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Our City Update

Volume 1, Issue 1 Fall - Winter 2004

The Organization Begins

Welcome To Our City!

Thank you for joining Our City, San Francisco's new nonprofit grassroots organization working year round on local political and community issues. Thanks to supporters like you, after just eight months we have gained our first 1,000 new members!

Our City was founded on the belief that San Franciscans support political change that will shift the balance of power back to communities, and that they are tired of politics as usual. For much too long, downtown businesses have successfully manipulated the political process in order to put their own financial interests ahead of our neighborhoods and schools.

Our mission is to help San Franciscans get involved in the political process by being better informed and organized.

When we educate each other on the issues, when we communicate with our elected officials, when we get out to organize and to vote - power shifts back to the people. That is why we are taking it to the streets, knocking on doors, and making change face to face, one person at a time.

In our first eight months, we have helped win important battles to preserve our neighborhoods, put cleaner busses on our streets, defeat a phony housing initiative, and raise public awareness on the need to preserve *affordable* housing.

Our City staff and volunteers are now working to promote solar power in San Francisco as an alternative to building new polluting power plants, and are also organizing to get city residents involved in the upcoming November 2nd election.



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March Election Victories

Yes on Proposition I - Diesel Bus Phase-Out

Various harmful conditions have been linked to particulate matter in diesel exhaust, including the development of asthma and the triggering of asthma attacks. Asthma is the number one health related cause of San Francisco children missing school, especially in the Bayview/Hunters Point area, which is directly downwind of the diesel bus yard, and other heavy particulate pollution sources such as PG&E's Hunters Point Power Plant.

In March 2004, Our City helped pass Prop I by a near 68% vote. The law requires MUNI to phase out its oldest and most polluting diesel busses over the next few years.



No on Proposition J - Phony 'Workforce' Housing

During the same March election, real estate speculators and the Chamber of Commerce tried to dupe voters into passing a massive subsidy for luxury high-rise apartment towers disguised as worker housing. Had the measure passed, it would have circumvented the city's established Planning Department approval process, which mandates input from local neighborhoods. Areas targeted for the high-rises, such as Potrero Hill's Dogpatch neighborhood had immediate cause to object. And residents all across the city recognized that their own communities could be next.

Our City joined a coalition of housing and neighborhood activists to defeat Prop J, and a historic 70% of voters cast a 'No' vote on the initiative.

Victory At City Hall

The Anti-Chain Store Ordinance

Introduced by Board President Matt Gonzalez, this new law provides clear notification to any neighborhood where a formula style chain store proposes a new location. It will help to protect locally owned independent businesses, and preserve the unique character of our communities from the homogenizing effect that chains are having across America.

Our City organized Noe Valley and Castro supporters to write letters to their Supervisor Bevan Dufty, who held the critical 8th vote needed to pass the legislation with a veto proof majority. Supervisor Dufty indeed voted 'Yes' as did Supervisors Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Maxwell, Peskin, McGoldrick, and Sandoval. "No" votes were Supervisors Alioto-Pier, Hall, and Ma. Mayor Newsom did not sign the legislation, but since a veto would be overturned, he opted to take no action for 30 days, thereby letting the Anti-Chain Store Ordinance become law on May 10, 2004.

Our Current Campaign: Solar Power Now!

Public health, global warming, war and peace, independence from fossil fuels, protection from ruthless energy and utility companies; all are causes of deep concern to San Francisco. A transition to renewable energy sources is both necessary and inevitable.

In November 2001, San Franciscans voted strongly in favor of renewable energy Propositions B and H. Among many other green energy goals, these measures were intended make San Francisco the most solar powered city on the planet by building a 50 megawatt solar network. Electricity savings generated by the solar program would have been used to cover its costs without raising taxes or energy bills.

Unfortunately, though it has been three years since voters adopted it, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) has not even drawn up plans for the project.

Our City is calling on Mayor Newsom to use the power of his office to demand that the SFPUC make building the solar network a top priority. So far, over 350 Our City supporters have written to Mayor Newsom!

If you have not yet written the Mayor on this critical issue, please take two minutes to do so today. Hand written/typed and signed letters are best. By public officials' mathematics each mailed letter stands for the views of hundreds of voters.

Election Reminder Instant Run-Off (Ranked Choice) Voting

This November, San Francisco voters will have their first chance to participate in Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). This innovation will save San Francisco millions of dollars by making runoff elections unnecessary. It also eliminates the 'spoiler' effect in local elections by ensuring that if your first choice doesn't win, your vote is transferred to your second or third choice, enabling you to *first* vote for who you really want in office and still cast a vote for a 'safe' choice in case your chosen candidate doesn't prevail.

This Election:

Rank Your Top Three Choices For Supervisor. If your first choice candidate receives the least number of votes, your vote is then given to your second choice. This continues until one candidate receives a majority.



Use the sample below, or compose your own. Remember to self address *both* your envelope and your enclosed letter so the Mayor will know you are a local resident...

Sample Letter

Dear Mayor Newsom,

Thank you for your past support of solar power and Propositions B and H in 2001.

Please use the influence of your office to make solar, wind and other renewable energy a top priority, and to demand that the S.F. Public Utilities Commission fully implement 2001's Propositions B and H immediately.

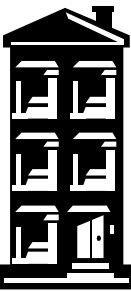
Thank you,

(Sign with printed name and address)

Mail your letter to:

**Mayor Gavin Newsom
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlet Pl,
San Francisco, CA 94102**

Core Report: The Battle To Protect Affordable Housing By Ending Demolitions For Profit



Anti-Demolition Ordinance

Rent prices and property values in San Francisco are at chronic sky-high rates. It is crucial that tenants receive all the protections possible to keep their rent at affordable levels. With this in mind, the Board of Supervisors passed Chris Daly's *Anti-Demolition Ordinance* in February of 2004. The ordinance outlawed the demolition of residential buildings containing 20 or more units unless the buildings were found to be truly unsafe.

This legislation was a key step in protecting the rights of tenants since rent control laws do not apply to rental units constructed after 1979. Therefore, any new buildings that are erected on the site of older residential units are exempt from rent control. So, demolitions of rent controlled buildings which are safe to live in, are nothing more than demolitions for profit, since they destroy rent controlled apartments in order to build newer units that have no such controls.

Because approximately 22 percent of San Francisco's tenants (who overall comprise two thirds of this city's population) live in rent controlled buildings of 20 units or more, Our City stood wholeheartedly in support of Supervisor Daly's ordinance.

Unfortunately, on March 5, 2004, Mayor Gavin Newsom vetoed this legislation. An effort to override the veto later that month failed by one vote - the vote of District 8 Supervisor Bevan Dufty - who had originally backed the legislation, but who then inexplicably reversed himself during the override vote. On that override 'Yes' (pro-tenant) votes were cast by Supervisors Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin and Sandoval. 'No' (anti-tenant) votes were cast by Supervisors Dufty, Hall Alioto-Pier, and Ma.

Housing Preservation Initiative

Still, the effort to preserve affordable housing in San Francisco was not over. Supervisor Daly decided to go directly to voters in November of 2004 and let them, rather than developers, decide whether the city would protect tenants from such demolitions for profit. The new ballot measure was named The Housing Preservation Initiative, and Our City helped in the gathering of nearly 20,000 signatures (almost double the amount needed) to get it placed on the ballot.

But one large property owner (who would be prevented by the measure from tearing down his 377 unit rent controlled complex named Trinity Plaza) successfully challenged its eligibility for the ballot on a technicality regarding outdated Department of Elections petition forms. These older forms did not include a new statement to the effect that a signer's personal information would not be used for any other purpose. Astoundingly, the judge on the case decided to "protect" the twenty thousand citizens who expressly wanted this legislation up for a vote, by ruling to remove it from the ballot...



Our City stands ready to work with the coalition of housing and community leaders that have united around this critical issue. Plans are underway to return the Housing Preservation Initiative to the ballot early as next March.

Our City Election Endorsements

Board Of Supervisors Races

District 1

Supervisor Jake McGoldrick

District 3

Supervisor Aaron Peskin

District 5

Three Equal Endorsements Listed In Random Order

Robert Haaland - Ross Mirkarimi - Lisa Feldstein

District 9:

1ST Choice: *Supervisor Tom Ammiano*

2ND Choice: *Renee Saucedo*

District 11

Supervisor Gerardo Sandoval

Ballot Measures

Prop A *YES* Affordable Housing Bonds

Prop D *YES* Better, More Accountable Government

Prop F *YES* Allows Non-Citizen Parents
To Vote in School Board Elections

Prop G *YES* Supports Health Care For All City Residents

Prop I *NO* Unnecessary Bureaucracy

Prop J *NO* Regressive Sales Tax

Prop K *NO* Unfair to Small Businesses -
Downtown Should Pay Their Fair Share

Prop L *NO* Deceptive - Could Endanger Historic Theaters

Prop N *YES* Withdraw U.S. Military Personnel From Iraq

Prop O *YES* Support City Health Services

Prop AA *YES* Badly Needed BART Funding



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