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## **Give Santa Rosa Renters A Floor and A Ceiling**

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The county's affordable housing crisis which was challenging prior to the Tubbs fire, is now on the verge of catastrophe. The county and all cities must adopt new emergency measures and a multi pronged approach to avert the displacement of low- and moderate-income renters.

A 2017 report by the California Housing Partnership Corporation (CHPC) outlines the scope of the crisis. Between 2000-2015 inflation-adjusted median rent in the county increased by 16 percent while median renter income declined by 6 percent. Then, according to the web site Zillow.com, median rents jumped by 36 percent after the October 2017 fires. The CHPC report also indicates that since 2008, federal and state funding for affordable housing in the county dropped by 87 percent.

Governor Jerry Brown and the Legislature approved a package of bills last year to increase funding for affordable housing including a \$4 billion bond measure that the voters will consider in the November general election. Santa Rosa may also place a housing bond measure on the ballot. However, even if both bond measures are approved, construction will take several years.

The county's housing and displacement crisis requires immediate action and is compounded by the high cost of living in coastal California and the explosion of low-wage employment. According to the California Budget and Policy Project, in Sonoma County in 2017 a living wage for two parents working full-time with two children is no less than \$23 an hour to cover all basic expenses without relying on public assistance.

Yet 54 percent of the jobs created in the county between 2012-2022, mainly service sector jobs, will pay less than a livable wage, according to the California Employment Development Department.

In 2016 the Brookings Institution reported that housing costs in metro regions across the nation rose much faster than incomes for low- and moderate-income families. These regions are where most of the country's population growth is occurring and, not surprisingly, the proportion of renters to homeowners is also climbing. The affordable housing crisis is rooted in soaring inequality, stagnant and falling wages, and an insufficient supply of subsidized affordable housing.

Two emergency measures the city of Santa Rosa and other jurisdictions can adopt now to address the underlying causes of the crisis and minimize displacement are rent control and a \$15 citywide minimum wage.

The Santa Rosa City Council approved rent control and just cause eviction protections in the fall of 2016, but the California Apartment Association placed a referendum on the ballot in June 2017, and, in a low turnout primary, rent control was narrowly repealed by 4 points, despite the fact that proponents were outspent by a 5-1 margin. However, rent control advocates have gathered signatures to place a measure on the ballot this fall that will limit rent increases to the annual rise of the Consumer Price Index with a cap of 5 percent.

Santa Rosa voters will likely make the city the 19<sup>th</sup> local jurisdiction in the state to adopt binding rent control and just-cause eviction protections. A recent report by Urban Habitat, based on in-depth analyses of three cities with rent control, including Santa Monica, Berkeley, and Richmond, found that rent control provides more affordable rents and stability for tenants, while not deterring construction of new housing, lowering property values, nor requiring appropriations from the general fund to effectively enforce.

To raise incomes and the wage floor, Santa Rosa can implement a citywide \$15-an-hour minimum wage that would phase in by 2020 and mandate six paid sick days, affecting 37,000 workers in the city. Currently the state minimum wage is \$11.00 an hour for large employers and will gradually increase to \$15 an hour by 2023 for all employers. Twenty-four California cities and one county have approved minimum wage laws higher than the state.

According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, 96 percent of the workers who receive a raise when the minimum is boosted are adults over 20, and more than half are women and Latinos. On average, these workers provide more than half of their family income. When the minimum wage increase is phased in to \$15, the average annual earnings of affected workers will increase by 24 percent or about \$3700.

It is not by accident that eleven California cities have both minimum wages higher than the state's and rent control. Santa Rosa should follow. Tenants need both a floor and a ceiling, because the rent can't wait.

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