

CITY OF OAKLAND



CITY HALL • ONE CITY HALL PLAZA • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94612

Office of the Mayor
Honorable Sheng Thao

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Letter of Appointment

October 15, 2024

Dear President Bas and members of the City Council:

Pursuant to City Charter Section 601, the Mayor has appointed the following persons as members of the following board or commission, subject to City Council confirmation:

City Planning Commission

Owen Li, to serve a three-year term on the City Planning Commission beginning May 5, 2024 and ending May 4, 2027, filling the seat previously held by Vince Sugrue.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheng Thao".

Mayor Sheng Thao

Profile

Owen

First Name

Li

Last Name

Pronouns

he/him/his

Email Address

Street Address

City

Suite or Apt

State

Postal Code

What City Council district do you live in?

District 6

Primary Phone

Alternate Phone

AFSCME Local 3299

Employer

Lead Researcher

Job Title

Which Boards would you like to apply for?

City Planning Commission: Submitted

Interests & Experiences

Please tell us how your qualifications and participation will relate to the requested board and/or commission's mission.

Since graduating law school, city planning has been an area of focus in my work. Through engaging development projects as far north as Healdsburg and as far south as San Jose, I've studied issues ranging from traffic light timing to burrowing owl habitats. I've also researched and engaged all aspects of the planning process, from making recommendations on behalf of community coalitions during Zoning Updates to drafting EIR comment letters. Through these experiences, I've developed a keen interest in best practices and good governance on matters related to planning, development, and land use. In my free time, I've also derived enormous enjoyment and satisfaction from using the knowledge I've gained to help the neighborhoods in Oakland where I've lived. When I lived in the Dimond District, for example, there was a clear consensus on the neighborhood email list that residents were shocked that another convenience store was set to open near the main intersection (it would have resulted in four convenience stores within two short blocks). I went to the planning department to look at the planning file and compared it to the zoning code. I discovered that the store fell within a special zoning area where convenience stores required a special discretionary exception be made at the staff level. I coordinated with the neighborhood to communicate concerns with the planning staff, who then directed the store owner to meet with residents. Ultimately, a compromise was reached where the store owner agreed to refrain from selling tobacco products and to include fresh produce at the store. It should be noted that this was many years ago, when there was much less variety in the types of stores in the neighborhood than there are currently, so the issue was especially concerning. In my current neighborhood, residents were confused by a \$1,400 special district assessment paid by every housing unit annually (over 400 households at that time). In my initial research, I found discrepancies in the special district's reporting. When I reached out to the consultants staffing the district about reserve funding levels, I was initially told reserves were 50% funded. Upon further research, however, I discovered that reserves were 120% funded even as residents were still being charged for reserve contributions. The annual assessment had been increased by the maximum allowable amount every year since the district's inception with reserve contributions absorbing all funds not used for operation, and the operating budget was often 60-100% higher than actual costs. I created a presentation outlining my research and coordinated with neighbors to communicate with the city council. The city council (acting as the special district board) suspended the fee even though consultants recommended continuing to levy it. The following year, investment returns from the reserves exceeded operating expenses. The fee has remained suspended for four years and reserves are still 100% funded. Although this issue does not directly fall under the category of city planning per se, the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct the analysis and make responsible decisions are highly related. Based on these experiences, I believe I would be a good candidate for the Planning Commission. I've spent considerable time studying and engaging with the planning process, and I've found that I enjoy putting these skills to use as an Oakland resident to ensure the city's decisions are grounded in sound analysis, best practices, and responsible policies. Thank you for your consideration.

Please submit your resume or curriculum vitae. You may upload a document. (A Word format is preferred.) Alternatively, you may paste the text of your resume in the field provided below.

[Owen_Cen_Li_Resume_-_Oakland_Planning_Commission.pdf](#)

Upload a Resume

Please paste the text of your resume or curriculum vitae below.

Please click the acknowledgement below.

Service on City of Oakland boards, commissions, and committees may require filings of the FPPC's Statements of Economic Interest (Form 700). Upon appointment and determination of filing status, I will comply with all filing obligations.

I Agree *

Owen Cen Li

Education

Boston University School of Law, J.D. 2004-2007

Warren S. Gilford Humanity and Law Prize

Chapter President of the National Lawyers Guild

Stanford University, B.A. with Departmental Honors, 1999-2003

Major in Asian American Studies (Department of Ethnic Studies)

Asian American Students Association Chair

Oxford University, 2002

Overseas studies program with independent research on immigration and diaspora issues

Work Experience

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Local 3299 (Oakland, CA)

Lead Researcher 2012-current

- Tracked and studied capital planning and development projects systemwide at the University of California. Provided research support as needed, including for housing linkage fee proposals and community benefits agreements.
- Lead author for the union's four most recent research reports, including two reports studying the housing affordability crisis in California.
- Conducted financial, data, and policy analysis related to payroll, budgets, investment policies, and public debt for fact finding hearings, advisory committees, and presentations.

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (Oakland, CA)

Lead Organizer 2010-2012

- Provided community organizing and strategic communications support for state legislative advocacy.
- Helped lift up voices of families with imprisoned youth in state budget debates related to the youth prison system.
- Represented the organization in criminal justice reform coalitions, gave public presentations, and spoke to media about juvenile justice issues.

UNITE HERE International Union (San Francisco, CA)

Senior Research Analyst 2007-2010

- Conducted municipal-level financial and legislative research related to the impacts of hotel, stadium, and airport developments, ordinances, and concessions contracts.
- Provided research and coordination for local ballot measures.
- Managed consultants, lobbyists, report writers, and other contract staff. Supervised two research analysts conducting similar work.

Boston Youth Organizing Project (Boston, MA)

Youth Organizer 2006-2007

- Guided two bodies of youth leaders (school-based and city-wide) to set annual school improvement and policy goals; translated goals into tangible workplans.
- Forged new relationships with ally organizations and laid the groundwork for a city-wide public transportation initiative through collaborative projects.

Legal Advocacy

Equal Justice America Fellow, Harry Dow Memorial Fellow 2005-2006 (Boston)

Law Student Clerk Summer 2005 (Harlem) and Summer 2006 (San Francisco)

- Boston: Law Student Clerk for Greater Boston Legal Services Asian Outreach Unit; public records research, client intake, legal research, represented clients in workers' compensation conciliation and unemployment insurance hearings.
- Harlem: Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem; interviewed clients, researched case law, drafted motions, assisted in preparation for hearings and trials.
- San Francisco: San Francisco Public Defender; similar to above, including authoring successful motion to throw out false confession by mentally disabled client.

Chinese Information and Services Center (Seattle, WA)

Project Manager 2003-2004

- Recruited, trained and coordinated forty poll monitors.
- Authored report to King County Elections Office on barriers to election participation by limited English proficiency voters.
- Represented coalition of Asian American community organizations in bi-weekly meetings with King County elections office to improve voting access.

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY


CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

RESOLUTION NO. _____ C.M.S.

INTRODUCED BY MAYOR SHENG THAO

RESOLUTION CONFIRMING THE MAYOR'S APPOINTMENT OF OWEN LI AS A MEMBER OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

WHEREAS, Section 601 of the City Charter provides that members of City boards and commissions shall be appointed by the Mayor subject to confirmation by the affirmative vote of at least five members of the City Council; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance No. 192 C.M.S., as amended, created the City Planning Commission to consider and review matters related to planning, development and preservation and to advise the City Council on land use and environmental concerns; and

WHEREAS, the City Planning Commission consists of seven members serving three-year staggered terms with no more than two terms served consecutively; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable Mayor Sheng Thao has appointed Owen Li to serve a three-year term on the City Planning Commission subject to confirmation by the City Council; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council hereby confirms the Mayor’s appointment of the following individuals to the City Planning Commission as set forth below:

Owen Li, to serve a three-year term on the City Planning Commission that began May 5, 2024 and ending May 4, 2027, filling the seat previously held by Vince Sugrue.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA,

PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES - FIFE, GALLO, JENKINS, KALB, KAPLAN, RAMACHANDRAN, REID AND
PRESIDENT FORTUNATO BAS

NOES –

ABSENT –

ABSTENTION –

ATTEST: _____

ASHA REED
City Clerk and Clerk of the Council of the
City of Oakland, California