The Referendum to Stop Santa Barbara's Rent Control

by Jay Reed

SBRPA is organizing a referendum to stop Santa Barbara's new rent control ordinance. Through the *Help Save Santa* Barbara Housing Committee, we have retained election counsel and a professional signature-gathering firm. Now we need members to help fund and carry out the effort. City Hall has voted. That does not mean the fight is over.

The council completed adoption Oct. 6. Our next step is not another round of testimony. It is a petition that can suspend the ordinance and require the council to repeal it or put it before voters.

Here is how we get there.

Under the full-text referendum process, we have 30 days from City Clerk attestation to gather and submit signatures. That is the clerk's formal authentication of the adopted ordinance, not the date someone posts it online. Counsel will confirm the filing deadline and petition requirements. Collection, checking and delivery must all fit inside that window.

Our working requirement is 5,535 valid signatures from registered voters within the City of Santa Barbara. We must gather substantially more because duplicates, registration problems and other defects can disqualify signatures. Owning property in the city is not enough: the signer must be a registered city voter. County residents outside city limits cannot sign this petition.

The operation has three parts. Ashlee Titus of *Bell, McAndrews & Hiltachk* handles election-law matters and petition review. NPC, our contracted signature-gathering firm, manages collection and processing. My firm, *Wheelhouse Strategies*, coordinates the campaign, vendors, communications and fundraising with committee leadership.

Professional circulators will work alongside volunteer support. NPC's agreement requires checking every signature, including volunteer signatures, and identifying duplicates. We will track progress throughout circulation.

A stack of petition sheets is not the finish line. A sufficient number of valid signatures is.



Members should coordinate volunteer collection with the committee and use only the approved petition. Signing a website form or expressing support by email does not replace signing the petition. Even members who cannot sign can introduce us to eligible voters and help organize opportunities to collect signatures.

Once we file, elections officials conduct their own verification, which can take several weeks. Our internal checks do not replace theirs. After certification, the council must either repeal the ordinance or submit it to voters. **A timely, sufficient petition suspends the challenged ordinance; it cannot take effect unless voters approve it.**

That is why qualification matters immediately, even before an election.

March 2027 has been discussed as a possible special-election date, but nothing is scheduled. Verification and council action determine the timetable, and other qualifying measures could affect election scheduling. We are also watching the separate just cause eviction proposal. Any challenge to that ordinance would require its own petition and deadline. We are not waiting for it to act on rent control.

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This is the qualification phase, not the later ballot campaign. Contributions now pay for legal preparation, petition printing, circulators, processing and verification. If the council sends the ordinance to voters, a separate election campaign and fundraising effort would follow.

Please contribute at *SaveSantaBarbara.com* (*https://www.savesantabarbara.com/*). If you have pledged, fulfill that commitment now. Crews, printing and verification must be paid for while the work is happening, not after the deadline.

Help beyond a contribution matters, too. Introduce potential donors. Host a briefing. Volunteer to collect signatures. Share the committee's information with friends and neighbors.

Visit *SaveSantaBarbara.com* (*https://www.savesantabarbara.com/*) for updates, contribution instructions and ways to help.

SBRPA has organized the effort. The professionals are on board. What happens next depends on whether we turn concern into signatures and funding while the window is open.

The council has had its say. Help us give voters theirs.



The Santa Barbara City Council discusses the Rent Stabilization Ordinance