

# Santa Barbara Happenings



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## **Previous Homeowner Refuses to Vacate Home After Completing the Sale; Buyer Left Holding the Bag**

After purchasing a home for \$560,000 in cash in January of 2020, a young couple in Riverside, California has been barred from moving into their residence by the previous owner. Though the seller has already accepted both the offer and the money, he refuses to vacate the home under claims that his case classifies as a COVID tenant situation. In reality, he was never a tenant of the couple before or after ownership changed. Despite continuing to reside on the property, the previous owner has shown no interest in taking care of it now that it is no longer in his name. Law enforcement told the couple that if they were in Arizona or Nevada this wouldn't be a problem and they could just go take their house back. However, in California, there's nothing law enforcement can do. The moral of this story is: next election pick a better Governor and state representative.

## **Gigantic Milpas Street Housing Project Sent Back for Refinement**

Housing developer Ed St. George and property owner Alan Bleecker designed an expansive four-story housing complex for 711 North Milpas Street. The project consists of 82 units, 16 of which are to be designated as affordable to moderate-income housing, in an effort to earn approval to build above the City's height limits. The proposal is considered to be the largest housing project proposal for the space thus far. It was met with harsh criticism by the City's Architectural Board of Review (ABR) for being too busy in design and not adequately utilizing the structure for its intended purpose. So, back to the drawing board.

## **Why Parental Choice Programs for Children's Education are Necessary**

Throughout the pandemic, teachers' unions have urged that public school classrooms remain closed. However, parents and students have

been greatly disadvantaged by this decision. In contrast, most private schools have remained open and have thrived.

In Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara Unified School District refused to offer an in class learning option throughout the pandemic, despite the hardship this imposed upon parents who needed to attend work and students who require a more hands-on and engaging learning environment than staring at a screen all day. Meanwhile, students who attended private schools such as Montessori Center School, Anacapa School, Providence, the Knox School of Santa Barbara, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel School were able to attend class in person, some as early as August of 2020. The SB Unified School District finally approved a full-time in-person learning schedule for elementary students, starting April 12, 2021.

Their response to the COVID-19 pandemic illuminates an ongoing problem with our public education system. On average, U.S. public schools spend \$15,000 per student per year. Comparatively, the average private school tuition is \$11,000 per year. Many parents pulled their children out of the public school system in order to receive the education their children needed during the pandemic. How can we justify the taxpayers' money going toward public education when it is not meeting students' needs?

Why don't parents have access to this money so that they can make the right educational decisions that will help their children flourish as students? A recent poll conducted found that out of 800 voters, 71% back school choice, which would allow parents to use the tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school that best suits their child's needs. Parental choice programs are needed now more than ever if we wish to see a well-educated, prospering generation of students. This pandemic shows a new approach is needed.

## **Limited Jury Trials Set to Hopefully Resume at Santa Barbara County Superior Court**

Since early March of 2020, Santa Barbara County Superior Court has stopped jury trials due to COVID-19. With looming concerns about defendants' rights to be heard in court (criminal defendants have a Constitutional right to a speedy jury trial or their case must be dismissed) and an increasing backlog in the justice system, the Court decided to move forward with jury trials, at least a limited amount of them. Criminal trials are to be held as the top priority but other jury trials are eligible as well. Plexiglass will provide separation from court staff and civilians. One jury trial will take place in the North County and one in the South County's largest court rooms.

## **Second and Third Dwelling Units in Single Family Neighborhoods**

The Santa Barbara County Planning Commission recently discussed amendments to ordinances regarding Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (JADUs).

The amendments are meant to streamline the ADU permitting process and reduce development standards. They aim to do so by increasing the number and type of ADUs permitted per lot (you and your neighbors' single-family home is now zoned for a duplex or triplex), only require replacement parking spaces for JADUs located within attached garages, reduce the permit processing time from 120 days to 60 days, and reduce the floor area restrictions and fees. An ADU will have to reflect the appearance and style of the existing structure (i.e.: colors, materials, roofing, and design) and ADUs and JADUs cannot be used for farmstays, homestays, or short-term rentals (a rental period less than 30 days). The Planning Commission unanimously approved the ordinance amendments, which will be sent to the Board of Supervisors for final approval.

## **Someone Has to Lead the Way: Texas Waives Goodbye to the CDC Eviction Moratorium**

The burden of the CDC's federal eviction moratorium has finally come to an end in Texas. The Texas Supreme Court directed courts in the state to stop honoring the moratorium on residential evictions, allowing new and paused eviction applications to finally move forward. The emergency order that forced the moratorium into effect expired on March 31 and has not yet been renewed, so landlords in Texas can finally breathe a sigh of relief after bearing the weight

of the pandemic's housing crisis on their backs for nearly a year. Landlords in California have not yet been granted such relief. With Governor Newsom's recall election on the horizon, perhaps a change in leadership will relieve residential landlords of this burden.

## **Upcoming Dates and Deadlines Regarding Newsom's Recall**

After receiving over 2 million signatures by the March 17<sup>th</sup> deadline, the Campaign to Recall Gavin Newsom is underway.

Once the Registrars in all 58 counties have verified the signatures received, the Secretary of State will notify Counties of the total signature count by May 9<sup>th</sup>. Immediately following this announcement, voters have from May 10<sup>th</sup> to June 21<sup>st</sup> to request to withdraw their names from the recall petitions.

It is expected that on September 17, the Secretary of State will have certified the recall and the Lieutenant Governor will set a date for the recall election, most likely to take place on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, or 30<sup>th</sup>. The filing deadline for candidates will be 59 days prior to the election. Due to California laws, these dates are subject to change.

## **Santa Barbara County Budget Overview: Last Year Business Suffered but County Government Thrived**

Many have faced financial hardships as a result of the pandemic, especially small businesses due to government-mandated shutdowns. It was expected that Santa Barbara County government had suffered with its residents. But the County did not suffer revenue shortfalls as a result of economic lockdown, even excluding federal and state bailout monies.

According to County budget hearings and a review of the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the County actually saw total operating revenue gains of 12.9%. While County residents faced such economic hardship such as layoffs, County employees faced no such layoffs, and received average compensation packages of \$157,000 per year each. Meanwhile, there are an estimated \$304 million of maintenance needs in Public Works that have been deferred, as well as \$56.1 million in Community Service maintenance deferrals. How about some trickle down to benefit roads and service districts?