

Community Groups Feedback

This feedback is based on the candidate questionnaires and group interviews.

Be sure to share this document, we have limited copies!

Berkeley Progressive Alliance by Rob Wrenn

General Comment: This year's pool of candidates is both large and very strong and we could easily come up with two full slates of solid, qualified candidates. I hope those not chosen will consider being candidates again in a future election.

Christine Schwartz

Recommended.

Her life experience related to housing and her work with, and advocacy for, people with disabilities, low income people, etc. would be very relevant to service on the rent board.

Leah Simon-Weisberg

Recommended

As Legal Director of Tenants Together, she is highly qualified and her extensive experience would be useful on the Rent Board. The work she has been doing to spread rent control to other cities is important.

Alejandro Soto-Vigil

Recommended

Knows broader housing issues as well as rent control; deserving of re-election to a second term.

Matthew Lewis

Recommended

As a student active in housing issues and involved with a range of student groups could help attract student support for the slate.

Christina Murphy

Strongly Recommended

Should definitely be included in this year's slate; South Berkeley's residents, facing displacement, need a voice on the slate and on the board. Would be a strong campaigner; has already started campaigning.

Poki Namkung

Recommended

Administrative and policy skills gained as Health Officer in Berkeley and Santa Cruz would be helpful on the Rent Board and make her very electable.

Igor Tregub

Recommended

One of Berkeley's most effective progressive activists and commissioners. Was an able Rent Board commissioner and would be again if elected to a second term.

Note: I was not able to attend screening of the other candidates.

Berkeley Citizens Action by Paola Laverde

Candidate One - Christine Schwartz - Not Acceptable

Life long advocate with lots of energy and enthusiasm. Seems to have cursory knowledge of how the RB works because of her dealings with bad landlords. However, her suggestions that the rent board have counselors that are specifically dedicated to either pro tenant or pro landlord positions and to locate these separate counseling sessions in separate quarters for confidentiality purposes... showed her limited knowledge. She has great potential and could learn easily how the system works, but there are stronger candidates than her at this time. I think she will make an excellent candidate in two-years.

Candidate Three - Leah Simon-Weisberg - Highly Recommend

She is an excellent candidate, with very good qualifications to serve as a rent board commissioner: knows Berkeley's Rental law very well, is a state wide tenants' advocate as knowledge of how local and state government works. She has lots of ideas and has a vision for creating a Bay Area regional rent board. She would definitely bring a strong progressive voice to the board, and would hit the ground running. Excellent public speaker

Candidate Four - Alejandro Soto-Vigil - Highly Recommend

As an incumbent, Alejandro has a strong grasp on issues presently affecting Berkeley's rental housing market, as he also serves on the Housing Advisory Commission. As a RB commissioner he serves on the committee looking at staff and budgeting and has a good grasp on the challenges and opportunities presently facing the Rent Board with the increase in demand of services, need to hire more staff and recruit a new executive director when the present executive director steps down in two years. Very good speaker

Candidate Five - Matthew Lewis - Recommend

Cal student, who will graduate next year. Has passion and is involved in student government. He keenly aware of the housing issues affecting students and knows Berkeley's rent control law, plus he knows some of the future important challenges facing the board in the next few years. If elected he would learn the

system quickly. What makes Mr. Lewis most attractive is his student affiliations. Good speaker

Candidate Six - Eleanor Walden - Acceptable

Housing Rights Activist, former RB commissioner from 2002- 2008. Presently, Co-Chair of the Residents' Council at Redwood Gardens. She's a voice for Berkeley's seniors and the disabled. She knows how the RB system works and would bring great hindsight as to what can be done better on the board now that she has other experience dealing with housing issues. She's a good speaker

Candidate Seven - Thomas Lord - Not Acceptable

Berkeley Renter moved to get involved because of the changes happening in his neighborhood. He has also experienced eviction and understands first hand the fear and uncertainty renters feel when faced with eviction. He admits he doesn't have much administrative experience, nor is connected with any community organization. He has great potential, lots of enthusiasm and could learn easily how the system works, but there are stronger candidates that bring more to the table than him during this election cycle. Good speaker.

Candidate Eight - Christina Murphy - Highly Recommend Strong candidate,
community-housing activist, life long Berkeley resident, represents Berkeley's dwindling African American community, has great interest, desire and enthusiasm to serve the community at large on Berkeley's Rent Board. She is engaging and was not offended when asked how she would deal with a heckler that behaves like she does sometimes at the Berkeley City Council meetings. Her response is that she would like to interact with the person one-on-one to see what can be done to work things out. She admits she doesn't really know how the system works but is willing to learn. Excellent public speaker.

Candidate Nine - Poki Namkung - Recommend

Health activist who sees repairing Berkeley's housing crisis as a way to also improve the health of Berkeley residents who are either stressed out over the high cost of living in Berkeley or who live in fear of loosing their rental homes. As the former director of public health for Berkeley, she is a voice for Berkeley's aging baby boomer generation. She is well versed in how the system works, as she is on several statewide health related boards. Good public speaker.

Candidate Ten - Igor Tregub - Highly Recommend. Former Rent Control Commissioner, member of the Berkeley Housing Advisory Commission and Zoning Adjustment Boards. Was an effective Rent Board Commissioner during his first term and who has continued to be immersed in housing issues affecting Berkeley through his participation on the commissions. Has strong name recognition, understands how the system work. Says in the last 4 years he's gained wisdom and experience. Says his campaign this time will be smarter and more strategic. Wants to bring more gravitas and professionalism to the board. Excellent public speaker.

Candidate Eleven Marcia Levinson - Acceptable but... Two time former RB candidate, former Housing Advisory Commissioner, attends RB committee

meetings. Has solid grasp of how the system works, and according to her, has solid name recognition. She is a voice for Section 8 housing and Berkeley's aging boomer generation. She is sharp and enthusiastic. The only thing that worries me is that during the interview she admitted that back in 2010 she didn't keep her pledge not to run against the slate. She said she would keep her pledge this time, but there's now an element of lack of trust. I don't know. Excellent public speaker.

Candidate Twelve - Asa Dodsworth - Highly Recommend
Incumbent. Excellent grasp of housing issues in Berkeley and around the Bay Area. Strong, independent Progressive voice. Has strong ideas on how to improve housing within Berkeley and how to increase the number of housing units within Berkeley, while still maintaining strong rent control. As an incumbent, he still has much work to finish on the rent board. Very good public speaker. Very knowledgeable on how the system works and works well within the system.

Friends of Adeline, Olivia deBree

Candidate One: Christine Schwartz, Recommended

She is a tenant, has advocated for other tenants in her building, has experienced homelessness and fought her own landlord, so she understands the challenges tenants face from personal experience—it's not academic. She especially sees how difficult it is to advocate for yourself without access to an attorney, which happens often as tenant attorneys are overwhelmed.

GOTV: unclear which constituencies she can mobilize

Candidate Three: Leah Simon-Weisberg, Highly Recommended

She is the Legal Director of Tenants Together and has lived in Berkeley since 2009. She is a tenant, is interested in taking on Costa Hawkins and getting the Rent Board involved in this fight. She has a regional perspective that could be valuable. Not much experience in Berkeley politics, but understands the power of tenant organizing better than perhaps any other candidate. She worked with ACCE in Southern California and in Richmond, where TT did a rent strike in coordination with ACCE as part of their fight for rent control. She wants to support a movement that is community led. She was able to help people know what's worth fighting for (i.e. what's winnable) and is interested in anti-harassment ordinances, ways to make landlords afraid to harass tenants, as she's not sure existing ordinances are being enforced. She did not mention personal experience fighting a landlord.

GOTV: Unclear, she did not mention constituencies she can count on or Berkeley organizations she has relationships with.

Candidate Four: Alejandro Soto-Vigil: Highly Recommended

Alejandro is an incumbent and on Kriss Worthington's staff. He wants to get inclusionary units to accept Section 8 vouchers to stabilize the drop in African American residents in Berkeley. He also wants to see shorter RB meetings and feels the responsibility to pick a new ED will be an especially important job for the RB in the next term. He wants fees to increase so the RB can have more staff to deal with the big increase in the number of complaints to the RB and more communication with tenants to get them to advocate for items on the City Council agenda. He critiqued his own role in not focusing enough on organizing tenants in his current term.

GOTV: He has connections to Latino communities in Berkeley and relationships particularly in North and West Berkeley. He's very well-connected to Berkeley nonprofits through his history in Berkeley and work in Kriss' office. However, he didn't seem particularly connected to or focused on the student struggle with housing.

Candidate Five: Matthew Lewis, Highly Recommended

Matthew is a 4th year Cal student whose strengths included having a lot of ideas for the RB, coming across as very motivated, and having a very solid understanding of the importance of collective organizing and coalition building. He sees addressing student rental concerns as key to stopping the gentrification of Berkeley and slowing down rental increases, because their constant turnover from rental units means rent is increased often in rent controlled units and the higher rental prices push students further away from campus, thereby gentrifying South Berkeley.

Candidate Six: Eleanore Walden, Highly Recommended

Served 1 term from 2004-8. She is involved in the National HUD Association of tenants and interested in coalition building and the drop in African-American residents in Berkeley. She wants to see the RB serve the interest of Section 8 tenants and others under the BHA. She is involved in organizing and advocating for tenants where she lives and has been involved in organizing going back to the civil rights movement. She understands the fear tenants feel and believes small victories for tenants can help them come together in spite of their fear.

GOTV: Her constituency is seniors and people with disabilities.

Candidate Seven: Thomas Lord, Recommended

Thomas wants to create a subcommittee of the Rent Board focused on housing affordability with the goal of increasing the number of units with controlled prices. He points out that the Board has power of investigation and to hold public hearings and could use this power to focus attention on the drop in African American residents and to support tenant organizing. The Rent Board could also send a representative to meetings of tenants who are organizing on their own. He is a South Berkeley

tenant.

GOTV: No constituency mentioned.

Candidate Eight: Christina Murphy, Highly Recommended

Christina is a member of the Friends of Adeline and works at the Drop-In Center in South Berkeley, where she advocates for homeless clients. She is well-recognized and trusted in the African American community and among seniors in Berkeley. She is formerly homeless and now a tenant in South Berkeley. She is very concerned about the displacement of African American residents. She would bring dynamic energy, experience with door-to-door organizing, and a willingness to work very hard to get the vote out for the slate. Running for the RB is very personal for Christina—she sees it as a way to advocate for her community. She has the endorsement of Kriss Worthington, Max Anderson, and Jesse Aguirre.

GOTV: African American community and seniors in South Berkeley, homeless, nonprofit organizations, Friends of Adeline

Candidate Nine: Poki Namkung, Highly Recommended

Poki is an expert on health, epidemiology, and policy and a 1st generation immigrant, who sees the inherent connection between health and housing. She believes the RB needs to be a more activist body, including dealing with vacancy decontrol, being more involved in planning decisions, and addressing student housing concerns. She feels more data could fuel good policy changes. She is currently on the Community Health Commission and part of an effort to develop a wellness center in South Berkeley. She is impressed by the fact that the Rent Board doesn't just wait for complaints and wants it to continue to be proactive and do outreach. She was formerly head of the Public Health Department in Berkeley, where she was focused on creating community-based action teams and place-based public health. She is very aware of structural institutional racism and wants bottom-up approaches, with the community telling the City what it needs. She took on the City while head of the health department when the City would not publish a public health report on racial and income-oriented disparities. She also is knowledgeable about how to negotiate and deal with UC, as she had to do this in her health department role. She supports increased density that is focused on affordable housing.

GOTV: Poki has many connections through her public health work in Berkeley and role on the Community Health Commission. She is endorsed by Max Anderson.

Candidate Ten: Igor Tregub, Highly Recommended

Igor is a tenant who served a previous term on the Rent Board. He is currently on the ZAB and HAC and has been working to try to reduce displacement of African American residents, which he is very passionate about. He's a strong proponent of increased outreach to students and has

organized with students. Very knowledgeable about policy. He wants to be a servant-leader and bring the community's ideas to policy-making settings. Very good at fundraising, comes across as driven, committed, and principled. He wants the RB to be proactive about proposing change to the law. He also wishes to mentor less experienced, newer community leaders who join the Rent Board.

GOTV: Sierra Club, very well-connected to many community organizations, students, unions, seniors and people with disabilities.

Green Party of Alameda County by Bob Marsh

It's quite a challenge to rate these candidates for the Rent Board slate! All were passionate about the plight of renters in Berkeley and about the very real need for strong rent control. I have listed the 10 candidates who came to discuss their candidacy with our screening panel on the two evenings that I was able to come (I missed the last two candidates on the 3rd evening). I've tried to list them in order of my preference, most preferred first (note that there are ties in these rankings).

1. Leah Simon-Weisberg

A lawyer with Tenants Together, and a true expert in rent control. She actually wrote several of the rent control initiatives that will be voted on in neighboring cities later this year. She is also well spoken and would be an excellent candidate.

1. Christina Murphy

Perhaps the most passionate of all 10! She is very outspoken and unafraid to confront anyone representing developers or landlords, including our Mayor. Quite knowledgeable about rent law as well.

1. Alejandro Soto-Vigil

Incumbent Rent Board member, extremely well spoken, and knowledgeable. We should support him, especially as he has worked hard for Berkeley as an incumbent, and as a councilmember's aide.

2. Poki Namkung

I'm not sure that Ms. Namkung would be a good candidate as she speaks extremely carefully (as a scientist should). She is of course extremely knowledgeable, esp. about the impact of home environments on the health of all Berkleyans, and would make a good commissioner. She has a valuable and unique perspective that would help the Rent Board.

2. Igor Tregub

Former Rent Board commissioner, he lost re-election last time, but is a very hard worker, very knowledgeable. He should have appeal to the student community, as he has maintained ties since his graduation just a few years ago.

I felt that these next 4 candidates were all passionate about rent control, and with relevant experience. However it seemed to me that they would be a bit less effective as members of the slate than the 6 listed above.

3. Thomas Lord

3. Matthew Lewis

3. Christina Schwartz

3. Eleanor Walden

Note – While I do not have the authority to guarantee the following, it is a virtual certainty that the Green Party will endorse the entire slate, regardless of whom the Rent Board convention chooses for its 4 slate members. The GPAC will publish its endorsement in its well-respected Green Voter Guide, and will distribute ~10,000 copies throughout Berkeley before the election.

Students for Bernie Sanders by Soli Alpert/Isabel Song

Christine Schwartz:

Acceptable. We like Christine's advocacy work and perspective as someone who has been homeless and evicted, but worry that she doesn't fully grasp the role of the board and all its workings. Also, there is some concern as to the amount of time and energy she would be able to devote to the board and board activities due to her legal issues and other responsibilities.

Leah Simon-Weisberg

Highly Recommended. Leah's experience, knowledge and insight was easily the greatest out of all of those seeking the endorsement. Her extensive work in housing and legal experience make her an obvious choice, especially her work in crafting rent ordinances for other jurisdictions.

Alejandro Soto-Vigil

Highly Recommended. Alejandro has done a good job this term and that doesn't seem likely to change. He has already proven himself as a progressive, effective member of the board who can be elected.

Matthew Lewis

Highly Recommended. Matthew displays a remarkable breadth of knowledge and political experience for his age. He would be a fantastic candidate to champion student issues at the city level.

Eleanore Walden

Highly Recommended. Eleanore has both the personal experience as a housing advocate and the knowledge to serve as an effective member of the rent board. Her work at the local, regional, and national level is impressive, and she would be an effective representative for both the elderly and disabled communities, both of which are deeply effected by issues that come before the board.

Thomas Lord

Acceptable. Thomas displayed intelligence and passion for the issues in the meeting, but we question his experience and knowledge for the workings of the institution. While it is noble for an outsider from the political system to want to work for their community, the rent board calls for more than just an understanding of the law. I think more work with the city is called for.

Christina Murphy

Highly Recommended. Christina seems to have already begun her campaign and we have no intention of stopping her. As a community activist, she would be a vital voice for those in the South Berkeley area that have been marginalized. She seems to be an impassioned representative for the community, not just of renters but also home owners and small landlords, putting her in a position to help to mediate and bring together the various constituencies that the rent board serves.

Poki Namkung

Highly Recommended. Poki's record with the Public Health Department speaks for itself, and we have no doubt that she will be able to effectively translate that experience into an effective and fresh perspective on the rent board. Her expertise with data could also be vital in expanding the information that is available to the board in order for them to more effectively serve the community.

Igor Tregub

Highly Recommended. Igor has the connections, experience and knowledge to run an effective campaign. He has already demonstrated a proficiency at fundraising that is rare and valuable. Further, he clearly knows the rent laws in and out, has the political wherewithal to effectively operate at a multitude of levels within the arena of housing policy.

Marcia Levenson

Acceptable. Marica seems like an active and vocal advocate for the community, and has experience on a number of commissions. She failed to offer anything unique however, and her decision to run independently in 2010 is concerning.

Asa Dodsworth

Recommended. As an incumbent, Asa has already shown that he can win his race, and he displayed clear progressive credentials. He didn't really say anything to stand out in the interview though, and doesn't have the expertise or experience of some of the other applicants.

Peace and Freedom Party, Norma Harrison

Christine Schwartz	Highly Recommended >
Leah Simon-Weisberg	Highly Recommended >>
Alejandro Soto-Vigil	Highly Recommended
Matthew Lewis	Highly Recommended >>
Eleanore Walden	Highly Recommended
Thomas Lord	Highly Recommended >>
Christina Murphy	Highly Recommended >>
Poki Namkung	Highly Recommended >
Igor Tregub	Highly Recommended
Asa Dodsworth	Highly Recommended

Other candidates were not interviewed or rated by Peace and Freedom

4/9 - 4/10

2016 Evaluation Form/Candidates for Rent Board

Please use candidate rating of Highly Recommended, Recommended, Acceptable, Not Acceptable for consistency

Use back of sheet for additional notes/comments

- CAISERVE
- Cal
- Students for Equal Rights
- Invalid Education
- Wmael Contreras
- Karina Paredes

Candidate One - Christine Schwartz

Recommended / Acceptable

Seems enthusiastic, but may need some more experience.

Candidate Two - Stefan Elstrand

Highly Recommended

Has a good background working with Berkeley Housing Policy.

Candidate Three - Leah Simon-Weisberg

Highly Recommended

Clearly have extensive experience working to improve the condition of tenants; very policy focused.

Candidate Four - Alejandro Soto-Vigil

Definitely understands the deep issues that are found in housing. Will continue past work and will build upon it. Highly Recommended.

Candidate Five - Matthew Lewis

Highly Recommended

Student voice that truly understands housing issues and how to build coalitions.

Candidate Six ~~██████████~~ Elanor Walden

— Recommended / Acceptable

- * very passionate about the history of housing rights in the Bay Area and nation
- * has many connections, important community behind her, time/skills to do this

Candidate Seven ~~██████████~~ Tom Lord

— Acceptable

- * very knowledgeable about profession and housing
- * needs more experience working in Berkeley with coalitions and stakeholders in the housing crisis movement

Candidate Eight — Christina Murphy

Highly Recommended

- * has deep community ties, this is very important when running and trying to get folks excited to support
- * needs ~~██████████~~ to learn more about the inner workings/administrative and details of commission running

Candidate Nine — POKI

— Acceptable

- * very knowledgeable about profession in health, great amount of experience in ~~the~~ city government health matters, data
- * needs more experienced knowledge in housing affairs and in housing crisis movement
- * has deep passion about health and housing relationship

— Igor Tregub

~~██████████~~ Recommended

- * ~~don't~~ has an extensive amount of knowledge in regards to housing. Already has a term so it would be great to see him continue work with a new perspective to bring back.

Candidate Eleven (if necessary)

- * understands community
- * extensive network/leadership
- * has already been doing so much work, might not need the Rent Board as a platform to continue the work