workforce development programs:

Connect high school students to paid job training programs, a key priority for 45% of respondents.

Develop trade and technical skill programs tailored to Oakland's growing industries, such as green energy, technology, and healthcare.

Establish pipelines for employment at the City of Oakland with living wages and benefits.

2. Support small businesses:

Provide grants and loans to entrepreneurs in underserved neighborhoods, especially for BIPOC-owned enterprises.

Streamline permitting processes and reduce procedural costs, policies supported by 35% of respondents.

Activate commercial districts through events like the Prescott Night Market that foster local economic growth.

3. Increase economic mobility:

Create affordable child and senior care options, identified as a top priority by 45% of respondents.

Incentivize corporations to develop local job training programs with requirements for community engagement.

Advocate for living wages in job sectors frequently employing underrepresented workers, addressing systemic pay inequities.

Implementation Strategies



Corpsmembers in Civicorps Paid Jobs Training Program, Oakland, Ca

Housing and Homelessness

1. Funding and Financing Mechanisms

Establish an Oakland Affordable Housing Investment Fund using a mix of state and federal grants, philanthropy, and municipal bonds to finance new developments. Expand the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts to subsidize infrastructure costs in affordable housing projects.

2. Regulatory and Legislative Action

Work with state legislators to refine Senate Bill 4 implementation that ensure faith-based organizations receive technical assistance when developing housing on their properties. Establish a fast-track permitting office for affordable housing to cut approval timelines by 30-50%.

3. Public-Private Partnerships

Formalize a developer-community coalition where affordable housing developers work directly with tenant organizations to ensure projects align with community needs. Incentivize adaptive reuse of commercial buildings through direct subsidies and reduced impact fees.

Community Safety

1. Infrastructure and Resource Allocation

Equip community safety ambassadors with training in conflict resolution, first aid, and de-escalation techniques.

Deploy AI-powered analytics in 911 call centers to better triage calls and ensure appropriate non-police responses.

2. Program Design and Scaling

Scale up the MACRO crisis response program by securing long-term state funding instead of relying on short-term city budgets.

Provide micro-grants for grassroots violence prevention groups, allowing them to test innovative, hyper-local solutions before citywide adoption.

3. Data-Driven Accountability

Require an annual Community Safety Impact Report tracking success metrics (e.g., reductions in police-involved incidents, improved response times).

Establish a civilian oversight body for non-police crisis response teams to ensure transparency and public trust.

Economic Opportunity

1. Workforce and Business Incentives

Establish a Community Hiring Pipeline where Oakland businesses receive tax incentives for hiring residents from workforce development programs.

Implement a Living Wage Certification that provides branding and marketing benefits to businesses that meet wage standards.

2. Financial and Institutional Support

Launch a municipal-backed loan fund for small businesses modeled after successful programs in Seattle and Chicago.

Create a Business Resource Navigation Center that offers one-stop guidance for licensing, financing, and technical assistance.

3. Equitable Economic Development

Expand cooperative business ownership models by providing startup grants to worker-owned businesses.

Develop a Land Trust for Commercial Spaces to prevent displacement of locally owned businesses.



“Want to Reduce Gun Violence in Oakland? Invest in Culture, Experts Say” (Nastia Vojnovskaya, Sep 12, 2022) Los Rakas perform at Town Nights in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood on July 15, 2022. The free event was hosted by Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ). (Beth LaBerge/KQED)

Conclusions

The Talking Transition survey underscores the need for decisive action to address housing, public safety, and economic inequality in Oakland. By prioritizing affordable housing, community-based safety initiatives, and equitable economic development, city leaders can create meaningful change that aligns with residents' priorities. Regular engagement with the community and transparent progress tracking will be essential to making sure these efforts succeed.

↔ **Community to Community (C2C)** is an impact accelerator at Northeastern University designed to deepen the university's commitment to community engaged research at each of its global campus locations. We strive to move the needle on societal problems at the local level, benefitting the areas our university calls home, while also promoting knowledge transfer across communities that are grounded in the local context.

