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Numerous Ballot Initiatives Involving Affordable Housing will be Decided November 2016

by Michael Anderson // 2016, Fall

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On November 8, voters in at least 27 jurisdictions in seven states and the state of Rhode Island will vote on revenue measures to provide critical affordable housing options in their communities. Going to the ballot for approval by voters has always been one avenue to move housing trust funds forward. Some states require voter approval for certain revenue commitments (like California and Colorado) and others have established procedures enabling voter approval for local housing trust funds (Washington and Massachusetts, in particular). The track record is impressive for the most part ... just look at these two success stories:

- Massachusetts' Community Preservation Act enables local voters to commit property tax revenues to affordable housing, open space and historical preservation (at least 10% of the revenues must go to each area) and 161 communities have done so. Ten additional communities will consider joining the CPA movement this November.
- Seattle, Washington approved its sixth property tax levy to support affordable housing with nearly 71% of the votes in August. The \$290 million housing property levy is extended for seven years. Since 1981, Seattle has voted five times in favor of this levy and each levy has exceeded its goals. Bellingham, WA is another Washington community to follow suit and others are currently exploring this option.

Perhaps most exciting about this trend is putting affordable housing before the public in a meaningful way and seeing their widespread support that we take positive steps to ensure safe affordable homes in every community.

These campaigns typically occur in two phases. First is getting the initiative on the ballot either by a vote of council or through the collection of signatures. For instance, Baltimore advocates got their

initiative on the ballot thanks to the hard work of faith-based groups, unions, and others collecting more than 18,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot. Second is winning the vote on election day, which in some instances requires a majority vote while, in others, a two-third vote, depending on state requirements.

Bring Vancouver Home is a non-partisan campaign of private and non-profit partners committed to ensuring that everyone in Vancouver has the opportunity to live in a safe, secure, and healthy affordable home.

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How important could this be for electeds to hear from residents that we need to do something about housing in our neighborhoods!! Seattle has supported its housing trust fund for 35 years with property tax levies, doubled in this last vote ... with the public saying: yes, I will pay property taxes to provide everyone with a safe affordable home. The success in Seattle and Bellingham has spawned interest in Vancouver and seven other communities throughout the state to explore local initiatives.

Here is a list of jurisdictions that we are aware of with revenue measures on the November 2016 ballot.

California:

- **Alameda County, CA** Measure A1 is a \$580 million bond for low income people through homeowner and renter housing programs. [Measure A1 in Alameda County](#)
- **Berkeley, CA** Measure U1 would generate funds for new affordable homes through an increase in the business license tax for owners of larger multi-unit residential buildings.
- **Los Angeles, CA** Proposition HHH would allow the issuance of \$1.2 billion in general obligations bonds to provide safe, clean affordable housing for the homeless; facilities for mental health, drug and alcohol treatment; and facilities for housing assistance. and for those in danger of becoming homeless. Among several other initiatives on the ballot, the Build Better LA Initiative Ordinance JJJ would impose affordable housing mandates and labor requirements on residential developments above ten apartments that seek zoning changes or general plan amendments; fees in lieu would go into the City's Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
- **Oakland, CA** Measure KK is a \$600 million bond to support street repairs, affordable homes, and other essential community needs.
- **San Francisco, CA** Proposition K would increase the sales tax by .75 percentage points, a measure that would generate an additional \$50 million for homeless services and transportation. Proposition J would create a Homeless Housing and Services Fund to route \$1.2 billion into homeless housing and services over the next 25 years. [Propositions J and K in San Francisco](#) Several other measures are on the ballot as well.
- **Santa Clara County, CA** Measure A would authorize \$950 million in bond funds **to support affordable housing**. [Measure A in Santa Clara County](#)
- **San Mateo County, CA** Measure K extends a half-cent sales tax for 20 years, providing an estimated \$80 million a year, some of which will be for affordable housing. [Measure K in San Mateo County](#)
- **Santa Monica, CA** will vote on a half-cent sales tax increase to fund education and affordable housing. [Measure GSH in Santa Monica](#)

Eagle County, CO has placed ballot issue 1A to support a sales tax increase to fund affordable housing.

Baltimore, MD will vote on Question J to amend the City Charter to create a housing trust fund that would support fair and affordable housing for low income households. A dedicated revenue source is not part of Question J.

Massachusetts:

Ten Massachusetts jurisdictions will vote on levying a Community Preservation Act property tax levy,

which is used for affordable housing, open spaces and historical preservation: **Boston, Chelsea, Danvers, Holyoke, Hull, Norwood, Pittsfield, Rockland, South Hadley, and Springfield.**

North Carolina:

- **Asheville, NC** City Council approved a general obligation bond referendum that would generate \$74 million for public improvements divided into three categories, Housing Affordability, Parks & Recreation, and Streets, Sidewalks & Bike Lanes. Voters will vote separately on each category.
- **Greensboro, NC** placed a bond on the ballot including \$25 million for various affordable housing programs.
- **Orange County, NC** November ballot includes \$5 million for affordable housing.

Portland, OR voters will decide whether to approve a \$258.4 million bond (Measure 26-179) to preserve and build affordable housing.

Rhode Island Yes on 7! is a \$50 million housing opportunity bond, not connected to their state htfund, but continues their bond support for affordable housing across the state.

Vancouver, WA Proposition 1 would approve a housing property \$42 million 6-year tax levy and **create an Affordable Housing Fund to serve very low-income families and individuals.**

If you are aware of other ballot initiatives affecting funding for affordable housing or tied specifically to housing trust funds, please let the Housing Trust Fund Project know by emailing: manderson@communitychange.org.

For a good read on the nuances and campaigns for housing levies, check out: ‘We Know What Works’ by Kim Herman, ED of the Washington Housing Finance Commission: <http://wshfc.org/newsletter/index.htm>



PREVIOUS

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