

Q&A

ERIC FRIEDMAN

Property Rights, Rent Control, and SB's Future

SBRPA: As mayor, what will be your defining accomplishment during your first term if elected?

My defining accomplishment as Mayor will be proving that Santa Barbara can tackle its affordability crisis without sacrificing fiscal discipline. My first term will demonstrate measurable progress in affordable housing that's built and occupied, a downtown that's genuinely thriving again, and a city budget with a healthy reserve that is sustainably balanced for the long term.

I've spent eight years proving I can deliver results through the

Local Housing Trust Fund, Library Plaza, and disciplined budgeting on the Finance Committee. As Mayor, my first term will be defined by scaling that same approach citywide, so families who work here can afford to live here, and Santa Barbara's downtown corridor reflects the vibrant, accessible future residents deserve and the public trust has been restored when it comes to the city finances.

SBRPA: Within the first 90-days of your term as mayor, name three proposals or direction to staff that will contribute to the economic vitality and development in the City?

Within my first 90 days, I will direct staff to focus on three concrete priorities that lay the groundwork for successful economic vitality.

First, an early review of the budget that is focused on the next three-year forecast. An immediate focus on the budget is especially important for the three new Council members. From their first day in office we need to ensure they understand the current budget



budget challenges and what choices will need to be made in order to maintain services the public demands. Doing so will also make clear to residents and businesses where the state of the city finances are so they know what to expect.

Eric Friedman grew up in Santa Barbara County where he is raising his sons with his wife, Julie. He has 25 years of local public and volunteer service that includes serving on the Santa Barbara City Council since 2018 and fourteen years as a staff assistant at the Board of Supervisors.

His leadership created the *Local Housing Trust Fund*, funded the award-winning Library Plaza renovation, and he has made fiscal discipline a foundation of his service. Eric also serves on regional and statewide committees focused on increasing water security and coastal land-use planning.

He holds a Master of Public Administration from Cal State Northridge and a B.A. in History from the University of Notre Dame.

Second, proactive community engagement on State Street. I will work with the City Administrator to initiate structured focus groups and planning sessions

with residents, business owners, and property owners, so the State Street Master Plan and Paseo Nuevo redevelopment reflect what our community wants and develop a realistic plan for funding and an interim operations plan that meets the needs of the local businesses that are left out.

Third, prioritizing housing production, with an emphasis on downtown. We will look at city-owned land, streamlined permitting, and partnership opportunities, to accelerate affordable housing production immediately, because economic vitality starts with people being able to afford to live in the city where they work.

Eric is a man with a diverse background – a Trader Joe’s worker, a former staffer for Rep. Salud Carbajal, and the current Santa Barbara City Council representative for District 5.

SBRPA: We have heard the term “Affordability Crisis” as a reason to deny a small sector of our community the right to raise rents up the allowable State Rent Control level. Given that this “Affordability Crisis” does not require any tenant to demonstrate a financial hardship when in fact the Tenant may have more expendable income than the housing provider, explain your reasoning to support the RSO as drafted to a landlord who may go into debt, foreclosure, bankruptcy because of City Council actions? Or if you don’t support the RSO, how do you explain your reasoning to those who can no longer afford to live in the city?

I understand the frustration behind this question, and I think it's fair to acknowledge upfront that rent stabilization policy involves tradeoffs on both sides, tenants facing housing insecurity, and independent local rental owners facing financial pressure of their own. Both sides need to be considered in this policy discussion.

That said, I don't support the ordinance for many reasons, including that it leads to higher rents overall, fewer rentals on the market, a reduction in maintenance on properties, and local owners selling to out-of-town investors who don't have the best interests of our city in mind. That ultimately hurts the same tenants the policy is meant to protect.

For renters who are facing an affordability crisis, it is important to learn if they are eligible for any public assistance for existing units or those that are coming online. While there may be short term benefits in the ordinance, they may not live in a unit that has those benefits, so rents will rise. They need to understand this fact. They may also be faced with a situation where a local property owner sells, which can lead to even

more instability. Time is of the essence to find solutions that include new production and creative ideas such as employer sponsored housing or a limited voucher program to assist with expenses such as move in costs. Unfortunately, this situation was created over decades of no-growth policies, so now we must fast track a response on the production side.

Finally, the City has passed a number of rental protections, so it is important that they know their rights and how to protect themselves from evictions that don't follow the ordinances in place.

Good policy has to work for all parties involved.

“The mayor has a unique ability to bring the council together and try to find those common points of interest on some of the issues that have been dividing us, whether it’s State Street, housing issues, economic development.”

Eric Friedman, Noozhawk, 1/7/2026



image courtesy of Noozhawk

Eric Friedman has been the City Council Representative for District 5 since 2017, an area that includes upper State Street, Las Positas, La Cumbre, and San Roque.

SBRPA: State Street Master Plan and the RSO - rent stabilization ordinance are two major policies intended to help Santa Barbara, but both carry significant economic tradeoffs. What specific, measurable results would you use to determine whether each policy is actually working, and what evidence would cause you to reconsider your position?

Good policy has to be judged by results, and I'd hold both of these to that standard.

For the State Street Master Plan, I'd measure success through concrete, trackable indicators: vacancy rates along the corridor, foot traffic and sales tax revenue generated by State Street businesses, the pace and cost of actual project completion against the \$96 million estimate, and direct feedback from residents and business owners through the kind of structured engagement I'd prioritize in my first 90 days. If vacancy rates keep climbing, if costs continue to balloon without expected progress of implementing the plan, or if residents and business owners tell us the plan isn't reflecting what they asked for, that's feedback I'd take seriously and use to adjust our approach.

For the Rent Stabilization Ordinance, I'd track whether it's achieving its intended purpose, protecting tenants from bad-faith evictions and destabilizing rent increases. I've been upfront about the consequences we can expect, such as independent local rental owners removing units from the market or reducing investment in current properties, or whether our overall housing supply is growing or shrinking as a result. If the data showed the RSO was meaningfully discouraging new rental housing or driving property owners out of the market altogether, that would be evidence to make adjustments. A policy that protects some tenants while shrinking the housing supply for everyone else isn't achieving what it sets out to do.

Eric Friedman and Kristen Sneddon, current City Council representatives, are considered the front runners in the Mayoral race. Also running are David Matthew Kilrain, Mark Redmond, Wendy Sims-Moten and Michael Stilwell.

SBRPA: State Street Master Plan's estimated financial liability is \$96M, how much of that price tag will you be asking the citizens of Santa Barbara to cover via enhanced fees, additional or new taxes, or assessments?



My goal is to minimize what residents are asked to cover through new fees, taxes, or assessments. Before asking taxpayers for additional revenue, I will work with the City Administrator to come up with a funding plan that emphasizes State and Federal funding sources, use of one-time funds, along with public-private partnerships similar to what we achieved with Library Plaza. It is important that local funds, such as Measure C, that were intended to prioritize other projects remain committed to their original purposes, such as the two fire stations that need to be relocated. The funding plan will be made available for public review and input.

Residents should not be asked to shoulder a \$96 million liability without first exhausting every available funding mechanism and partnership opportunity. That means pursuing state and regional infrastructure funding sources and bringing private investment to the table wherever possible.

I will only consider new revenue measures after all other options are exhausted and a clear case can be made that there will be positive return on investment.

“We have to find a way to improve the circulation and let the public, whether it's the businesses or the longtime Santa Barbara folks who have had a lot of change, be able to say, ‘we want to come downtown again.’”

Eric Friedman, Santa Barbara Talks with Josh Molina

This kind of discipline is exactly what a project like State Street requires. State Street is one of Santa Barbara's greatest assets. It's a main attraction that should work for the city, for residents, and for the visitors who contribute to our local economy. Getting this investment right means building a State Street that becomes both an economic engine and a beloved gathering place for generations to come. Santa Barbara residents deserve a Mayor who treats this \$96 million investment as the serious fiscal responsibility it is.

SBRPA: Santa Barbara's 6th-cycle RHNA is 8,001 units through 2031. From mid-2022 through 2025 the city issued permits for only a small slice of that target; 2025 itself was 255 permits, heavily skewed to above-moderate units. The housing element is now certified, so new Builder's Remedy filings should have stopped, but projects filed in the gap—especially the 270-unit, eight-story proposal at 505 E. Los Olivos near the Mission. Do you support the 8001-unit requirement since the city is facing an “Affordability Crisis”? What needs to happen to ensure city compliance?

The 8,001-unit RHNA is a target the city must make a good faith effort to achieve, or else risk losing further local control. The permit numbers you've cited make clear exactly why we can't afford to fall further behind. 255 permits in 2025, heavily skewed to above-moderate units is an absolute shortfall against a state mandate, and a direct reflection of why families and workers can't find housing they can afford here. However, there are some larger projects in the pipeline that we need to recognize, such as Paseo Nuevo and La Cumbre Plaza that will positively impact those numbers.

To increase supply, the city needs to prioritize housing in strategic areas, such as downtown, that also contributes to economic vitality and rejuvenation. That means continuing to streamline our permitting and approval process so qualifying projects, especially those including affordable units, aren't stuck in delays that add cost and discourage development. It also means re-evaluating density, again in specific areas and fully supporting adaptive reuse.

Since the 505 East Los Olivos property is currently under review, I cannot comment on the specifics of the project at this stage, or I risk having to recuse myself from any future hearings. It is important that a fair hearing takes place through the established planning processes and that the public has opportunity to provide input, along with proper review of impacts to emergency planning, cultural resources and other community concerns.



Artist's rendering of proposed project at 505 E Olivos property behind the SB Mission. image sagesb.org

SBRPA: The Supreme Court has ruled that Housing Providers are protected from local regulation overreach if they are denied a "Fair Rate of Return" on their rental housing. The Santa Barbara draft RSO has a provision providing a petition process to

demonstrate a "Fair Rate of Return." Since the Fair Rate of Return is a constitutional right, should the Fair Rate of Return petition process be discretionary or ministerial?

A responsible decision on 'discretionary' or 'ministerial' needs a full legal review from the City Attorney's office. Ultimately

the process needs to be fair, transparent, and accessible to housing providers seeking to demonstrate a fair rate of return in order to avoid constitutional issues. The process must be tested with legal guidance to ensure it withstands scrutiny, rather than adopting a standard that's vulnerable to litigation down the road.



The first Mayoral debate held at the New Vic Theater with candidates Eric Friedman, Wendy Sims-Moten, and Kristen Sneddon.

To see the full debate, go to <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2497838874060075>

SBRPA: Under California law, the Costa-Hawkins Act exempts specific properties from Rent Control. Would you support a Statewide repeal of Costa Hawkins in full or in part? If yes, what type of units (SFR, Condos) would you exclude from the Costa-Hawkins protections?

Any reform to Costa Hawkins needs to be thoughtful about the specifics, including which unit types, single-family homes, condos, newer construction, should be included or excluded, since these carry different tradeoffs for housing supply and viability for local owners to continue investing in the market. The most critical component to addressing housing costs is increasing supply. Any changes could disincentivize production, which would have long-term consequences for affordability. Any decision on whether to repeal all or some of Costa Hawkins would need to be evaluate these potential impacts to new supply before any decision is made.

SBRPA: A rental registry and rent board adds staff, legal risk, and ongoing cost to the City. In a year when contingency reserves are diminished, how would you pay for the additional administration expenses, and what is your threshold for repealing or loosening the ordinance if vacancy falls, petitions explode, or litigation costs exceed the benefit?

Given the fiscal discipline I've brought to the city's budget for eight years, I don't believe we should launch new administrative structures, like a rental registry or rent board, without a clear, sustainable funding plan that doesn't rely on our already diminished reserves. Costs need to be covered through dedicated fees tied directly to the program, such as registry or petition fees paid by participants in the system, rather than pulling from the General Fund or reserves that are meant to protect the city in a genuine emergency. These are costs that need to be shared by owners and renters.

On the second question, it is important to set measurable benchmarks before implementation. This means tracking vacancy rates, petition volume, and litigation costs against projected benefits from day one, with a built-in review period where the Council revisits the ordinance based on that data. Any policy that starts generating more litigation costs and administrative burdens rather than tenant protection benefit needs to be revisited.

SBRPA: In 2024, a Statewide ballot initiative to repeal Costa-Hawkins, Prop 33 went down to defeat by a significant margin in SB county with 38% voting yes and 62% voting no. Yet the current City Council refused to allow the voters of Santa Barbara the option to vote on a RSO

ballot measure. Given the overwhelming voter preference to keep Costa-Hawkins and the divided community pitting

Tenants vs. Landlords, would you now support allowing voters to decide the fate of the RSO?

I support having this placed on the ballot for the public to decide. This would need to have an education campaign and a full understanding of the implications of the ordinance, both pro and con so the public can make an informed decision. To be clear, this isn't designing a new ordinance, it is simply whether the adopted ordinance is something the community supports. Allowing the people to vote on whether to keep or repeal the adopted ordinance, has now affect on flexibility should it need to be changed at some point.

SBRPA: What specific changes to the city process will you champion to lower the time and cost to develop multi-family, commercial, retail, or Tenant Improvements in the City?

I will continue to advocate for streamlining our Community Development process, building on the reforms I've already supported. Applicants must have predictable timelines rather than open-ended delays. Specifically, I will champion clear service-level timelines for permit review at each stage, improved coordination, from the start, between departments so applicants aren't bounced between offices, expanded use of technology to track project status, and continued expansion of the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance model that's already reduced costs for converting existing commercial space to housing. I also support pre-approved plan sets and standardized review criteria for projects meeting clear community standards, so staff time is focused on projects that

require closer scrutiny. This is demonstrated in my support for the Better Buildings pilot program and Pathways to Yes initiative within the Community Development Department. I also support using vacant city land or other lots, such as building on top of parking lots while keeping the parking, to reduce the costs of project. This would come with a commitment to increase the number of affordable units.

SBRPA: Do you support revenue enhancements to include: Vacancy Tax on Commercial or Residential Properties in order to balance the city budget and restore reserve funds that have been used as a stopgap? Do you support increasing the Transfer Tax on all properties within the City?

I have strong concerns with a vacancy tax since it is a tax designed to change behavior that does not necessarily produce revenue. The City Finance Director has presented information that a vacancy tax is expensive

to administer and enforce, and it could cost more than the revenue it produces. I'm also cautious about the transfer tax since a broad increase affects every property transaction, not just those directly tied to the housing or vacancy issues we're trying to solve. My standard for any new revenue measure is the same: the city should exhaust efficiency and existing resources first while expanding our economic base beyond tourism, tech and taxes. Any new tax needs a clear, transparent scope that produces value for all residents.



Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-Santa Barbara, endorsed Eric Friedman for Santa Barbara mayor.

"With Eric as Mayor, Santa Barbara will have steady, responsible leadership and I am proud to endorse him."

Salud Carbajal, Santa Barbara NewsPress, 9/1/2026.

SBRPA: Do you support Proposition 43, the Howard-Jarvis "Save Proposition 13" ballot initiative?

I don't support prop 43 for the following reasons. Local governments are getting squeezed by factors out of their control. From State and Federal mandates to high inflation costs and other factors. Yet the public relies upon the services that local governments provide more than any level of

Q&A from page 15

government. For example, public safety costs are rising faster than revenues can grow. If the public wants to fund public safety, or other services, it should be a fair vote in the same manner it is today. So, the question we need be asking is, if the public places a measure on the ballot, should a small minority of voters dictate to the majority whether or not those local services continue to be funded? In this case, where it is the public who placed the ballot measure, my preference is to let the public decide by a fair majority vote.

SBRPA: Are there any Departments, programs or elements in local government you would consider eliminating or reducing as a measure to reduce the city's financial exposure?

I believe every department should operate with clear objectives, a defined scope of work, and specific duties and projects they're accountable for delivering. That structure should be what determines their budget and their capacity.

These decisions can't be made without year-over-year data. Departments face different challenges at different times, and viewing their capacity and funding through that lens, and understanding that circumstances change, helps the city staff and prepare appropriately rather than react after the fact.

Any reductions would need to be evaluated holistically so any impacts are fully understood. It would be more effective to evaluate vacant positions as they arise to determine if they are still meeting a specific need.

SBRPA: Do you support reducing the number of Sworn Peace Officers and/or SBPD support staff authorized as of April 1, 2026?

No. I have consistently supported ensuring our Police Department has the staffing and resources it needs, including voting to move our new police station forward. I don't support reducing sworn officers or support staff levels.

Editor's Note: SBRPA reached out to the two frontrunner candidates vying to be the next mayor of Santa Barbara. Both Kristen Sneddon and Eric Friedman agreed to participate in the Q&A. Both candidates were given the same questions and same amount of time to respond. Mr. Friedman provided answers to the SBRPA questions and responded within the specified timeframe. Ms. Sneddon did not provide answers to the SBRPA questions.

ERIC'S PRIORITIES

Working for Santa Barbara

Eric's focus as mayor will be making sure that opportunity reaches the people who call Santa Barbara home through affordable housing, strong schools and libraries, and public services you can count on.



Affordable Housing



Fiscal Responsibility



Emergency Preparedness & Response



Environmental Sustainability

*The above is from Eric's webpage.
For more information, <https://www.voteericfriedman.com>*