

Santa Monica Democratic Club 2026 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. Only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration. 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.

Please send the completed questionnaire to smdemocrats@gmail.com by 11:59pm on June 8, 2026. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis for the weekend of June 20/21 as the questionnaires are returned.

None of these questions shall be construed as litmus tests. There are no questions that must be answered a certain way to be considered for our endorsement.

General Information

Candidate Name: **Kurt Gonska**

Email Address: **kurtgonskaforrentcontrolboard@gmail.com**

Candidate's Current Occupation: **Political Campaign Manager**

Candidate's Employer: **Re-Elect Karen Bass for Mayor 2026**

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate):

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

I am currently a Commissioner on the Santa Monica Rent Control Board. Last year, I served as Board Chair. I have worked professionally on political campaigns for Democratic candidates for many years. I also have professional experience working in the entertainment industry in various communications, production, and marketing roles. Furthermore, I have lived in rent controlled apartments in Santa Monica for more than 12 years (including currently).

2. Why are you running?

I'm running to continue serving my fellow Santa Monica residents, protecting tenants and landlords of rent controlled units by ensuring our regulations meet the needs of today's housing environment, and fairly evaluating matters that come before the Board in its capacity as an appellate body.

3. What are the top issues of your campaign, and how do they differ from other candidates in this race? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?

- **Supporting the charter amendment ballot measures proposed by the Rent Control Board, including adjusting Commissioner term limits, reforming registration fee financing provisions, clarifying petition decision timelines, and new tenant occupancy protections related to allowing family members to move into rent controlled units.**
- **Working with staff to revamp how the office receives rent decrease petitions (and other documents and information) from the public to streamline their experience and reduce barriers to entry.**
- **Amending regulations for determining new maximum allowable in Tenant Not In Occupancy cases**

4. Please list all endorsements received to date (individual and organizational).

This is the first endorsement for which I'm applying.

5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica? Where else have you lived?

More than 12 years. I previously lived in Chicago and the Chicago suburbs where I grew up.

6. Will you pledge to serve on the Rent Control Board for your entire four year term?

Yes

7. What is your history of watching, attending, or speaking at Santa Monica Rent Control Board meetings? (If incumbent, prior to your own service.)

I was first exposed to the Santa Monica Rent Control Board when I had a problem with my apartment and filed a rent decrease petition. I then spoke before the Board to advocate for a regulation that was relevant to my situation and applied to everyone in my building as well as many other Santa Monica tenants.

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date?

None to date.

2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2026?

To be determined.

3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries who are out of step with their own values. Are there any such sources from which you would decline donations? If so, which?

I will not accept contributions from any companies, including real-estate developers.

Party / Activism

1. 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 first registered to vote when I was 18 years old, and have always been a Democrat. I've always been registered as a Democrat where applicable, such as in California.

2. 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 have volunteered and worked professionally on staff on dozens of political campaigns for local, state, and federal offices.

3. Which political candidates and/or ballot measures have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.

I have supported dozens of Democratic candidates, including those who I worked for on staff. Recently, I supported local leaders running for higher office, including Ben Allen and Sion Roy (I did not work directly for these candidates). I supported ballot measures GS and RC.

4. 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'm philosophically opposed to recalls. We have regular elections that allow voters to hold politicians accountable.

5. Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization.

Santa Monica Rent Control Board (Commissioner 2022-present, Board Chair 2025)

Santa Monica Democratic Club (Member)

Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights (Member)

6. Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found below. List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree.

<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CDP-Platform-2026-FINAL-Platform-Adopted-2.22.26.pdf>

Tenant Protections & Rent Control

1. What do you see as the mission or purpose of the Rent Control Law in the 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. With today's extraordinary high housing prices, that would not be possible if not for strong rent control protections.

2. What are the biggest challenges to keeping tenants in their homes in Santa Monica?

Rising costs, both in housing and the overall economy. Too many people are one missed paycheck away from their homes being at risk.

3. In light of the Justice for Renters Act failing to pass, and similar recent efforts to reform state housing laws falling short, how should the Rent Control Board operate effectively within the constraints of laws such as Costa-Hawkins and the Ellis Act? Should further attempts to repeal/reform these laws be pursued?

The Rent Control Board currently operates effectively within the constraints of Costa-Hawkins and the Ellis Act every day. Part of our role on the Board is to ensure we are still able to provide protections within the confines of those laws. That said, continued attempts to reform those laws should be pursued.

4. What types of legislation or other factors do you believe may threaten the stability of Rent Control housing in Santa Monica?

Sometimes, the biggest threats come from politicians and organizations claiming they're trying to help, but through lack of understanding or proper research actually create unintended consequences that put the legality and effectiveness of our rent control law at risk. We saw this in 2022 with the attempt to essentially means test

rent control by treating tenants differently based upon their rent amount compared to median prices. Such a scheme would have put the very existence of our rent control system on shaky legal ground.

5. Which communities in Santa Monica are most at risk of housing instability or displacement, and how would you use your position on the Rent Control Board to address these challenges?

Low income residents are most at risk. Also, the fastest growing homeless population across the region is senior citizen women. Using my position on the Rent Control Board, I often help residents navigate city resources and departments available to them to avoid housing instability or displacement. I also advocate for and support regulations that address their needs while still guaranteeing a fair return for landlords.

6. How do you think Santa Monica should address situations where tenants face eviction over small rental debt.

Santa Monica should enact law prohibiting eviction for small rental debt, and the city should provide additional funding to financially assist those facing eviction due to financial hardship.

7. Do you believe tenants in rent controlled units should have the right to add additional family members to their household without facing eviction? Why or why not?

Yes, as long as adhering to safety-related maximum occupancy limits.

8. Did you support SB 79 before it included any protections for existing rent-controlled housing and its tenants? Why or why not? Do you believe the anti-displacement provisions of SB 79 as adopted go far enough? Why or why not? Do you believe Santa Monica ought to implement greater protections for existing rent-controlled units and their tenants than SB 79 provides? Why or why not?

No, I did not support SB 79 before it included protections for existing rent-controlled housing and its tenants because of the potential to displace large numbers of tenants. No, I do not believe the anti-displacement provisions of SB 79 as adopted go far enough because, for example, buildings with 2 controlled units are not protected. Dozens of controlled units in Santa Monica are now potentially threatened under the final version of SB 79. Yes, I believe Santa Monica ought to implement greater protections for existing rent-controlled units and their tenants than SB 79 provides. One of my other concerns is that people who would ordinarily support new public transit projects will oppose them, fearing the redevelopment of their neighborhoods those projects could enable under SB 79.

Policy Implementation

9. The Rent Control Board often serves a quasi-judicial role in hearing petitions and interpreting regulations. How would you approach making fair, consistent decisions in cases where tenants and landlords present competing claims?

Our role in these cases is to determine if the Hearing Officer made any errors in applying regulations. We can overturn a Hearing Officer's decision only if their findings are not supported by any substantial evidence in the record. However, thinking we would have made a different judgement (for example, granting a higher decrease amount in a decrease petition case) is not necessarily a basis for overturning or adjusting a Hearing Officer's decision within the bounds of our legal authority.

10. Based on the first few years of implementation, how do you assess Measure GS? Are there any adjustments or clarifications you believe should be considered? If so, what and why?

Measure GS has not brought in the amount of revenue originally anticipated, as least to date. However, it is still providing desperately needed funds for tenant assistance. We must continuously asses whether it causes a measurable decrease in new housing development, and make adjustments if needed to avoid that. But only if it can be shown to actually have this negative impact.

Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the California Billionaire Tax Act, which would impose a one-time emergency 5% tax on those worth more than \$1B? Why or why not?

No. This type of tax works only if implemented at the federal level. If implemented in only one or some states, such as California, people - especially the ultra-rich - can easily relocate to a different state to avoid the tax, depriving California of much needed tax revenue.

2. Do you support the state ballot measure which would require voters to present government-issued identification when casting ballots? Why or why not?

No. It's a solution in search of a problem, and it will disenfranchise hundreds of thousands if not millions of eligible voters while preventing a negligible amount of exceptionally rare voter fraud.

3. Do you support the proposed state taxpayer initiative which would limit the ability of local governments to raise revenue through certain taxes and fees including real estate transfer taxes? Why or why not?

No. Local governments know their local funding needs best and should have the ability to raise revenue accordingly. Ultimately, they are accountable to voters who can make their wishes about taxes and fees known and ultimately vote out unresponsive elected officials.

4. Do you support the proposed parcel tax to fund SMMUSD? Why or why not?

Yes

5. Do you support the proposed ballot measure which would set aside 25% of the airport land for 3000 units of affordable housing, in addition to the remainder which would become a Great Park? Why or why not?

It is my understanding that this ballot measure is not moving forward. However, I do support some housing at the airport in addition to a Great Park.

Additional Questions

1. Should the Rent Control Board have the authority to place measures directly on the ballot without City Council approval? Why or why not?

Yes. Currently, the City Council is not obligated to approve ballot measure requests from the Rent Control Board, and can choose to alter any requests. Rent Control Board Commissioners are the subject matter experts – their expertise should not be filtered by a different government body.

2. Should term limits for the Rent Control Board be changed? Why or why not?

Yes. Rent Control Board term limits should be increased from two terms to three to align with City Council term limits.

3. 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?

I have and will continue to regularly attend and participate in Santa Monica Democratic Club and Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights meetings. I also engage in frequent conversation with organization leaders.

4. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire?

Accomplishments of current office holders running for re-election.

To name a few during my first term, I helped spearhead dollar amount increases to and reforms of the process for our Decrease Standards (dollar amounts awarded for loss or deterioration of housing services, amenities, or maintenance), banning algorithmic price fixing software, ensuring balanced/responsible budgets, hiring a new Executive Director, hiring a new General Counsel, and proposing charter amendments addressing four important reforms (Commissioner term limits, reforming registration fee financing provisions, clarifying petition decision timelines, and new tenant occupancy protections related to allowing family members to move into rent controlled units).

5. Please describe whether and how you used generative AI tools in preparing your responses. If elected, how would you use these tools in governance, if at all?

I did not use AI tools for this questionnaire. For governance, AI tools can be helpful with research, in particular to analyze how other communities adopt and implement housing regulations.