

Tenant Times

Volume XXIV, No. 3

Newspaper of the San Francisco Tenants Union

Summer, 2003

Supes Reject Tenants

Unbelievably, the "new" Board of Supervisors overwhelmingly rejected the plan to elect the San Francisco Rent Board. Supervisors voted 8-3 against tenants. Only Ammiano, Daly and Gonzalez voted with tenants; Sups. Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin and Sandoval—all elected with tenant support—joined their pro-landlord colleagues to defeat the measure.

This rejection came despite the facts that the proposal to elect the Rent Board came from a heavily attended grass roots Tenant Convention in March and was supported by all of the city's tenant groups except one. Further, the measure was to simply place the measure on the ballot to ask voters to decide if the Rent Board should be elected.

The measure was the first major piece of tenant legislation to come before the Board in over 2 years. In 2001, the just-elected Board approved regulation of TIC-type condominium conversions. Since then, though, they have paid little attention to tenant issues, with the exception of Ammiano's capital improvement compromise and Daly's eviction threats legislation (both of which were uncontroversial and passed easily) and Gonzalez's rent control fixes (which is controversial and faces an uncertain future).

The votes was not the first time the new Board has voted against tenants: last year the Board voted to increase the tenant's share of a fee which funds the Rent Board. Tenant groups unanimously opposed that idea, noting then that tenants should not have to pay a penny for a landlord-controlled Rent Board.

Since 1992, when tenants adopted a strategy of bypassing the Supervisors and taking issues directly to the voters, this was the first time the Supervisors were ever asked to place a measure on the ballot. In all other cases, petitions were collected. The petition route was not taken, however, because the March 29 Tenant Convention decision left inadequate time to collect the 40,000 signatures needed for a charter reform (which electing the Rent Board would be). It was expected that this Board would easily agree to place a measure on the ballot for tenants, but that turned out not to be the case.

Tenants Plan Next Step September 6

To the surprise of all, the March 29 Tenant Convention identified the top issue as a landlord-biased Rent Board—and proposed the election of the Commissioners, as is done in Berkeley and Santa Monica. Participants clearly zeroed in on the lack of oversight and regulation of San Francisco landlords as a big problem (the number two proposal was a plan to license landlords). Participants also recognized that the ballot is where tenants win and City Hall is where tenants lose, this opting for the election route (over ideas of taking appointments away from the Mayor and giving tenants more seats on the Rent Board).

But, for some, the plan to elect the Board was a little too drastic. Although the convention proposal was heartily endorsed by the Tenants Union, St. Peter's Housing Committee, Tenderloin Housing Clinic, Housing Rights Committee, Central City SRO Collaborative and all of the city's big building tenant associations, the Community Tenants Association of Chinatown felt it was dangerous and opposed election of the Commissioners and opting instead for reforming how the appointments are made.

The opinions on each side are strong, though there is consensus that some sort of Rent Board reform must happen.

What form that reform will take is the subject of Tenant Convention II, to be held on Saturday, September 6 at the Main Library in Civic Center (Koret Auditorium) starting at 11 AM. The goal is to develop broad support for one approach or another

and to then move on that plan, be it appointment reform or election. The format will be for an advocate for election to make their case, an advocate for appointment reform to make their case, and then to have participant discussion and debate. Consensus will be the goal but, if necessary, a super-majority of two-thirds will decide the next step so that the movement to reform the Rent Board moves forward.

All tenants are encouraged to attend and help decide. This is an important issue with strong implications for the future of rent control in San Francisco.

Tenant Convention II What To Do About The SF Rent Board?

Following the Supervisors' rejection of the plan from the March 29 Tenant Convention to Elect the Rent Board, tenant groups have organized Tenant Convention II to discuss the options and plans for reforming the Rent Board—ranging from bringing the Supervisors a more modest appointment reform plan to bypassing the Supervisors and collecting signatures to place the elected Rent Board plan to the voters directly.

Saturday, Sept 6
Main Library, 100 Larkin St
Koret Auditorium
11 AM-4 PM