

WEBVTT

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): Okay, now is a good time as any. Hello, everyone. My name is Jackson of Bears, and I am a senior associate of public engagement as far. Thank you so much for joining us for this digital discourse today. Many of you here today are spam members. So thank you so much for your support. If you're not a member, I encourage you to join the support spurs, ongoing work and using education, policy, analysis, and advocacy to make our cities and region

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): or prosperous, sustainable and equitable places to live. Your financial support enables us to continue our work, including the hosting of programs like today's. You'll find more information about membership online. As for.org slash join.

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I'd like to think the lead of women voters of Oakland and the Laurel District Association for co-presenting today's digital discourse.

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): We have 2 remaining events this week tonight we are having the spurring forward a CEO Update and happy hour taking place at the urban center. And so if you're a member and interested in joining us this evening, we have a couple of spots left before we sell out, and then tomorrow evening we'll be hosting 2 professors from Uc. Davis. We'll be hosting that virtually They're gonna be looking at how a progressive parcel tax in San Francisco can lead to a better infrastructure without having to tax new housing

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): today's visual discourse. And the reason you all are here is a conversation with District 4 Council Member Jenni Ramashan, trying

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): Jenny Ramoshandrin is the council member for Oakland's district. 4. Ramachandran has a public interest. Attorney who has dedicated her life to empowering communities and fighting for responsive government institutions. A graduate of Stanford University and Berkeley law, Ramshan Jo. Has worked at various legal nonprofits and served on the Board of Violence Prevention nonprofits across Oakland. She is a Commissioner on the California Commission for Api American Affairs, and previously served on the city of Oakland Public Ethics Commission

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): Councilmember. Ramachandrin is an East Bay native and a former professional musician. Council member. Ramishan is the youngest person elected to a Clinton City Council, and as well as the first South Asian and first Lgbtq. Woman of color, to serve on Oakland City Council, Council, Member Ramish 100, is excited to represent a support and be a strong advocate to address the district's needs around

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): public safety, wildfire prevention, infrastructure and economic development. Her office recently launched a Public Safety campaign lift up d. 4 to increase safety, walkability and local patronage of our district for business corridors.

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00:02:48.550 --> 00:03:13.220

Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): Today's conversation will be moderated by Ronak Dive of Cori Ronick is Spurs, chief of strategic initiatives and interim. Oakland Director prior to joining Spur Ronick served as Director of community community benefits at the San Francisco, Public Utilities Commission and Deputy Director of Hope, Sf. An ambitious public housing and community transformation initiative based in the San Francisco Mayor's office.

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Jackson Nutt-Beers / SPUR Public Engagement (They/Them): And lastly, we want this to be an interactive conversation and plan on spending as much time as possible engaging with you all. So I encourage you to use the chat box, share your thoughts with each other and the speakers, and they also encourage you to submit any questions that you may have by using the Q. A. Panel, it should appear as a button at the bottom of your screen or at the top of your screen. If you're using the mobile app, and within the next few days we'll be sharing a copy of the recording Transcript and chat with everybody who's registered with that, Ronick. I will turn it over to you to get us started. Thanks.

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00:03:42.880 --> 00:04:12.239

Ronak Davé Okoye: thank you, Jackson, and thank you, councilmember. And again for being here with us today. We're delighted to be in conversation with you just to get us started. I thought we could spend a little time with you, just describing what is de 4? So we might have some members with us and some audience folks that are not as familiar with the district lines in Oakland. So what is your geography? And how would you describe your constituents that you're serving in the city?

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely well? Firstly, thank you for having me really excited to get to connect with some of your members and the general public. my name is Jenni Ramichandr, and and proud to represent Oakland's district for So last year Oakland went through the redistricting process where we redefined several of all of the districts in Oakland. So right now, District 4 covers

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: the Glenview Neighborhood diamond laurel Allen dale, which is a little below 5, 80, and then more on the hillside. It includes Redwood Heights, Oak, more Crescent, Montclair, and the North Hills. All the way up to the border of Berkeley, and parts of Upper Rock Ridge.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: Great! Thank you for that overview and so we know that it is budget season. We are following it in the press and we understand that there are many kind of hearings and meetings that are taking place right now, as it relates to the budget in Oakland. so thank you again for your time. I know that it's a busy season for you all in City Hall, and in the council chambers.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: as it relates to your budget priorities. You talk in in what you've named in your your budget. Memo about a through line. being in your work about this idea to rebuild trust in City Hall. So can you talk a little bit more about where you think trust has been broken with the public, and how your proposed budget priorities would prepared to or begin to repair that dynamic

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: absolutely so. One of the key themes that emerged when I was running for this seat, Knocking on about 10,000 doors and engaging with community members, and.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: as well as you know, every day engaging with constituents, since being in this role for about nearly the last 5 months is the fact that there isn't a trust in City Hall in, particularly when it comes to management of our taxpayer dollars. And this is a historic issue of

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: the public questioning where our city funds are going. It's not something that just emerge in the last couple of months or even years. This is a history of having a lack of transparency when it comes to our dollars.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: So there are a couple of ways that I'm interested in addressing, you know, transparency as a vehicle to rebuild public trust, and very supportive of the open Gov tools that we have out there and encourage more promotion of the data and visualizations that we have, that showcases Oakland's budget, the trends, how much of our budget is consumed by the general fund, how much the General fund control

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versus how much is contributed by specific set aside

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: revenues and and funds from tax dollars or State and Federal funds? and that's one element of transparency.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: The bigger issue, when it comes to public trust in government, is making sure that the public has an understanding that if funding is allocated to a specific purpose. Whether that's things like measure Kk, and more recently measure you when it comes to infrastructure and housing, or simply dollars that go to homelessness, services, bottles and paving parks and recreation. You have it

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: wanting an assurance that these funds are actually going to the programs and services that are, they are intended to. The intended recipients of these programs are getting that fund intended. Constituent services are actually being funded. And there are a lot of ways that we can address this. But

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: in the system of governance that we have one of the key powers that I do have, and I'm sure later in this conversation I'll talk about all the powers that I don't have for one of them. That I do

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: is the power of the question. I sit on 4 different committees, rules and legislation, public safety, life enrichment and finance and management,

and these are opportunities. Every other week. every other Tuesdays are public meetings, where I get to ask department heads and senior staff members in each department questions on where the money is flowing.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: I am a lawyer by training. So I sometimes I know how to phrase the statement as a question. But there are a lot of creative advocacy tools, and you know again, less than 5 months into the job. I'm learning how to harness that tool in the power of the question, both when it comes to publicly on the dyes privately, during meetings as well as formal requests for informational reports

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: that try to follow the money as you will. Recently, last week, councilmember down Calvin I co-authored an informational request.

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from the Department of Transportation from Oak Dot on how our traffic safety dollars were being spent, and I think this is one example of how the public can get a better sense of where this money is flowing. and I hope to do that for a variety of other key issues as well.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: That's incredible. And I will say that what you describe as needs or desires from Oaklanders around transparency around accountability, understanding where dollars are going or very much echoed. And research that's for has done in Oakland. in particular, what was reflected in our good government report that was released. in November 2,021 And one of the things that we advocated for was the up

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Ronak Davé Okoye: the idea of an office of a Controller and many of our recommendations ended up being passed at the ballot box by the Council run measure X, which was you had overwhelming approval at the ballot box, which was great. so as it relates to improving the city's ability to really govern and enact policies to effectuate the change the residents seek in Oakland.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: What do you see as the primary needs of areas of improvement at this point in your term.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely so. we'll start off by saying there are elements of this for that I do agree with, and then others that I certainly disagree with when it comes to our system of governance and what we we need right now to move effective policy. Forward. my focus in

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00:10:42.810 --> 00:11:07.810

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: using the tools that I have for governance is community responsiveness, and as a representative of District 4, it is, I take it upon myself to be as present as possible in different neighborhood settings, so that I can adequately uplift the concerns of community needs. So, as in the spare report is discussed, Oakland has a hybrid model. Pseudo, strong mayor system. is more what I call

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: it and I am interested in actually doing perhaps a little bit more of the opposite and moving and introducing more elements of the council management system. for a variety of reasons. one thing that your report very clearly lays out is the fact that there is confusion of who is in charge of and that is very, very accurate

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: which constituent even in areas with high political engagement. The average person doesn't know who does what in the city, and is, calls upon the person that they have most access to, which is generally their council member to forward these concerns.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: So when I get cries from communities saying, My street is full of potholes, please fill it. Why haven't you filled it. I've asked you 3 times, or even worse. you know my street has gone and has a string of robberies. Please deploy an officer right here to this chord, or we need it. Why haven't you done it? It is difficult to explain the fact that I don't have the power

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: to direct city staff to do that kind of work.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and often that education piece is helpful. But then people want to know. Well, then, who do I tell? Who can I raise my voice to on whether it's safety, need, road, traffic, safety, all of these very key constituent issues? And that's where I believe more shifts to words are incorporating more elements of that council management system would be helpful when it comes to responsiveness.

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I don't expect a large department that has a variety of tasks, whether it be a public works or the department of transportation, to know what each communities in different parts of the district looks like. District 4, for example, is not a model. You have areas and parts of it that are very much considered East Oakland, and then you have the North Hills, which is on the border of Berkeley, a panoramic hill in this district, with a completely set of

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: different challenges, geographic, economic, other kinds of needs. And I feel that having more ability to over department activities not necessarily the power to direct, I recognize that is complicated. But more say over actionable things that happen would be a better system, and some of that could be, of course, through both the hiring and ability to fire a city administrator is one of many steps that we could take, and I know that was flowing

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and discuss last year. There's a I am. I'm very supportive of the idea of a controller. because going back to that speech at that point about transparency

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and where our money is actually going, having an independent body. That is not account of that is not directly reporting to the city administrator is something that I think could prevent independent oversight, and I will start off by saying, I'm a big fan of our revenue department and the staff and our finance team. but they alone cannot do undo years of history where we have had

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: a history of mismanagement and mis allocation of funds. So I do believe that independent voice and analysis would be helpful. in addition to what our finance staff are already doing.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: There are other aspects of this again, what I call pseudo, strong Mayor system that I believe could be shifted. And you know, going back to the 1998 shifts that happen.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: I wanted to show a little bit about my thoughts on the city attorney, and how, having an elected role as city attorney is pretty confusing to I think a lot of members of the public? Does the city attorney represent the city, the staff, our budget, our finances? Or do they represent the will of the people? How that representation change closer to election time. who is elect? Who

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the city attorney, accountable to in that role, I believe, would be best served, reporting to the city Council, where you again have that district by district focus and council members who are most in touch with community needs.

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00:15:21.340 --> 00:15:43.340

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yes, thank you so much for that thorough response and consideration of various recommendations, as it relates to governance in Oakland. your perspective is very much appreciated. and I'll just say that your what you flag around. City attorney is also something that we have noticed and flagged in some of our ratings as well about Oakland operations.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: you talk a little bit about history. and you know you're actually entering office at a rather historical moment. and a very important time, and generating and realizing opportunities for building housing in Oakland. Right? So we have just a. We have a housing element that has been approved by the State. we have measure you funds that were supported again at the ballot box by voters.

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which would provide upwards of approximately 350 million towards housing. I'm curious if you could share more about how you're looking to capitalize on this moment for housing in your district and for the city overall.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely so. w. Most of the general plan was That whole process happened before I came on board, but I do know that the multi departments. the that the multiple departments that came up with what became our general plan? Draft?

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: did. Did. They did a pretty thorough job in trying to engage with the community in many ways, and I'm grateful for that. a couple of things that I am excited about in our new general plan. includes the affordable housing overlay that includes a part of District 4. That many residents here believe. is a strong area of opportunity. A lot of times when we think.



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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: or historically, what we think about affordable housing, we think about multi family projects in deep East Oakland, in West Oakland what has not been talked about as much is affordable housing in resourced communities. I will start off by saying, District 4 in Glenview, diamond and laurel, and the stretch along the Carthor and part of Park Boulevard. There are a number of smaller

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: affordable housing units senior housing in particular that we certainly do have, and have been around, many of which has been along for quite a while. but there's opportunity for more. There is We don't have a bard station in our district, but have a pretty great A/C transit line connectivity. All all along, Macarthur we have a plethora of grocery stores. I know.

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as far as I think I'm I'm very grateful to see that spurs engage on the issue of food, access, and sustainability. And

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: you know, at a addressing the need to tackle our food desert and whatnot and that's something that is really thankfully present in our district as well. so those are some of the opportunities that I think we do have when building affordable housing. We also have vacant units, and we have. We have several vacant properties all along that Macarthur stretch, and a little bit beyond that, once again, is included

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in this affordable housing overlay. So I am excited in our office is engaged on seeing when the potential zoning changes might happen. in order to

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: refurbish some of these pure commercial zones into mixed commercial, residential, or a residential, or the variety of options that we have. And I do think that we are going to see a lot of community support. You'll always have those who are against involved in some or the other. But I do see a trend, at least among community members that we've been in conversation with, supportive of

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having more affordable housing in the sides of our district that are possible. Of course there are sides of our district that have are difficult to build on. that have high wildfire needs construction. Costs are higher. I'm not saying that

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: the hills side of our district can never have affordable housing. I absolutely believe that we can and should but as far as low hanging fruit goes, and accessibility to transit and food and other resources. I think. the areas identified in the overlay are a good start.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: The other aspects of the general plan I'm very excited about is building on publicly owned land building, affordable housing and other resources. and another thing that I appreciated as far as in the and housing and community developments. Approach is having a community conversations in each district about spending of measure.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: these are difficult questions about how we spend this very limited allocation of funds. We're seeing a lot of influx in the mayor's proposed budget right now on measure, you dollars going towards both staffing and capital And we are having discussions about what that balance of using these dollars for means, and how it could perhaps be.

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We shift it in order to serve the most need and essentially get as much housing built and the quickest amount of time possible, because we can't wait 20 plus years in the way we have been waiting 20 plus years on other parcels of publicly owned land for portable housing to be built and sitting around waiting for it to happen, while prime vacant lands

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: empty.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: And there's also a balance of needing to build a new housing as well as rehab of properties, not up to code and The costs are different and the funding opportunities are different. one thing that has become clear and some of these housing element and measure your discussions are building a new

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00:21:05.590 --> 00:21:30.139

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: properties. can invite more state money to complement that for sure. re reef rehabbing existing properties that are not to code and need the support. Maybe lower costs actually are significantly lower cost. But don't get that complement of state money in the same kind of way. So these are the issues I know that we're all grappling with when it comes to spending this money

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both in this budget cycle, but also for the years to come. As we start to collect these measure, you dollars.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: Yeah, thank you. Council member. yes, the measure. You conversations are really important. we agree in the city of Oakland. And I'll just say for audience members that are wanting to know more. we are looking forward to also having a conversation in a dialogue with Chris Norman from the our city's office of housing and community development, who's leading measure you in just a few weeks. So look for that.

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If you're wanting to understand and and learn more about measure you and what it means for for Oakland and our funding.

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Ronak Davé Okoye: So you also talked about this housing. Sorry that city department of housing and community development a little bit in your comments just now. and I noticed in your budget priorities that you call to fund that all staff in the city department of Housing and community development who work on securing grant funding be filled. and I'm curious if you can just speak more to why, that's so important in the realization of housing for your district in Oakland more broadly.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: absolutely. So we're talking about a serious budget deficit this cycle 360 plus 1 million dollars in the next 2 years, and that is continuing in the 5 year forecast as well. We know the cost of of staffing and labor, and also construction, are rising as they do in most municipalities. based on the MOS we have with these different

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: respective city departments. And what's not rising fast enough to catch up with that are our is the revenue coming in transit occupancy tax sales tax. Real estate transfer in particular are the ones that we've suffered. The biggest hit and there's also,

and of course, losing arpa funds as well as other State and Federal covid related one time grants that we got in the last

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: a couple of years. That's all kind of collectively led to the crisis that we're in But what we have not harnessed enough, I believe, are opportunities for State and Federal grant funding in all departments.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: the staff that exist in departments like Oak Dot and HD. You know, do a good job and doing their best within means to try to apply for State and Federal grants. But I can name so many situations in which grant funding exists. We know that they exist, and we just don't have the staff to to to get it in on time and to do the work needed to access that. And this applies to all departments, whether it's related to violent.

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I mentioned dollars or public safety funds. Not having that capacity to generate revenue is huge and this includes other revenue generating departments. such as parts of a code enforcement and building and planning, and those operating parking meters. we had some staff members who live in my district coming to my Budget Town Hall the other day saying, if we're talking about generating revenue.

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why is there a 30 vacancy in these roles that are intended to collect, find some fees and what not, from other city services. So.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: staffing up those revenue, generating roles across the city is very important to me. Starting with their Hr. Department, starting with making sure that for for unfrozen positions that the city proposed budget will is proposed to fund, as well as the other existing vacancies in our Hr. Department. as well as the soon to be leaving director of the Hr Department are prioritized. So we can get these revenue generating units back in place and

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00:25:12.610 --> 00:25:24.269

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: fill the roles needed to do constituent services. And and there are a lot of reasons why we need to have full staffing, of course, can for provision of basic constituent services. But

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00:25:24.270 --> 00:25:48.369

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: a lot of the issues in, for example, are a department of transportation projects when it comes to traffic. Safety, for example, is in some of these situations, and every department varies. I know. I just said we need to generate more revenue, but it and and apply for more grants. But in some cases, like our department of transportation. the issue is not a lack of money. It's issue. It's a lack of staff

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: to implement these projects. For example, in District 4, there was a road diet study in the laurel area that would that had funding allocated for the last couple of years through the previous council member now, Mayor, who helped obtain that funding. That money is

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: that has not been implemented for a long period of time because of staffing issues to do it when there are other higher marked priority projects in other parts of the city, or projects that have grant funding with a timeline that have to get done in a certain amount of time, so it's use it or lose it. and we see this for projects with the Department of transportation across the city.

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: where there are earmarks. But when I say earmarks that to me is what community members have collectively held together to prioritize. For example, there's a corner. There's a part of our district on the car. They're in cool age. That's a hotspot for side shows as well as serious pedestrian safety issues and is located right near a middle school. that's a hotspot for serious pedestrian and traffic in

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erez agmoni as well as not too far on in the laurel side, the intersection of High and Macarthur. These are 2 areas with very similar traffic safety issues and 150

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: very loud calls from the community that have had set aside. But without the staffing, those projects that have these earmarks based on community conservative calls can't be implemented. So that is really part of my interest in in in the staffing of both revenue, generating roles as well as roles where we have the money, we just gotta build it and get it done.

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00:27:31.570 --> 00:27:42.989

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you for that explanation. and as you are thinking about staffing as well. One thing I'll say is that it's my understanding that

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00:27:43.120 --> 00:28:05.670

Ronak Davé Okoye: road safety is a and traffic safety overall is a priority across the council. that there's kind of a unanimous need across the city. that's being named Do you feel like there's also parity with your council members around the need to staff up to support this work. And are you kind of unanimously advocating for that as part of this as well?

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00:28:05.830 --> 00:28:29.909

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely every council members, budget priorities talked about this and all the accounts, numbers I've spoken to, you know, recognize how violent traffic safety traffic safety issues are becoming. And this is a nationwide trend. we see traffic and pedestrian and biker fatalities increasing across the country, and I think

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Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: if we can pilot some initiatives we can be a statewide and a nationwide model to show. Yes, historically, Oakland has been for a whole variety of reasons, a yeah, a car prone city. not a city conducive to public transportation. In the same way other cities might be, but we are implementing measures to address that and to curb the violence that is happening

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00:28:54.350 --> 00:29:23.419

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: through traffic. Ds. and one of the reasons that one of the many reasons our office is promoting traffic safety. In addition to the basic fundamental health and safety needs is it's connection to economic development and public safety. The more foot traffic you have around the more comfortable people of all ages feel crossing the street in our commercial districts, the more business these stores are going to be able to get. and the more people there are walking

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00:29:23.420 --> 00:29:33.089

around, the more vibrant small businesses there are around. the less likely you are going to have higher levels of crime. I mean, there is

91

00:29:33.110 --> 00:29:57.609

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: research that shows, you know, more walkable neighborhoods are safer neighborhoods, and I want to see the laurel diamond mach clear all the areas with slow streets, pedestrians feeling comfortable, walking across streets in these areas, and these small businesses, thriving and staying put rather than feeling force to leave because of a variety of safety issues.

92

00:29:57.870 --> 00:30:24.740

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yeah, absolutely. So to our audience, I will just say, and I will. And planning to bring in your questions in just a few minutes. so if you have any questions that are burning that you'd like to bring in to be raised with the Council member. Please do feel free to put them in the Q. A. Panel at the bottom. of your zoom screen and council member, I think, for the last few questions that I will be driving with you. I'd love to turn to the, to economic development just a little bit.

93

00:30:25.080 --> 00:30:49.670

Ronak Davé Okoye: So let's start with thinking about your district and small businesses that that are existing in your district, which have endured so much in both the pandemic and post pandemic times. as businesses have consistently had to pivot to meet public health needs and change behaviors of customers. What are you hearing from the small businesses in your district about their priorities, currently. And what supports are they asking for?

94

00:30:50.450 --> 00:30:52.640

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely so?

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00:30:53.010 --> 00:31:17.890

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: In March of this year we launched our public safety initiative called hashtag. Lift up d. 4 that focuses on commercial corridors. the laurel, Diamond Glen View and Mont Claire or the 4 major ones of in our district. 2 of them are bids the Laurel and Montclair business improvement districts, and Glenville and Diamond are not yet.

96

00:31:18.180 --> 00:31:36.140

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and the number one issue is public safety. If you, as a small business owner, have to have this expectation that you might be broken into every few weeks and have to plan for that. You're going to be less motivated to continue to do business. Here you have

97

00:31:36.140 --> 00:31:54.999

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: You have businesses and owners who are via that are essential to the community fabric in these neighborhoods. primarily businesses that are minority owned, I'd say. certainly, close to a majority in many of these business corridors are bypass owned and

98

00:31:55.000 --> 00:32:17.919

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: most importantly, Oaklanders locals who own these stores, if they are fearing violence in this level, and deciding that other new neighbouring cities are better to set up shop or or suburbs, and I know we are seeing more moves to suburbs with

across the East Bay in the Bay Area. Then we lose that vibrancy. And what makes Oakland Oakland so.

99

00:32:18.160 --> 00:32:24.379

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: addressing public safety is very much to me. Part of our lift up d 4 campaign

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00:32:24.570 --> 00:32:49.570

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and the other problems with that is, you know, like I mentioned traffic safety the the walkability aspect, making sure that storefronts aren't smashed into by drunk drivers. which sadly happens often, and as another, of course, element of public safety, and and and things like that. There's also an element of a technical assistance that I think can be

101

00:32:49.570 --> 00:33:09.810

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: strength. And across our business corridors, for example, at the start of the pandemic I was volunteering with my law school's a business law center to work with o small Oakland businesses to apply for Covid related grams, cares act spa loans, etc.

102

00:33:09.810 --> 00:33:33.550

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: And we in this program, you had, recent graduates, students and corporate lawyers, all who who work in employment law for a living partnering together to support the small business community in both Oakland and Berkeley, and you saw how these pro bono partnerships really can make a difference, and how there is interest in working with the small business community.

103

00:33:33.550 --> 00:33:53.559

in a different way. You don't see a lot of non profits really cater to supporting the legal and technical assistance needs of especially minority owned businesses. you know Oakland has very vibrant chambers, but I think there's a lot more opportunity we can do to improve that technical assistance aspect of things.

104

00:33:53.560 --> 00:34:08.079

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: especially because these business corridors are Oaklanders that are owning their own businesses and bringing creativity and culture and positive news to the heart of Oakland. We have now

105

00:34:08.080 --> 00:34:09.939

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: for sorry.



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00:34:09.969 --> 00:34:33.570

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: at least, we have several restaurants on the Michelin guy. But in District 4 we have 2 new ones that have made that list. And and that's beautiful. We're getting positive attention. And people wanting to come to the Laurel and diamond. But if these restaurants are forced to shut down at 7 Pm. Every night because they're worried about crime, we're not going to be able to sustain that. So I was all over the place with that answer. But just to highlight.

107

00:34:33.570 --> 00:34:55.959

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: How serious Some of these issues facing small businesses are, and you know my personal interest in wanting to make sure that we sustain them here and keep them in Oakland. And you know, there's certainly a need for a vibrant and a more vibrant downtown. But there's also a need to really uplift the smaller commercial districts across the city. for all of our benefit.

108

00:34:56.250 --> 00:35:08.250

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yes, absolutely. And your district is so crucial to that conversation. so you mentioned downtown. And that's exactly actually where I'm going next. in my final question before I turn it to the audience.

109

00:35:08.250 --> 00:35:33.229

so as it relates to economic growth, is, as you know, and I know our audience is aware there's so much interest currently in this discourse around the future of downtowns. in this post, covid era. And so in Oakland. This also pairs with the recent movement. that we've had on getting closer to finalizing the downtown specific plan and the changes in zoning and the arts, district and public space that really come with that point?

110

00:35:33.230 --> 00:35:52.879

Ronak Davé Okoye: so from an economic development perspective, what opportunities do you see for Oakland and maintaining commercial interest and expanding industry and job growth as it relates to our downtown Or do you see different possibilities for how downtown connects to the economic engine of the city in the region.

111

00:35:53.320 --> 00:36:17.689

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely. I mean, I cannot predict the future of the tech industry and their work workshop habits. But I do know I didn't give you a crystal ball when you were elected, so I did not. But I do know that there are a lot of industries looking to Oakland. we are different from San Francisco. We're different from a lot of our neighboring cities

112

00:36:17.690 --> 00:36:51.239

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: in the opportunities we have in the town. Feel Oakland is considered the town for a reason. We're not a major. Oh, we are a major city, but we're not overwhelming, and sometimes the way city can feel to to businesses. both small businesses as well as small both big and small businesses. So I think there is a lot of opportunity to partner with the tech industry, even if not the big name. Some of the smaller start up some of the mid size firms that we're seeing

113

00:36:51.240 --> 00:37:16.040

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: with industries like Fintech, which has had a presence in Oakland biotech, which you know, is more going to em revol. But we can bring. We can bring them in here with other industries that do see value in having a physical office space and presence as well as, of course, co-working spaces and mixed and artists sloughs and mix our residential commercial spaces.

114

00:37:16.130 --> 00:37:20.900

I also believe there is opportunity for more

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00:37:21.030 --> 00:37:30.540

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: events. You know we have a great convention center, and you know the tourism industry certainly brings in a lot of dollars hotel space, but also

116

00:37:30.540 --> 00:37:51.500

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: really going back to some of Oakland's routes, of having large scale public arts and cultural events. we have had conversations, for example, about Frank Plaza and this beautiful plaza that we have right outside of City Hall. And you know, may I put some proposed cuts to some of the activation plan that we had around there

117

00:37:51.500 --> 00:38:16.500

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: but a couple of months ago I went to an nft festival that was here in Oakland, and you know they dropped 100 grand on paying for the plaza for a singular night. perhaps even more than that, we could have so many in this. And we're right next to a Bart station and down the several Bart stations in downtown. There are plenty of opportunities for those hosting cultural events. is including those hosted and supported

118

00:38:16.500 --> 00:38:39.720

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: by different industries. to set up here. Recently I gave a tour of City Hall and some facts about, you know Oakland to a delegation that came from India.

in supporting local entrepreneurs in the Indian American community. And that's another example of folks that I believe we can be inviting to here in Oakland, because a lot of

119

00:38:39.940 --> 00:38:56.730

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: other. A. A lot of folks don't know about the opportunities that there are here. when it comes to setting up a new business in a new industry. You're hosting an in a large scale event, and whatever I in my role can do to promote that I will certainly try to continue to

120

00:38:57.160 --> 00:39:25.180

Ronak Davé Okoye: great. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that perspective. so we. I'm going to turn it to audience questions now. for the last 20 min or so that we have our meeting. So again, audience members, please feel free to Please your questions in the chat. We'd we'd love to bring them in for the council member. so I'm actually gonna start with the question we have here from Jay Murphy. and I'm gonna Just focus in on a part of it. So I know council number, you're actually almost at your 6

121

00:39:25.180 --> 00:39:48.970

Ronak Davé Okoye: 6 months probably feels like longer, I imagine. but you're almost at your 6 months and you know. J. Is wondering, how would you measure your success? So how are you thinking about what success looks like for you at the 6 month mark which you're about to reach. And then also, as you think, about a year, and you think about kind of the you know, the end of your tenure in your term, just what it would. Success. Look for you with these milestones in your work.

122

00:39:49.690 --> 00:40:00.100

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: I'll go back to our first question and rebuilding trust. It's not going to be everyone. It may not even be a majority of people in my district, but if I can

123

00:40:00.180 --> 00:40:05.199

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: give a few more people confidence in City Hall, and

124

00:40:05.350 --> 00:40:32.579

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: a sense that we are working for them, that we're not working for our own personal gain. We're not hiding information. We're not purposefully not tracking money or purposefully not staffing departments. If there can be some sense of I am listening and we are, and we are fighting for you that rebuilding of trust in some percentage of my constituents, I will. I will feel like I had a level of success in my first 6 months

125

00:40:32.580 --> 00:40:51.509

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: longer term. If we can work to both, retain our small businesses, and also have every vacant storefront industry for filled in the first year or 2. That will be another measure of success. If our levels can be seen to go down.

126

00:40:51.710 --> 00:41:14.629

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: can't control the whole city. You can't even control a crime friends across the district. But this will be a collaborative effort. It's not just me, of course, with every single one of my council colleagues. If we can collectively bring crime down across the city. specifically, property crime down, that will be another indicator of success. another to me is perhaps a little different, but

127

00:41:15.100 --> 00:41:25.749

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: we have ways to for the public to engage in city processes, of course, through making public, common and attending office hours and town halls and meetings.

128

00:41:25.750 --> 00:41:50.750

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: but what we've seen a lack of in the last several months is participation in boards and commissions. There are all vacancies in sports and commissions across Oakland. That really surprises me, because a few years ago, when I applied to be a city, Oakland Public Ethics, Commissioner. I was one of 45 applications. there are many seats in these boards, and

129

00:41:50.750 --> 00:41:54.510

that are appointed, but there are many that are

130

00:41:54.510 --> 00:42:17.590

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: They go through a public application process through these departments and the commissions themselves, and going from 45 applications in a very rigorous process to Hey, we're dying to have applicants come to this Border Commission is really interesting to me, and if we can shift that, that will show me that people want to participate because they have more faith in this.

131

00:42:18.290 --> 00:42:31.539

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yeah, absolutely. Well, we are all rooting for your success. Council members. I think these are all things that we would love to see for our city as well. I'm going to go to a question from Mj. Pritchett.

132

00:42:31.540 --> 00:42:56.369

Ronak Davé Okoye: who's asking about the building department, and I think we can kind of scale this question to think about accountability more broadly across the city and our city departments. they're asking very specifically about permitting and the review and processing of permits. And if you have suggestions to improve this department's timely performance of basic functions, we know that you know, permitting is a challenge. and then it can often be very.

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00:42:56.370 --> 00:42:58.779

quite delete, both for individual

134

00:42:58.780 --> 00:43:14.539

Ronak Davé Okoye: homeowners and for commercial development that's happening in the city. any thoughts that you have on building efficiencies there and then? Maybe I know the second question is, accountability and efficiencies across departments more broadly.

135

00:43:14.810 --> 00:43:33.420

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: definitely. permitting is one of the things that has always surprised me about how long we take, I mean, does the city not want the revenue coming in from private applications. So Having sat down with the department and also hearing some of their proposals in the new proposed budget that will be voting on

136

00:43:33.420 --> 00:43:57.229

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: In the next few weeks I do know that the one stop permitting the one stop shop permitting center which took a back seat during Covid. For various reasons. The plans to ramp that up. is very active right now, and I believe that in the coming months we will get closer to the model we see in other cities. like San Francisco, with more efficient one stop shop permitting centers.

137

00:43:57.230 --> 00:44:01.240

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Another aspect of

138

00:44:01.450 --> 00:44:25.179

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: of both building and planning, but systems more broadly. Is it? I'd be to not mention our nowhere attack, and how how much damage that cost to every single department in many ways, and how much it slowed things down, especially in building and planning, and they are recovering from that as they try to do

139

00:44:25.530 --> 00:44:51.209

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: what all departments are doing now, the building and planning in particular, which is staff up their own vacancies. They're also grappling with, you know, over a month and a half of a period of time where the the the situation was difficult and they're getting back to speed on getting those permits processed. And from my role on council. I want to continue to

140

00:44:51.320 --> 00:45:22.630

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: put pressure on the department to make sure they follow through with these promises. and you know. do the best I can with creative advocacy. But these are some of the things that I know are in place. again, in the proposed budget there is 5 million dollars proposed to go towards it. security infrastructure, and that is something I support. I think there's a lot of it. Tools that the city has not harnessed. And coming into this role from actually the nonprofit world, not even the

141

00:45:22.630 --> 00:45:38.719

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: a private sector. It did well, my amount high. How outdated so many of our systems are, and how outdated systems, and sometimes even paper systems lead to inefficiencies in these processes! It's not certainly an an issue of

142

00:45:38.720 --> 00:45:58.120

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: not as much people power with these vacancies being in place, but also ineffective systems and processes, that I do believe, Warren, a deep dive department by department of how we can do things more efficiently. and I think this improvements the It infrastructure is one good start.

143

00:45:58.120 --> 00:46:22.280

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: but going back to partnering more with technology. I would love to partner with industry, to see what tools that we can take advantage of, whether that's tools related to Public safety, and security cameras or whatnot, whether that's investment into our own. Hr, software and systems. and some of those contracts do come before us when it in different committees that I said on

144

00:46:22.280 --> 00:46:35.500

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: so those are our things. I will have the opportunity to periodically review when they come before us on committees about who we're contracting with. And whether that's the most efficient use of our resources when it comes to it and Hr management.

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00:46:35.500 --> 00:46:46.489

Ronak Davé Okoye: yes. And if I'm not mistaken, I did see that in your budget priorities you name funding for these systems is a priority. as well.

146

00:46:46.670 --> 00:47:15.719

Ronak Davé Okoye: Correct. Yes, yeah. okay. So we're going to to shift gears a little bit, and actually move to the question of housing, and particularly temporary housing for unhoused And so just curious, I'm bringing in some elements of Dana's question. who's just wanting to understand more about your perspective, or what opportunities might exist. to build temporary housing to house those until these permanent homes that I know that

147

00:47:15.720 --> 00:47:23.550

you are wanting to prioritize in your district, and others are wanting to prioritize in our city are actually built. any thoughts on that?

148

00:47:24.300 --> 00:47:29.480

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Yeah. temporary housing is

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00:47:29.530 --> 00:47:47.189

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: is is a really difficult conversation. You have right now in Oakland a mix of traditional emergency shelters. where that have high levels of vacant beds. You have, on the other hand, right outside some of those shelters

150

00:47:47.270 --> 00:48:08.529

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: tents and accountants. And it is a real issue about what services we're funding that are contributing to those to actually exit tents and into safe spaces versus a, those that those interventions that are not necessarily making an impact today in the way that perhaps they might have 1020 plus years ago.

151

00:48:08.530 --> 00:48:28.450

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: I am a big supporter of using public property for creative interventions, and we've had models of community cabins and whatnot and tiny homes from the previous administration, and the one before that they haven't worked. We've seen The city auditors report from

152

00:48:28.450 --> 00:48:52.500

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: last year talking about our homelessness services did highlight how we had in many of these initiatives, tiny homes, initiatives, only a 30% success rate in those exiting these homes into permanent housing or into transitional housing. and that's dramatically low. When we see other cities, including in the bay area, with tiny home models

153

00:48:52.500 --> 00:49:17.499

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: that have a much higher pathway to permanent housing. San Jose, for example, had tiny homes that were able to graduate 60 of their residents rather than 30 into permanent housing, which is huge. and I looked into some of those models, and the differences were often slight. It was bathrooms, b bathroom progress in the cabin per resident rather than

154

00:49:17.500 --> 00:49:40.769

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: communal. a heating facility. Some of the basics that might make someone feel more grounded in their space. for relatively low cost changes versus and going back to homelessness. we all we do have some interventions. that incorporate like, for example, youth, spirit artworks. they have a program that really incorporates

155

00:49:40.770 --> 00:49:56.390

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: high Level case management into their youth that are unhoused. 25. And below, I believe, that has seen higher levels of success than some of our other programs. And I think we need to do a deep dive into what's working and what's not

156

00:49:56.530 --> 00:50:19.089

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: and what will convince someone to leave their tent and go to the. This option. In in the current legal system we have oaken does not have the ability to for someone to leave their tent. In most situations eminent domain is a very tricky thing to do in re to perform in reality. And again, our we've had very few cases.

157

00:50:19.090 --> 00:50:33.650

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: where that's actually happen in theory, you know, eminent domain, that land, and hey, just compensation to whoever whoever owns it and move on and do what you want to do. But in reality, because of the legal liability and framework we were under.

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00:50:33.650 --> 00:50:58.640

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: it's less of an option that I think theoretically, sounds sounds good, but we do need to get creative. And aspect of that question that I really resonate with is that need to partner more with some of these property owners. If there are vacant property sitting around. The uncomfortable truth is that our vacancy tax doesn't really do much. It's not a deterrent to those property owners leaving it vacant. In most cases.

159

00:50:58.640 --> 00:51:10.180



Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: What we need is not just penalize these property owners for keeping their properties vacant, but incentivize them to want to lease out their warehouses or units, or

160

00:51:10.220 --> 00:51:23.420

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: what? Not to make sure that they're filled for below market run in cases or have some kind of program where there's partnership between our vacant those who own vacant units and the city to help those who need it.

161

00:51:23.780 --> 00:51:37.879

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yes, thank you. Thank you for that thorough response to that question. so I think we'll have time, maybe, for one or 2 more audience questions. So again, if you have anything lingering out there, please feel free to put it in the Q. A. Panel.

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00:51:37.960 --> 00:52:03.179

Ronak Davé Okoye: Speaking of incentive, let's maybe pivot with that same train of thought. But to small businesses in your district. do you have any plans at this point, or things that you're exploring to really incentivize businesses to fill those vacant storefronts. we have a audience member here who's talking specifically about the therapy space that is now vacant, and the laurel as one example of how that showing up in d. 4

163

00:52:03.770 --> 00:52:28.760

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: absolutely. So this is some of the soft advocacy work that I am starting to do, and learning more about the tools that I have to approach developers. And in converting spaces. one example is the bank in the diamond The Bank of America leaving had made a huge gap in that area. And what happens a couple of weeks ago? They get ransacked in the building, the the vacant building

164

00:52:28.760 --> 00:52:47.300

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: it's broken into, and there's all sorts of chaos happening there. Next thing you know, there might be folks sleeping inside, or vandalizing the area. Further, there's there's a lot of possibility that's deeply uncomfortable. And I am trying to do my best to uplift our neighborhoods to show.

165

00:52:47.300 --> 00:53:06.640

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: hey? Not just the crime that you hear about in the news. But here all the awesome things that happen in this neighborhood. Here's why these neighborhood type. Here are some of the benefits of having a neighborhood with active community groups, for example, proximity to a part, proximity to all these grocery stores, to an A/C transit line.

166

00:53:06.640 --> 00:53:30.610

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: to housing. Not that far away. I am learning how to approach chambers. Business owners, developers in promoting the positives of what we have here. but also this is a call to others who might be engaging in that work. If you want me to be a part of some of those efforts that your community might be engaging, and please

167

00:53:30.610 --> 00:53:55.479

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: in invite us to be a part of that effort in any of that advocacy that we might be able to have. I. And another thing that we are have been doing is connecting with some of our local community colleges in Oakland, in the entire Paralta system, to see how we can support those local to Oakland, to our budding entrepreneurs, to be able to set up their own

168

00:53:55.560 --> 00:54:20.149

shops, and invite them to these vacant storefronts, so that our commercial corridor stay vibrant arts and music festival are a huge huge draw to highlight that positive culture, the laurels world. Our music festival is a huge draw, October fest in the diamond. not Clara beer and wine. These are events that just last year each respectively pulled in thousands of people

169

00:54:20.150 --> 00:54:36.040

who may not have either been to the dive in her laurel in a long time, or may have come for the first time. When I engaged with residents, at those events, with the participants in those events, there were people from all over Oakland, all over the East Bay, coming to show up at these large scale

170

00:54:36.040 --> 00:55:00.080

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: events that people didn't get to participate in for 3 years and quite lore people in to see that vibrancy. Another role is the media and organizations like visit Oakland that do a great job highlighting that positive culture in showcasing the attractiveness of these businesses on a larger platform to potential business owners all over Oakland and the Greater East Bay.

171

00:55:00.340 --> 00:55:12.449

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for that again. Thorough response. I think I'll bring in one last question, and then I'll leave you if you would like to say any last words.

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00:55:12.660 --> 00:55:14.649

Ronak Davé Okoye: To us. So

173

00:55:14.810 --> 00:55:30.319

Ronak Davé Okoye: Emily is coming in and is saying that they are, and a representative for aarps they are kind of interested in support for aging. So the question is, what is an your age? Friendly agenda for District 4.

174

00:55:30.720 --> 00:55:56.930

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: I'm gonna go back to one of our priorities, which is traffic safety all along district. For as the senior homes that I mentioned on Park Boulevard and Macarthur and the Glen View, Diamond and Laurel. You have a number of senior homes and senior affordable housing. and these are often the residents that are most impacted by the most vulnerable residents impacted by the lack of traffic safety.

175

00:55:56.930 --> 00:56:19.930

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Many ways that we can talk about addressing the needs for senior services and connectivity to county services and engaging with other parts of Oakland. But to me, traffic safety is very much a priority. On one hand, the other issue in the other side of our district in Montclair, and so in the North Hills, is

176

00:56:19.930 --> 00:56:25.560

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: making sure that Oakland is that district, for is not

177

00:56:25.560 --> 00:56:50.360

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: painted often as just the most resourced part of Oakland. Therefore everyone's doing fine. There are a number of seniors in the hills living on fixed incomes, and might have moved to these neighborhoods. when it was certainly less expensive and very much have me be that medical needs Life needs a lot of support. I recently did a right along with

178

00:56:50.360 --> 00:57:14.260

meals on wheels. The organization that delivers food to unhouse all across District 4, and you'd be really surprised. The number of neighborhoods where you have elders and seniors living alone with serious medical issues, and perhaps the lack of family or social support that really are in need of both financial, social and medical support. So Part of my efforts, as well as to make sure that we don't get painted into

179

00:57:14.260 --> 00:57:20.380

that being painted into a model that doesn't leave out those who are very much in need.

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00:57:20.500 --> 00:57:40.639

Ronak Davé Okoye: Absolutely. Well, Council Member, we've had such a wonderful conversation. I really appreciated your attention to detail and how far you've been able to be as we've gone through a wide range of topics today. I just wanted to offer you, if there's any final words, anything that we weren't able to bring in that you want to be sure to mention today.

181

00:57:40.640 --> 00:58:05.639

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Absolutely. So I see 2 of my team members amber children and ours Marions on the chat today. I will invite them to put in the chat our contact information for how to reach our office with any questions, concerns feedback spots. we try to be as responsive as possible. we will also include a link to our office hours. If you live or work in District 4 and want to

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00:58:05.640 --> 00:58:29.680

15 min, one on one with with me. you can sign up for office hours. You can also sign up for our mailing list. our newsletter. We put out about 2 newsletters per month. one. That's generally more policy focused with some initiatives that we're working on opportunities to engage in council meetings and committee meetings, another that's more community events focused

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00:58:29.680 --> 00:58:47.309

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: where we're talking about everything from neighborhood beautification, events and volunteer opportunities to arts and music, festivals to everything in between and ways to engage with District 4 and all of Oakland. so please find out if you're interested and

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00:58:47.310 --> 00:58:51.689

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: yeah, thank you for having us and for joining us today.

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00:58:51.860 --> 00:59:16.860

Ronak Davé Okoye: Yes, absolutely well, thank you again. council Member Ramachander, and I'm just so impressed by your clarity and your focus, and all of the skill that you're bringing into your your job. and the passion that you're also that undergirds all of it. So thank you so much for your service to Oakland. We look forward to continuing to work together, and it being in dialogue with you, and thank you so much to our audience members for your time today and for your participation.

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00:59:16.860 --> 00:59:29.470

Ronak Davé Okoye: I do hope that you take the Council member up on her offer to be in dialogue with you to be in community with you. around your your needs in Oakland. So thank you so much for your time. Have a wonderful day.

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00:59:29.510 --> 00:59:30.690

Councilmember Janani Ramachandran: Thank you.