



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area
97 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022**

November 29, 2015

Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council
City of Mountain View
500 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

Re: Council Meeting December 1st, Agenda Item # 7.1 - Consideration of Rent Relief Options

Dear Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council:

The LWV supports actions that provide affordable housing for all Californians. As the excellent staff report points out, rental housing in Mountain View has become increasingly unaffordable for many Mountain View tenants. Fifty-eight percent of City residents rent and, according to the well-researched staff report, in the last four years average monthly asking rents have increased an incredible 52.7 percent, while the median household income in Santa Clara County has risen only 1.2 percent during this same time period.

Clearly, in order to keep housing more affordable for the majority of its residents, the City must act to provide some rent relief for tenants who are being displaced or who are paying far too much of their monthly incomes towards rent.

We believe the proposed ordinance regarding written residential leases would offer some protection for tenants, by at least preventing the possibility of more than one increase in a year. We also believe that working with CSA to provide more rental assistance is one way in which to help prevent displacement. We look forward to hearing more details regarding the three options described in the staff report; initially, Option 2 seems to offer the most hopeful long-term solutions.

We applaud the detailed discussion in the staff report regarding mandatory mediation. We recommend some form of third step after mandatory mediation, such as what the Los Gatos ordinance provides with binding arbitration. Apparently, binding arbitration is rare, but the threat is enough to make mandatory mediation more successful. Mediation without some subsequent option is far less effective than mediation with a subsequent option, according to the staff report.

We also believe that tenants and landlords should not be required to make a good faith effort to resolve a rent dispute before initiating a conciliation process with a third party. We are concerned that this might lead to retaliatory evictions should a tenant go directly to the landlord. We also think individuals should be able to initiate mediation without finding other tenants to join them.

Regarding the threshold for a “reasonable” rent increase, we understand that the tenant coalition suggests CPI, while the landlords are suggesting 10%. The Los Gatos ordinance seems to strike a compromise by setting the threshold at a 5% rent increase.

We think the goal of data collection, especially to determine specific information regarding rent increases, is excellent, but we share staff’s concerns regarding compliance, privacy and validity of the data collected.

The LWV also supports measures to provide safe housing for all Californians. Thus, we support City efforts to pursue a safe parking program for the RV’s that so many displaced tenants are now living in. It is important that this housing be located near services that these households need, including not just bathrooms, but close to schools, shopping, etc.

Thank you for considering our input.

Donna Yobs
Co-Chair, Housing Committee
LWV of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area

Cc: Dan Rich
Randy Tsuda
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Linda Lauzze