

Lori Alden

Petaluma, CA 94952

March 4, 2023

Dear Honorable Mayor and Petaluma City Council Members,

As a Petaluman who, like you, wants our city to be more welcoming to low-income families, I'm writing to object to the proposed Petaluma Tenant Protection Ordinance. I have a Ph.D. in economics and I taught the subject for over two decades at various California universities, including UC Davis and Sonoma State. I also have a real-estate broker's license and I own several rentals, though none of them are in Petaluma.

I believe the ordinance would have several unintended consequences:

1. By making the business of renting property more costly and difficult, the ordinance would, over time, discourage developers from building new rental housing and encourage landlords to sell off their existing holdings. As a result, the ordinance would, in the long run, make it harder for low-income families to move here.
2. The ordinance would discourage residents from building badly needed ADUs.
3. The ordinance, with its additional rules and reporting requirements would be especially onerous to "Mom and Pop" landlords who own just a single rental property. It's easier for Wall Street landlords to hire the staff necessary to navigate complex regulations.
4. By making it more difficult to get rid of problem tenants, the ordinance would discourage landlords from taking chances on riskier applicants. Discrimination is hard to prove since most landlords know better than to tell applicants why they weren't selected.
5. Since the ordinance would reduce the growth of rental housing in Petaluma, some of the costs of complying with it would be passed on to future tenants in the form of higher rents.
6. The ordinance would exacerbate Petaluma's reputation for being anti-business.

The ordinance is also unnecessary since the California laws are already highly favorable to tenants. I once leased a home in a nice Vallejo neighborhood to a woman with two adult children. She had a criminal record for ID theft and passing bad checks, but it's unlawful under California law to discriminate based on an applicant's criminal record.

Her children often threw loud parties and neighbors reported that she seemed to be running a business of some sort in the house, since parking spots on the street became scarce soon after she moved in. Because of California's tenant protections, there was little we could do.

A few months after the tenant moved in, the police came in force to search for her other son, who was wanted for armed robbery. Our tenant, who, the police believed, had been fencing stolen merchandise from the house, wouldn't come out, so the police shot canisters of tear gas through the windows.

The raid caused a lot of damage to the house, including broken windows, burned flooring (from the tear gas), broken pipes (from an attempt to hide evidence), a broken garbage disposal (from an attempt to destroy evidence), damaged landscaping, and broken shades (from an attempt to escape out a back window). The cost of repairing the damage exceeded the value of the security deposit.

We consulted a lawyer, who said we would not be able to evict the tenant under California law. Even if we went through the trouble and expense of proving that she'd used the house to commit a crime, her adult children (who were also on the lease) had the right to stay and invite her to live with them as a guest.

We ended up giving the tenant \$3,000 in "cash for keys" to move out, and not deducting a penny from her security deposit.

As a last point, I found the Petaluma Residential Tenancy Protections Community Survey questions to be biased and unprofessional. For example, Question #2 asked, "Do you believe the City should provide tenant protections in addition to those in the California Tenant Protection Act (TPA)?" I clicked no, but subsequent questions assumed my answer would be yes, and invited me to tailor the ordinance to my liking.

The survey likely frustrated (and therefore undercounted) many Petalumans like me who disapprove of the ordinance.

Sincerely,

Lori Alden