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Voters in three Marin municipalities reject stronger rent control



People hold signs in support of and against local issues and politicians on election night in Fairfax, Calif. on Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2024. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)



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In Larkspur, voters weighed in on Measure K, which would have made the rent-control ordinance voters narrowly upheld in March stricter while also adding tenant protections. Fairfax residents voted on Measure I, which would have repealed the rent-control and renter protections that the Town Council approved in 2022.

In San Anselmo, voters were asked to make the call on two related rent-control measures. Measure N would have enacted a rent-control ordinance approved by the Town Council by a 3-2 vote in April, and Measure O would have penalized landlords of properties with three or more dwellings who terminate a tenancy due to no fault of the tenant.

When all the ballots on hand Tuesday had been counted, Measure I was winning with 66.5% support. Measure N was opposed by 65.76% of voters and Measure O was rejected by 69.06% of voters. Measure K was opposed by 62.85% of voters.

Michael Sexton, director of Marin Residents, a nonprofit composed of homeowners, housing providers and renters, said he had been optimistic about the results of the election but was surprised by the margin of victory that rent control opponents achieved.

"It heartens me that the people of Marin are rejecting this approach to solving the problem of housing affordability," Sexton said. "I think the people of Marin realize that this is not the right approach to dealing with the housing affordability crisis in Marin."



"It is also a wake-up call for the town councils that they can't impose rent control willy-nilly," Sexton added. "For a matter of this much economic importance, you have to get the consent of the people. You can't just vote on it by yourselves."

Curt Ries, a San Anselmo renter and leader of the Marin Democratic Socialists of America, said, "These are not the results we'd hoped, nor expected."

"The story of these results," Ries added, "is that corporate landlords and wealthy real estate interests were able to swoop down with their big money and cover the internet with their ads, buy full page newspaper ads and send out slick glossy mailers that stuffed people's inboxes in the last few weeks."

He asserted that the advertising spread disinformation about what the measures would do and the consequences that they would have.

Opponents of rent control contributed over \$361,000 to efforts to defeat Measures K, N and O and pass Measure I. Contributors included the California Association of Realtors, the California Apartment Association and several real estate investment firms, including Hummingbird Hill Limited Partnership, which lists Andrea Schultz, a prominent Marin businesswoman, as its agent to contact.

“Unfortunately, if we lose in all three areas it’s going to leave the door wide open for the Democratic Socialists of America to bring rent control to Mill Valley, Sausalito, Novato and Marin County as a whole,” Sexton warned early in the campaign.

Campaign committees working to pass the rent control measures received a little over \$158,000 in contributions, with \$100,000 coming from the San Francisco Foundation.

The rent-control measures may also help to determine who wins town council seats in San Anselmo and Fairfax. In San Anselmo six candidates are competing for three seats and in Fairfax seven candidates are competing for three seats.

In San Anselmo, just one of the candidates, Yoav Schlesinger, supported measures N and O. Another candidate, Chantel Walker, remained neutral. The other four candidates stated their opposition.

“I’m strongly in favor of both N and O,” Schlesinger said during a meeting with the Independent Journal editorial board. “They represent really critical steps to ensuring housing stability and fairness for the renters in our community.”

But Ford Greene, who is running to regain a seat on the council after being ousted in 2022, said, “It doesn’t pencil out for a landlord to be able to be in business.”

Nowhere in Marin was rent control more controversial than in Fairfax. Three incumbent council members, who voted to approve the existing rent-control ordinance in 2022, were defending their seats against four challengers. They opposed Measure I, which would repeal the ordinance. All four of the challengers support Measure I.

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