



## Candidate Questionnaire

### General Information

**Candidate Name:** Robert Oliver

**Office Sought:** West Hollywood City Council

**Ballot Designation:** Small Business Owner

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

### Campaign Team\*

Provide the names and cell phone numbers for the following campaign team members:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

### Elected Office

**Do you currently, or have you ever held public office?**

This is my first time running for elected office, but I have been an appointed official in the city of West Hollywood for a number of years.

**If yes, which public office(s) have you held and when did you do so?**

I currently serve on the West Hollywood Public Safety Commission (in my 2nd term). Previously, I served on the L.A. County West Vector Control District Board of Trustees and the West Hollywood Lesbian and Gay Advisory Board.

## **Personal and Political Background**

**Current Occupation:** co-owner/operator, advertising agency

**Are you a registered Democrat?** Yes.

**Have you ever been registered with another political party or selected “Decline to State” or “No Party Preference” for your voter registration party affiliation, and if so, for what period?**

No, I have been a registered Democrat since I “pre-registered” to vote just shy of my 18th birthday.

**In less than 250 words, briefly summarize your personal background (work experience, education, community involvement, etc.).**

I am a longtime West Hollywood resident, commissioner, and public servant with over a decade of city government, social justice, and community organizing experience. I was born and raised in a progressive Jewish home in Los Angeles in a family of immigrants who fled or survived the worst that humanity is capable of.

My sense of duty to community and service to others are clear in my career, volunteer work, civic engagement, and activism. As a student at Cal State Northridge and UC Santa Barbara, I served on the boards of the college Democratic and LGBTQ+ club and worked full-time for the "No on Proposition 8" campaign. I was hired as the LGBTQ Advocacy Coordinator at Pacific Pride Foundation a year later. When Pacific Pride Foundation was short-staffed, I volunteered to work in the organization's HIV testing clinic, needle exchange, and food pantry. I have also worked in the district offices of United States Senator Dianne Feinstein and Los Angeles Councilmember Paul Koretz, as well as for the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. I also serve on the JQ International Board of Directors, and I volunteer weekly for Project Angel Food.

My husband and I met playing West Hollywood Dodgeball about a decade ago. We were legally married in West Hollywood, and our wedding ceremony was in the hills outside Ein Bokek, Israel, overlooking the Dead Sea.

**What endorsements have you received from organizations and prominent individuals? (You may either use the space below or attach a separate list.)** See attached list.

In the past five years, have you:

- belonged to an organization that has taken action or formally expressed a viewpoint on Israel or related issues;
- participated in an organized activity, including a forum, on Israel or related issues; or
- while holding office, introduced or co-sponsored legislation (other than purely ceremonial, supportive measures) on Israel or related issues?

In West Hollywood, I spoke in favor of the Jewish Community Security Plan at City Council. In my capacity as a Public Safety Commissioner, I introduced a recommendation that the City Council adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. It was passed unanimously by the commission, and it then went to council, where it passed unanimously on consent.

I have have been an active member in a number of Jewish community and pro-Israel organizations, including the Jewish Federation of Greater LA, JQ International, IACAN, Hillel International, and local synagogues. In my role at the Jewish Federation, I worked with college students to combat BDS on campus and support pro-Israel student activism.

During the latest platform hearings, I spoke against proposed changes to the CADEM's platform that, in my opinion, were intended only to be used to delegitimize Israel.

As an active board member of JQ International, one of my priorities is to create a space that is supportive of LGBTQ+ Israeli-Americans, as well as pro-Israel/Zionist LGBTQ+ Jews and progressives who feel shunned in other LGBTQ+ and progressive circles.

### **Policy Questions**

Please describe your positions on the following issues. Please limit your responses to 250 words for each response. If you wish, one response may include up to 500 words.

**1. Please describe your last trip to Israel and the Middle East, including the year of the trip and any group that arranged or sponsored the trip. If you have not yet been to Israel, when and to where do you plan on going in Israel, and the region generally, for your trip?**

My last trip to Israel was for my wedding in June 2018. Were it not for COVID-19, I would certainly have been since. During that trip, 25 friends and relatives joined us. We chartered a bus and were so excited to share this country that we love with them. We were married at the Dead Sea, and we took our friends and family to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv for Pride, and the Golan Heights for wine tasting and nature.

Prior to that, I have been to Israel a number of times. My first trip was with Taglit in 2011. The reason we chose Ein Bokek for our wedding was because it was where we had our first official

date 5 years prior in 2013, and we returned again with friends for Pride around 2015/16. From Israel, I have traveled to Jordan and Turkey.

I have many friends in Israel—some who I met there, some who made Aliyah. The Israeli friend who officiated our wedding is someone I met while she was working on assignment at UCSB Hillel. She lives in Jerusalem, and we visit her and others each time we visit. Another “pilgrimage site” is a street and square named after my great great grandfather, Haim Amzalak, British Vice Consul for Ottoman Palestine and one of the benefactors of the revived Jewish community in Yafo.

**2. Who do you speak with to develop your positions and views on Israel and the Middle East, including people overseas and local leaders in Southern California?**

I have spent years of my life learning as much as possible about the history of Jews in Eretz Yisrael, my family’s story in the Land of Israel, the establishment of the State of Israel, the Israeli-Arab conflict, and the relationship between deligitimization of Israel and antisemitism.

It is hard to point to one source of information since there are many. Some are local leaders and rabbis, others are Jews who are passionate Zionists. There are online sources like “Unpacked” on YouTube that really put the history in context in a way that is fairly neutral.

**3. Please describe your relationship, if any, with the Israeli-American and Jewish community in Los Angeles.**

I am fourth generation Angeleno with a family story that is similar to many Jewish Angelenos. My family came from Eretz Yisrael, Poland, Ukraine, and Moldova, and settled around L.A., including in Boyle Heights and Mid City. My Sephardic ancestors were founding members of Tifereth Yisrael, my Ashkenazi extended family attended Sinai Temple, and I grew up attending Temple Beth Emet in Burbank.

I have deep and long standing relationships with Israeli-Americans and the L.A. Jewish community. Over years working and volunteering for Jewish organizations, as well as two Jewish and staunchly pro-Israel elected officials, I have become more confident in my identity as a pro-Israel Jew, and I have really gotten to know the diversity that is our community.

**4. If elected, what committees and organizations would you try to be active in, and what policy areas would you try to affect that are relevant to Israel and the Middle East?**

I think there are a few ways that a West Hollywood councilmember can be an advocate on Israel-related issues. For one, it's understanding the complexities of the history and conflict, so as not to allow the city to (even inadvertently) become a platform for those who seek to delegitimize the only Jewish State. These issues have arisen in recent years, and it is important that West Hollywood has leaders on council who understand the nuances of the issues and motivations of the different groups.

We've also always been a city that celebrates immigrant communities, and Israeli-Americans should be no different. We must not allow those with a political agenda to "other" Israeli-Americans or politicize/attack Israeli culture.

5. Over the past decade, there has been a small but growing movement around the country to divest from Israel. These groups often use anti-Semitic language in their efforts, some target Jewish students on campuses and instead of discussing how to engage the democratic-process to challenge Israeli policies that may be objectionable, they try to delegitimize Israel or question its right to exist. In short, these are frequent attempts to influence state and local governments and their universities and pension boards not to invest in Israeli companies or companies that do business anywhere in Israel.

**What is your view on the Israel boycott and divestment movement and what will you do about it?**

I will continue to vocally and wholeheartedly oppose the BDS movement, and I will oppose any attempt to use West Hollywood as a platform for it.

6. The FBI's Uniform Crime Report for 2014 showed that there were more than 609 anti-Jewish hate crimes in the United States that year and even today, Jews were the most persecuted and targeted religious group in the country.

**What steps would you take (for example, in the education and law enforcement arenas) to help prevent current and future anti-Jewish hatred and anti-Semitic activity in your jurisdiction?**

I will continue to support and expand upon the Jewish Community Security Plan introduced by Councilmember Horvath and passed by Council last year. Public Safety is front and center in my campaign, and it will be my priority if elected. Our Jewish community must feel and be safe in this city, and I will ensure that we have the resources and coordination to accomplish that. I believe the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism gives us something to work off of when training law enforcement and other public safety agencies.

**7. As a Democrat, what steps can we take to help fight anti-Semitism on both the left and the right?**

As a lifelong and passionate Democrat, it is very sad to hear from some members of the Jewish community who don't feel like this party represents them. They point to voices on the left who echo antisemitic talking points and seek to delegitimize the one Jewish State. But to focus on those voices only would be a mistake—there are hateful, violent rightwing antisemites who threaten our community in many ways. No matter the origin, we as Jews and/or pro-Israel Democrats have to call out antisemitism in every form.

I want to help bridge the divide between the progressive movement and the Jewish/pro-Israel community. I do not want our issues to become lumped in with those on the right

**8. What other issues do you think are unique or important to the Jewish and pro-Israel community, and how do you propose to make a difference with these issues and keep in touch with the community?**

The LA Jewish community is a community that is constantly redefining its identity. When my grandmother was a child in LA, being an American Jew meant something a little different. There was a focus on assimilation and a desire to “fit in” more, at least in her family. When I was a child, I wasn't taught conversational Hebrew, just the prayers. Now, I think we, at least the Reform and more secular Jews I know, are reconnecting with our Judaism and connection to Israel in a more profound way. My sister is insisting that her children learn conversational Modern Hebrew so they will identify fully with their culture.

If I am elected, I want to widen the tent to celebrate more members of our community—Latin@ and Black members of the community, trans people, AAPI community members, and Jewish/Israeli Americans. No one should be made to feel like they must celebrate their culture quietly.

There is a sense among many I've spoken to in the community that a double standard is applied to Jews, especially Jews who support Israel. Israel is misrepresented as a “white” and “colonial” or “apartheid” state, and Jews as colonizers or oppressors. That narrative paves the way for “othering” Jews and driving a wedge between Jews and progressives. I want to help repair that divide.

## **ENDORSEMENTS: ROBERT OLIVER FOR WEST HOLLYWOOD CITY COUNCIL. (Updated Sept. 27, 2022.)**

### *ELECTED OFFICIALS & DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS*

- Los Angeles County Democratic Party
- California Young Democrats
- Stonewall Young Democrats
- Westside Young Democrats
- Southern California Armenian Democrats
- East Area Progressive Democrats
- Jeff Prang, L.A. County Assessor & (fmr.) West Hollywood City Councilmember
- Congressman Henry Waxman (ret.)
- Rick Chavez Zbur, Candidate for State Assembly
- West Hollywood City Councilmember John Erickson, PhD
- Beverly Hills Vice Mayor Julian Gold
- Artesia Mayor Ali Taj
- Burbank School Board Vice President Steve Ferguson
- Burbank School Board Member Dr. Armond Aghakhanian
- Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council President Owen Smith
- Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council Member Jeffry Carpenter
- Mid City West Community Council Second Vice Chair Will Hackner
- P.I.C.O. Neighborhood Council President Brad Kane

### *WEHO COMMISSIONERS*

- Public Safety Commission Chair Amanda Laflen (fmr.)
- Public Safety Commission Chair Tod Hallman
- Planning Commission Chair Stacey Jones
- Planning Commissioner Michael Lombardi
- Planning Commission Chair James Litz (fmr.)
- Human Services Commission Chair Steven Davis
- Human Services Commission Chair Peter Mackler (fmr.)
- Historic Preservation Commission Vice-Chair Jacob Sotsky
- Business License Commission Chair Erick Matos
- Public Facilities Commission Chair Elaine Polachek
- Public Facilities Commission Vice-Chair Jake Mason
- Public Facilities Commissioner Andrew Solomon
- Rent Stabilization Commissioner Estevan Jose Montemayor
- Transportation Commissioner Adam Kroll
- Arts and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Mito Aviles
- Arts and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Lindsey Deaton
- Arts and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Catherine "Cat" Lee
- Arts and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Todd Williamson
- Arts and Cultural Affairs Commissioner Martin Gantman

### *LABOR & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS*

- Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
- AFSCME Council 36 (includes WeHoME Local 3339)
- Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW)
- Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters
- UNITE HERE! Local 11
- HONOR PAC
- Streets for All
- Abundant Housing Los Angeles
- Run for Something