

# East Palo Alto voters OK rent control in small turnout

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Voters in East Palo Alto have reinstated rent control, four months after it was suspended when opponents won a public vote on the measure.

With only 28 percent of the city's registered voters casting ballots, Measure A — which allows the city to limit rent increases — won by a tally of 1,522 to 1,135.

"This is a victory for the integrity of our city over big money," said city council member Ruben Abrica, a rent control advocate. "The homeowners group slandered us and tried to divide us. They presented themselves as a grass

roots movement, but it was outsiders with big money trying to take control of the city."

Jack Orr, a political consultant for the anti-rent control group, East Palo Alto Property Rights Committee, said supporters had turned out its voters in greater numbers.

"The opposition just turned out the west side renters better than we could turn out the homeowners on the east side," said Orr, whose group spent over \$61,000 to crush the rent control referendum.

"The most negative effect of that is that now there won't be any investor money coming into the city at all," he said.

As with earlier elections in East

Palo Alto, the voting on Tuesday was accompanied by allegations from both sides of politically motivated vandalism and charges that absentee ballots in residents' mailboxes had been tampered with.

A car belonging to Sonia Leonard, office manager of the East Palo Alto Private Property Rights Committee, was set afire and gutted early Tuesday. Rent control opponents linked the incident to Leonard's involvement in the campaign.

Spokesmen for the other side, the East Palo Alto Council of Tenants, said their signs and posters had been ripped down all over town on election day.

East Palo Alto's rent control

measure was enacted by the new city council in November, but it was suspended in December when property owners gathered enough signatures to force Tuesday's referendum.

The vote on Measure A was to determine whether rent increases over the next two years in East Palo Alto would be limited to increases in the Consumer Price Index. If the rent control measure is defeated, the city council cannot reintroduce it for another year.

The measure was the only issue facing East Palo Alto voters.

Property owners argued during the campaign that rent control would cause property values to plummet. Members of the East

Palo Alto Property Rights Committee, which used the anti-rent control slogan "No to Slums," contended that investors, who are sorely needed to improve the city's tax base, would be scared away by a rent-control law.

Opponents raised about \$61,000, hired a consultant and sent five mailings to residents. In contrast, supporters of rent control raised \$525 and stuck red signs that read "Vote Yes, Pay Less" on telephone poles.

Home and property owners in East Palo Alto number about 5,000; approximately 13,000 people live in rental units. But city officials had predicted less than a 50

percent turnout Tuesday from the city's 9,424 registered voters.

The referendum was the first in a series of three political scuffles expected to divide the year-old city in the coming months.

Petition signatures calling for an initiative to prohibit the city from setting any price controls on rental, sale or leased property are being counted by City Clerk Russ Averhart. Depending on the number of valid signatures, the initiative will either be included on the November ballot or taken up in a special election sometime before the general election.

A recall against four of the five city council members also has been threatened.