

**Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights
Rent Control Board Questionnaire - 2026**



Name: Sue Himmelrich

Email address: sue.himmelrich@gmail.com

Did you include the requested Additional Materials? Yes ☒ or No ☐

Please email completed Questionnaire and Additional Materials to
smrrinfo@gmail.com

Your Candidacy

1. What is your understanding of the role of a rent control board member?

In 1979, the voters of Santa Monica adopted the rent control charter amendment and established the rent control board to combat conditions that have persisted to this day: a rental market that, if left unregulated, would produce rapid rent increases that would either unduly burden or displace Santa Monica renters. The Board's tasks are limited (by the charter and state law) but significant in the lives of tenants: the Board insures that landlords receive a fair return on their investments while controlling rent increases and decreases, regulating what amenities are included in the rent and what a decrease in amenities is worth, and regulating the grounds for eviction and removal of rental units from the market.

2. Why are you running for Rent Control Board?

The Rent Control Board is the guardian of tenants' rights in Santa Monica granted by the City Charter to the more than 27,000 households living in rent-controlled units. I am disturbed by recent attacks on the very existence of rent control from not only landlords and developers, but also from allegedly pro-housing political actors who value quantity of housing over the safety and security of tenants who make their homes in our apartment stock. I am running to help assure that the board remains comprised of the most qualified and most committed rent-control and tenants' rights advocates.

3. What skills, background, and experience do you possess that prepare you for this office?

- I am a graduate of Harvard College and Columbia Law School. As a practicing attorney for more than 40 years, I am accustomed to reading, writing, editing and interpreting the law, including statutes and regulations such as the Rent Control Charter, Santa Monica Municipal Code, and state and federal law that governs this

board. I also have served as a mediator of legal disputes and as a temporary judge, roles also relevant to service on this board.

- I am a seasoned veteran of Santa Monica government and politics, having served on the Planning Commission for 18 months and the City Council for 8 years.

- I have a proven track record of fighting against tenant displacement and for renter's rights. I have litigated cases on behalf of tenants threatened with displacement as part of my work at Western Center on Law & Poverty. I was a proponent (and funder) of 2 successful Santa Monica ballot measures, Measure GS-GSH in 2016 and Measure GS in 2022, that sought to prevent tenant displacement and homelessness, and to address rent burden. These two measures have generated to date at least \$60 million in funding for tenant-related services and affordable housing creation in Santa Monica (as well as an additional at least \$60 million in funding for our public schools).

4. What sets you apart from the others running for Rent Control Board?

The top issue of my campaign is assuring that the board remains comprised of the most qualified and most committed rent-control and tenants' rights advocates. I believe my skill set and track record sets me apart from any other candidate.

Once elected, I will apply my skills to faithfully carry out the duties of a board member as set forth in the City Charter. Where I have discretion, I will use it to protect our neighbors living in rent-controlled units from displacement and abuse of their rights to the maximum extent possible, as well as to protect our rent-controlled housing stock (which is the City's principal middle-class housing stock). I will also use my bully pulpit to advocate for the City Council and the State to do the same.

5. List each organization other than SMRR whose endorsement you have sought and whether or not you completed a questionnaire for that organization. Provide a copy of any questionnaire(s) you submitted to any other organization(s).

Santa Monica Democratic Club (questionnaire attached)

6. Please list your main funders, endorsers, and supporters, and provide an overview of your campaign's financial progress to date.

I intend to self-fund my campaign as I did when successfully running for City Council in 2014 and 2018 (although I will not refuse donations, subject to question 7 below).

7. Will you accept donations from developers and/or their paid lobbyists for your campaign?

As in my previous campaigns, I will not take contributions from corporations or real estate developers/landlords (including my brothers who develop real estate in Maryland and Florida and are commercial landlords).

8. Please provide a list of all organizations with which you are a member, along with a description of leadership positions held, whether related to your civic, community or professional endeavors.

I have served in leadership roles in several capacities. I was a litigation partner in two national law firms prior to devoting my efforts to public interest law and public service. I was appointed to the Santa Monica Planning commission in 2013 and served in that capacity until I was elected to the Santa Monica City Council in 2014. I served on the City Council for 8 years, including two years as Mayor, and stepped down after completing my second term in 2022 as I promised I would when I first ran in 2014.

I am a member of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, the Santa Monica Democratic Club, Stonewall Democratic Club, West LA Democratic Club (board member for 2 years), Los Angeles County Democratic Party Central Committee (alternate), California Democratic Party (Executive Board for 4 years), Beverly Hills-West Hollywood Democratic Club, and Sierra Club.

SMRR

1. How long have you been a member of SMRR? Please outline the extent of your relationship and engagement with SMRR.

I joined SMRR after I became aware of the efforts of the City Council and Planning Commission to displace 30-plus residents of Village Trailer Park from their homes with inadequate compensation, without regard to their relocation stress, and without complying with the terms of the City's Affordable Housing Production Program. After 18 months on the Planning Commission, during which I insisted that real estate developers, our elected and appointed officials, and our staff adhere to the Affordable

Housing Production Program and Prop R, the voters elected me to the City Council where I continued my work in conjunction with SMRR.

2. Do you pledge, if elected, to attend SMRR's monthly Steering Committee meetings to provide the Rent Control Board report (in rotation with other SMRR supported Rent Control Board members)?

Yes. I have always attended SMRR steering committee meetings when humanly possible, in office and out of office.

3. Do you pledge, if elected, to discuss major policy issues related to your office with SMRR leaders prior to making decisions?

Yes.

Rent Control and Tenants Rights

1. Do you support Santa Monica's rent control law? Why or why not?

I have always supported Santa Monica's rent control law. I see rent control as another patch in the quilt of affordability I would like to build for all Santa Monica tenants. When people rent an apartment that is rent controlled, they are renting a home at a price with predictable and affordable rent increases that will allow them to stay for the long term. This is different from affordable housing, in which the government sets maximum rent levels and income limits for lower and moderate income households. We need both of these and much more (as discussed below) to allow Santa Monicans to remain safely in their homes, and to expand the ability of those who work here to afford to live here.

The single biggest challenge to keeping tenants in their homes in Santa Monica is affordability. This is a chronic problem for most of our City's lower income households. Indeed, according to the most recent HUD CHAS data, two out of ten renter households in Santa Monica are both lower income and paying more than half of their limited incomes for rent and utilities. And an additional one out of ten Santa Monica renter households are paying more than 30% and up to 50% of their limited incomes for rent and utilities. Rent control is essential to mitigating the rate at which this challenge worsens, and makes it easier to combat the existing problem. For example, I am pleased that the City already has deployed 2016 Measures GS-GSH money to provide ongoing income assistance to elderly rent-burdened renters, and is beginning to use 2022 GS money to provide flexible financial assistance to rent-burdened households facing the potential loss of their homes through eviction. The cost per household of these interventions is lower due to rent control than it otherwise would be.

The second biggest challenge is tenants' lack of knowledge and/or ability to assert their legal rights. The RCB and its staff play an essential educational role. In addition, I am pleased that the City is now expanding its funding to the Legal Aid Foundation to provide attorneys to assist both low income and now moderate income renters assert their rights when threatened with losing their homes.

The third biggest challenge is the threat of redevelopment of rent-controlled housing. The City has historically sought to mitigate this threat by channeling development to unoccupied, commercial, or industrial land along the commercial boulevards and in the downtown through more permissive zoning in those areas. The RCB has some power to protect existing housing (subject to certain State law limitations) and also is a critical voice in advocacy for the protection of existing rent-controlled housing. In addition, I am pleased that the City is working to create deed-restricted affordable housing for those who are displaced on the public land I fought to have included in the current housing element for this purpose, and using funds generated from 2016 Measure GS-GSH and 2022 Measure GS to support deed-restricted affordable housing creation.

2. Have you ever taken a proactive role to protect Santa Monica tenants? If so, please describe specifically what you did.

The last 13 years of my life have been committed to Santa Monica tenants, beginning with my advocacy for the tenants of Village Trailer Park. During my years on the City Council and the Planning Commission, I initiated and/or supported State and local legislation to reduce the annual cap on rent increases, to prevent evictions of teachers and students during the school year, to prevent landlord refusals to rent to Section 8 tenants, and to limit the proliferation of AirBnb and other temporary, short term rentals that take units away from those who want to make their homes here in Santa Monica. I further led the fight, together with SMRR, for 2016 Measures GS-GSH and 2022 GS (which, as just discussed, are providing the funding for long-term assistance to rent-burdened senior renters, emergency rental assistance and legal assistance for renters facing eviction, and the creation of deed-restricted affordable housing).

I also propounded local legislation to register lobbyists, create an audit committee with resident participation, and impose 12-year term limits on council members.

3. What can you point to that should give Santa Monica renters and their allies confidence that you are truly committed to renters' rights and Santa Monica's rent control law?

I was a leading proponent of 2016 Measure GS-GSH and 2022 citizens' initiative Measure GS, and a funder of successful campaigns for each of these Measures. In 2022 I voted to place Measure RC on the ballot as a member of the City Council, and advocated for its passage. Measure RC was adopted by the voters and lowered the cap on annual rent increases for rent-controlled units from 6% to 3% (as well as assured that the cap effectively applied to the 2021-2022 rent-control year). And in my day job at Western Center on Law and Poverty, I have actively litigated cases on behalf of renters throughout California.

4. What would you propose, if anything, to improve Santa Monica rent control and/or to strengthen tenant protections (including code enforcement)?

I support the passage of the current RCB's proposed Charter Amendments to impose a minimum threshold of rent owed for a landlord to be able to evict a tenant, and to allow rent-control tenants to invite others into their homes to live without triggering eviction by the landlord. In addition, I believe code enforcement needs reform to make it more responsive to tenants, and I also believe that the metrics for amenity reductions may benefit from closer analysis of their economic impacts. These are two additional problem areas that I believe we can solve.

5. Do you think it is appropriate for the City Council to propose changes to the Rent Control law without full involvement of the Rent Control Board and tenant advocates?

No. Indeed, we saw an example of how this can go wrong when Councilmember Negrete proposed a landlord-initiated scheme to modify rent control in a manner that would not have guaranteed landlords a fair return on investment and ignored the underlying legal foundation of rent control. We need to see more collaboration on all matters involving displacement of Santa Monica renters from their homes, and disruption of our safety net for lower income Santa Monicans.

6. Which is more important to you: Preserving controlled rental units and retaining existing renters, or allowing temporary or permanent displacement of tenants who are occupying aging controlled housing stock to replace old buildings with new ones? Please explain.

My position on tenant displacement is inflexible – tenants should never be displaced from their homes unless absolutely necessary for public safety reasons. There is sufficient room for new market-rate development along the boulevards and in downtown, as our housing plans always contemplated. As we have seen with victims of the Palisades and Eaton fires, relocation stress is real and profoundly affects people

who are evicted in the same manner as a natural disaster. Our aging controlled housing stock is the only housing in our city affordable to middle-income households (as confirmed by the RCB's annual report), and we must preserve it as far as humanly possible.

7. Did you support the original version of SB79, which lacked effective antidisplacement protections and protections for rent controlled housing stock? Why or why not? What is your opinion of the version of SB79 that was adopted? Explain.

I did not support SB 79 before it included any protections for rent-controlled housing and was proud of our current rent board for opposing it unless amended to protect all rent-controlled housing (which unfortunately is not the case for rent-controlled properties of only two-units). My position on tenant displacement is inflexible – tenants should never be displaced from their homes unless absolutely necessary for public safety reasons. There is sufficient room for new market-rate development along the boulevards and in downtown, as our housing plans always contemplated.

8. Do you support the City's laws regarding short term housing, corporate housing, Airbnb? Why or why not?

Yes and I was on the council and a contributor to the language that the council adopted regarding corporate housing and AirBNB. We must create and preserve as much permanent residential housing as possible. It is our residents, not our visitors, who create the magical city we inhabit. I believe we should maintain this priority.

9. Do you support city financing of emergency assistance to renters at risk of losing their homes, such as the recently adopted Santa Monica Renter Aid program? Why or why not?

Yes. As noted above, HUD estimates that two out of ten Santa Monica renter households are lower income and pay more than half of their limited income for rent and utilities, and another one in ten are lower income and pay more than 30% and up to 50% of their limited income for rent and utilities. These households are often just one economic shock (illness, loss of employment, etc.) from missing a rental payment and losing their home. Preventing this through emergency assistance is critical to our neighbors facing such a shock, and to our efforts to keep Santa Monica an economically diverse community. This is one of the reasons why I was an official proponent of 2022 Measure GS, which is funding an expansion of such emergency assistance.

10. Do you support city financing of free legal counsel to all lower and moderate income renters facing the threat of eviction? Why or why not?

Yes. We know that 95% of unrepresented tenants lose their cases. The unequal bargaining power between a represented landlord and an unrepresented tenant leaves the tenant at the mercy of the landlord. We should prevent this. This is one of the reasons why I was an official proponent of 2022 Measure GS, which is funding an expansion of such free legal counsel.

11. Do you support increasing local funding for programs providing ongoing income support to severely rent burdened renters, such as the Preserve Our Diversity (POD) program for seniors? If so, what additional households do you believe should receive ongoing income support?

Currently the POD program serves only seniors in rent controlled housing. This should be broadly expanded to families and persons with disabilities in view of the rising cost of living and our families' growing inability to meet all of their life needs. Our Santa Monica neighbors who face severe rent-burden are unable to adequately meet their other needs, including nutritional needs, medical needs and the educational needs of their children. This is intolerable. This is one of the reasons why I was an official proponent of 2022 Measure GS, which provides funding that can be used for an expansion of our City's income support programs.

12. Voter approved 2022 Measure GS contemplated that an additional 5% transfer tax on sales of properties for \$8 million or more would go to providing additional funds for emergency and ongoing income support programs, the preservation or creation of deed-restricted affordable housing, right to counsel, and other programs aimed at preserving existing tenancies of and units serving lower and moderate income households (as well as to the public schools). The City Council already has directed a portion of the funds raised be used for the Santa Monica Renter Aid program, expansion of the right to counsel, and for a pilot predictive model program to prevent homelessness. But on June 22, AB-736 in Sacramento was gutted and amended so that, if passed, it would cap the total transfer tax rate for all commercial and multifamily property in such a way that only 0.9% would go into the purposes outlined in 2022 Measure GS. Given that the first \$10 million raised by 2022 Measure GS goes to the public schools, and that a City Council commissioned report in 2022 found that 93.4% of the total value of all transfers of \$8 million or more during the prior decade came from commercial and multi-family properties, AB-736 if passed will decimate the funding for homelessness prevention and affordable housing that 2022 Measure GS otherwise could provide.

- a. Do you support AB-736? Why or why not?

I do not. It would gut the funding stream created by 2022 Measure GS, without providing any replacement funding. As a result, the City's expansion of its emergency renter assistance, free legal counsel to tenants facing eviction, ongoing income assistance, and affordable housing creation programs would be eliminated. I am offended by the State's attempt to overrule the will of the voters who adopted local transfer taxes here and elsewhere in California, and to defund these lifeline programs from renters here and in Los Angeles (just as it did back in 2012 when it eliminated redevelopment funding). Santa Monica has already taken steps to incentivize new housing development, and the City and its voters are the ones best positioned to determine what is right for our City, not the monied interests and their highly compensated lobbyists who negotiated the terms of this bill.

b. Do you support any other changes to 2022 Measure GS (if so, specify what changes)? Why or why not?

Not at this time. We remain stuck at the bottom of the real estate cycle as Trump's tariffs, Trump's deportations, Trump's attacks on the independence of the Federal Reserve, and Trump's Iran war have kept interest rates at extremely high levels, and increased the costs of construction labor and material. Despite these headwinds,, over its first three years Measure GS has generated \$30 million for our public schools, and \$50 million for the Homelessness Prevention and Affordable Housing Fund. City Council is now beginning to deploy those latter funds, including \$6 million for flexible financial assistance to at risk renters, \$2.5 million for additional attorneys for lower and moderate income renters, and \$800,000 for a one year pilot program to identify and proactively assist the currently housed Santa Monicans most at risk of becoming homeless. The GS Commission is recommending that Council make another \$23.5 million available to support creation of new affordable housing. None of this—or the further expansion of income support programs to rent burdened households which City Council directed Staff to explore as part of the “affordability agenda”—would be possible without 2022 Measure GS.

I supported in principle (although not in every detail) the City Council's efforts to put market rate developers in a position to move forward with development of their properties—despite all of the current economic headwinds—through a new local density bonus program that allows the inclusionary affordable housing to be built offsite. I believe that an realistic opportunity for macro-economic conditions to improve and the new offsite program to kick in should pass before any possible changes to Measure GS are considered (and any changes adopted should be revenue neutral to the purposes supported by Measure GS).

c. Do you support finding some other local funding source for homelessness prevention and affordable housing programs? If so, what source?

For similar reasons, I do not see the need to find new local taxes for such programs until we see the impact of 2022 Measure GS over a full real estate cycle. However, I do support the City developing a social housing development model that could use bank financing to create below-market rate housing.

But we do need support from additional levels of government. The State has steadily starved cities of funding for homelessness prevention and affordable housing since the repeal of redevelopment. Unlike many other cities, Santa Monica used some 40% of its tax increment redevelopment funding to successfully develop affordable housing (twice the amount required by State law). Those funds never have been restored to our City, and overall State funding for affordable housing has never fully returned to the levels in place when redevelopment was ended. I believe we need the state to backfill the funds it snatched back at least to the levels that existed prior to 2012, and we need the federal government to step up its funding (e.g., by fully funding the Section 8 program).

State Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the Howard Jarvis measure (or any substitute for that measure) to require a two-thirds vote on any and every form of new local tax? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure?

I oppose this initiative because I believe that wealth inequality is eroding the quality of life for all but the wealthiest among us. The initiative power in California is a powerful and effective tool to allow all voters to decide whether they wish to impose a tax on themselves for a specific purpose they believe is being neglected by a simple majority vote after enough signatures are collected. This is a daunting task, as I know first-hand after 2022's Measure GS, which I funded and worked on daily through the election cycle. A small minority of voters (33.3% plus one) should not have veto power over the majority of voters. Similarly, local government's power to ask voters by a simple majority to impose a tax on themselves by a simple majority to provide additional general revenue for public services is critical to ensure the quality of life here and throughout California. Again, a small minority of voters (33.3% plus one) should not have veto power over the majority of voters.

I will most definitely urge all Santa Monica voters, including my supporters, to vote no on this measure (which I understand will be a modified version that does not negate past voter approved taxes, but only applies prospectively).

2. Do you support the measure to require that any ballot measure imposing a new super-majority vote requirement must itself pass by that same super-majority in order to become effective? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your

supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure (assuming it appears on the ballot)?

Yes. It is a matter of simple fairness to demand that a measure that requires a super-majority for future citizen initiatives and government ballot measures should have to command that same super-majority.

I will most definitely urge all Santa Monica voters, including my supporters, to vote yes on this measure if it appears on the ballot, but I understand that it is not going to appear on the ballot in exchange for the substitute measure described above replacing to the original Howard Jarvis measure).

3. Do you support the measure to condition the right to vote on new voter identification requirements? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure?

I oppose this measure because it will suppress legitimate voter participation in our elections and impose unnecessary time delays on those voters who do participate, all to solve a “problem” that does not exist except in the imagination of President Trump and his MAGA supporters. And I will most definitely urge all Santa Monica voters, including my supporters, to vote no on this measure.