

Santa Monica Democratic Club

2022 Rent Control Board Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in the Santa Monica Democratic Club endorsement. Candidates seeking the endorsement of our Club must complete and return the following questionnaire. Note that only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration. Please send the completed questionnaire to smdemocrats@gmail.com by 11:59pm on August 26, 2022. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis as the questionnaires are returned.

Submitting this questionnaire constitutes acknowledgment that its contents are now part of the public record and may be reproduced and distributed by the Santa Monica Democratic Club.

General Information

Candidate Name: [Kurt Gonska](#)
Email Address: KurtGonskaForRentControlBoard@gmail.com
Phone Number: [Personal cell available upon request](#)
Candidate's Current Occupation: [Marketing and Talent Partnerships](#)
Candidate's Employer: [dick clark productions](#)
Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate): [N/A](#)

What qualifications do you bring to this office? [I've lived in rent-controlled apartments in Santa Monica since 2014 and have first-hand experience working through problems with my landlords with the assistance of the Rent Control Board and department staff. I've navigated complex tenant/landlord issues and want to help my fellow neighbors do the same. I'm passionate about rent control as a public policy, and I will adamantly defend it.](#)

Why are you running? [I'm running for Rent Control Board because I believe that Santa Monica is the vibrant community that it is because of rent control which has enabled people of diverse backgrounds and varying income levels to afford to live here. We want long term residents and newcomers to be able to stay in Santa Monica for many years – to put down roots and contribute to the strength of our community. Rent control is under attack and we need more young people to stand side by side with the activists who have fought for so long to first deliver rent control to Santa Monica in 1979 and subsequently defend it for decades.](#)

What are the top issues of your campaign? How do you plan to address those issues once elected? [The top issue of my campaign is supporting reduction of the current General Adjustment to 3%, and capping future GA's at a max of 3%. Both are on the ballot in Santa Monica this November, and I will be a strong advocate informing voters of these ballot measures. Once in office, we will need to continue a robust communication effort to ensure tenants are aware of the protections \(eviction moratorium\) and financial resources \(city funds\) available to those who cannot afford the 6% rent increase in effect between September 1 and January 31. We will also need to make sure tenants are aware of the required rent reduction that would apply in February \(once the ballot measure passes\).](#)

Please list all of your individual and/or organizational endorsements.

How long have you lived in Santa Monica? Where else have you lived, and why did you live there? I moved to Santa Monica in February 2014 from Chicago where I was born, raised, and attended college. In Santa Monica, I have lived in three rent-controlled apartments (Lincoln & Wilshire, San Vicente between Ocean & 4th, and currently 3rd & Washington).

Will you pledge to serve on City Council for your entire four year term? I will pledge to serve on the Rent Control Board for my entire four-year term.

Party / Activism

How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? If so, which party and why? I have been a registered Democrat since 2014 when I first registered to vote in California. Previously, I was registered to vote in Illinois where we do not register to parties. However, I have always considered myself a Democrat.

What is your experience with political activism? Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved? I first got involved in politics as an election judge at a polling place in a local precinct when I was in high school. I also volunteered for John Kerry's Presidential campaign while in high school. Subsequently, I worked on staff for several Democrats running for office:

- 2008: Field Organizer - Obama for America / Democratic Party of Virginia (Loudoun Co.)
- 2009: Field Organizer - Quigley for US Congress (Illinois)
- 2009: Campaign Manager - John Bell for House of Delegates (Northern Virginia)
- 2010: County Coordinator - Alexi Giannoulias for US Senate (Illinois)
- 2010: Field Director - Claypool for Assessor (Cook County, IL)
- 2011: Campaign Manager - Tim Cullerton for Alderman (Chicago, IL)
- 2011-12: Campaign Manager - Raja Krishnamoorthi for US Congress (Illinois)
- 2012: Finance Director - Bill Foster for US Congress (Illinois)
- 2013: District Director / Outreach Director - US Congressman Bill Foster (Illinois)
- 2013: Deputy Campaign Manager - Bill Daley for Governor (Illinois)
- 2014: Campaign Manager - Sandra Fluke for California State Senate (Los Angeles, CA)
- 2014: Campaign Manager - Brad Ashford for US Congress (Omaha, NE)
- 2015: Campaign Manager - Nanette Baragán for US Congress (Los Angeles, CA)

Which political candidates have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible. See list above

Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office? If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled. No. I do not support recalls. That's what elections are for.

Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization. Santa Monica Democratic Club and Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights (SMRR)

Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found here: <https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CDP-Platform-2022-FINAL-1-1.pdf> [Confirmed](#)

List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree. (This is in no way a litmus test for our endorsement; however, because the party delegates have worked so hard on every word of this platform document, we believe it will be a helpful guide to comprehend the policy differences between each candidate.) [I agree with all elements of the Affordable Housing section of the CDP Platform, as those pertain to the position of Santa Monica Rent Control Board Commissioner that I am seeking.](#)

Campaign Finance

Please indicate Yes or No to the following statements:

1. I pledge not to take contributions from oil, gas, and coal industry executives, lobbyists, and PACs. [Yes](#)
2. I pledge not to take contributions from police or law enforcement unions, lobbyists, and PACs. [Yes](#)
3. I pledge not to take contributions from development firms, lobbyists, and PACs. [Yes](#)

If you answered No to any of the above contribution questions, please explain here:

Social Justice

In what ways can the City of Santa Monica ensure that, in a real, practical sense, Black Lives Matter in our community? [First and foremost, we need to listen. Listen, listen, listen. Too often, people want to offer solutions without knowing what Black people actually need and want. Adding Black people to leadership roles through the City is crucial, but outreach to just some groups or individuals and relying too heavily on too few is woefully insufficient. Showing true commitment is not about simply reaching out; it's about building relationships by proving a persistent commitment over time.](#)

In what ways can the Rent Control Board best protect the undocumented residents of Santa Monica? [All existing tenant protections apply equally to undocumented residents of Santa Monica, but we need do extra outreach to ensure that our undocumented neighbors are aware of their rights and know that they can trust us to help them take full advantage of those rights.](#)

How would you use your position on the Rent Control Board to assist BIPOC and other disadvantaged residents of Santa Monica? [We need to ensure that BIPOC and other disadvantaged Santa Monicans know their rights and feel that we have their back. They need to feel that the protections and services offered by the Rent Control Board and City staff are meant for them, too, and that their concerns are being heard. This will require putting in the time to build and maintain relationships with these communities day in and day out.](#)

How do you plan to (in the moment) counteract any and all observed possible acts of micro-aggressions towards Women, African Americans, Hispanics, LGBTQ and others of marginalized communities from your fellow Boardmembers or members of the public? What is your experience in dealing with these situations? [By calling them out each and every time they appear. Zero tolerance. Understanding how people will respond to being called out is important, too, so that the approach can be tailored to achieve a constructive outcome.](#)

Housing / Development

What steps would you propose to address the homelessness crisis in the City of Santa Monica? [The most important first step is doing everything we can to urge voters to pass the real estate transfer tax that requires revenue to be used for affordable housing and homelessness prevention, and not the competing measure that fails to provide enough funding or guarantees. Additionally, we need to reduce the maximum General Adjustment to 3% to prevent our neighbors from being forced out of their homes and becoming at risk of homelessness.](#)

What is your philosophy on the appropriate scope of development that should be approved in Santa Monica? [There's no question that we desperately need more housing in Santa Monica. This means more development will be needed. However, in addition to affordable units we need housing that middle class families can afford. Recent development seems to be mostly focused on high end units \(expensive one and two bedrooms along Lincoln Ave\). Even though these developments increase the City's total housing inventory, the additional units have not put downward pressure on rent prices in the City.](#)

In what specific ways has Santa Monica failed to address the housing affordability crisis? What concrete steps would you take on the Rent Control Board to better address the crisis? [Not enough has been done to encourage new housing units that are affordable for the middle class. The City's focus on affordable housing for low-income earners is absolutely appropriate. Developers have focused on building high end units. Not enough has been done to encourage affordable units for the middle class. Additionally, while on the Rent Control Board, I will do everything within my power to protect our current rent-control inventory.](#)

How can the City of Santa Monica meet its next RHNA cycle goal of 6,153 new deed restricted affordable housing units for low and moderate income households and 2,721 new market rate housing units? [I support the property transfer tax measure that will appear on the ballot as the result of more than 10,000 signatures from Santa Monica residents. This measure will provide a significant amount of funding to make a serious impact on the RHNA goal.](#)

What is your assessment of the 2022 Housing Element proposed by City Council? [While the Housing Element is imperfect, it is crucial that the City complies with state mandates so as not to relinquish local control.](#)

Rent Control

What do you see as the mission or purpose of the Rent Control Charter, both at its founding and in its present form? [Fundamentally, the Rent Control Charter is meant to stabilize our community. When people decide to live here, we want them to be able to stay for the long term – to put down roots and become contributing members of the community. We want people of all income levels and diverse backgrounds to call Santa Monica home. That would not be possible without strong rent control protections.](#)

The Rent Board and its staff have committed to hosting a discussion about the city's rent control law with the community at large. The Charter has undergone periodic changes over its 43 year history. What areas of the Charter, if any, do you feel need enhancement or review at this time? Any changes should strengthen tenant protections. The charter allows for landlords to receive a fair return. I am not aware of any changes that would need to be made to benefit landlords.

Historically, how do you think landlords have fared regarding the return on their buildings, both before Costa-Hawkins and since? By law, landlords must receive a fair return on their buildings. There is a well-defined process for determining this and an established appeals process. The fact that very, very few landlords apply each year leads me to believe that the vast majority – if not all – landlords in Santa Monica are receiving a fair return on their buildings.

Are there any current trends in real estate speculation patterns that you see as an issue for the spirit of the Charter? Real estate speculation often leads to tenant harassment. This is unacceptable and we need to be vigilant in making sure tenants in buildings purchased by investors understand their rights and know that they can come to the Board with grievances about new owners / building managers.

What are the biggest challenges to keeping tenants in their homes in Santa Monica? I believe that efforts to chip away at and weaken rent control are afoot among some people who have their own self-interest in mind. I will continue to fight against these efforts and work to ensure that any changes to rent control are only those that will strengthen it. Protecting our current and future residents is paramount, as rising rents coupled with annual rent increases in the city are making it more and more difficult for our neighbors (including market-rate renters) to be able to afford to stay here to build community.

Do you feel that Costa-Hawkins and/or the Ellis Act need reforms, and if so, what are some examples of those reforms? Costa-Hawkins should be amended to allow cities and counties to apply rent control policies to new buildings constructed after passage. The Ellis Act should be amended to require landlords to own a property for a longer period of time before they can use the Act to evict tenants.

Ballot Measures

Do you support California Proposition 1? Yes

Do you support the citizens initiative ballot measure which would tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue for affordable housing, rent subsidy, and SMMUSD? Why/why not? Yes, because it raises an amount of revenue that can actually make a substantial impact on affordable housing, rent subsidies and SMMUSD, and the revenue is required to be used for those purposes (unlike the competing ballot measure).

Do you support the competing council-approved ballot measure which would tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue into the general fund? Why/why not? No, because it does not raise nearly enough revenue to make an impact and funds are not required to be used for affordable housing and homelessness prevention.

Do you support the rent control ballot measure which would permanently lower the rent control General Adjustment cap from 6% down to 3%? [Yes](#)

Do you support the SMC bond measure? [Yes](#)

Do you support the 1% transient occupancy tax ballot measure? [Yes](#)

Do you support the cannabis business tax ballot measure? [No](#)

Additional Questions

What role do you believe the Santa Monica Democratic Club should have in our City? [The Club should and does have a crucial role in our City. The Club reflects the values of the vast majority of Santa Monica residents, and goes to great lengths to make sure internal processes are equitable and transparent. Therefore, City officials should look to the Club as a strong voice that's in touch with the people.](#)

If elected, how would you attempt to interact with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations to ensure community buy-in on new proposals? [Communication is key. I would frequently consult with the Club and its leadership for advice and counsel on new policy. Even if we don't agree 100% of the time, I will always seek to understand the Club's perspective and to explain mine in an open and respectful dialogue.](#)