

LOCAL NEWS

Marin supervisors freeze rent in parts of county

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Marin County supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to freeze rents in two census tracts facing greater impacts from the pandemic.

The freeze, which will expire Dec. 31, applies to census tract 1330 in western Marin and census tract 1290 in Marin City. The coastal tract includes Dillon Beach, Tomales, Marshall, Point Reyes Station and Nicasio.

“These two census tracts really bubbled to the top in the county of Marin,” Angela Nicholson, an assistant Marin County administrator, told supervisors. “Census tract 1330 has a comparatively higher risk of COVID-19, and in Marin City census tract 1290, there is a high potential of COVID impact due to overcrowding.”

The county’s move follows similar action taken recently by San Rafael and Novato.

Last month, San Rafael froze rents in two census tracts that include the city’s predominantly Latino Canal neighborhood. In tract 1122.01, Latino residents comprise 89% of the population; in tract 1122.02, 67%.

Novato followed suit a week later, freezing rents in three census tracts that have high coronavirus infection rates and overcrowded housing. The Latino population in those tracts range from 16%, the countywide average, to 33%.

The supervisors’ decision was hailed by the leaders of several community organizations advocating for renters.



“This last year has been chaotic for everyone but renters, essential workers, and immigrants have borne the brunt of the economic and health impacts,” said Sami Mericle, a representative of the Marin Organizing Committee, which lobbied hard for the rent freeze.

Caroline Peattie, executive director of Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California, said, “For people living in the two census tracts, many of whom are members of protected classes, the prospect of rent increase at this time is catastrophic.”

“Protecting renters who are disproportionately black and Latinx from displacement is one way of addressing some of the stark racial inequalities in the county,” Peattie said.

Lucie Hollingsworth, a senior attorney with Legal Aid of Marin, praised the supervisors for enacting the freeze, but said they should go further and ban all evictions in the county with the exception of those necessary to protect health and safety, as Sonoma County has done.

“At Legal Aid of Marin, we’ve seen 10 eviction notices just in the past two weeks,” Hollingsworth said. “All of these notices would be invalid in Sonoma County.”

However, Alex Khalfin, a spokesman for the California Apartment Association, said, “I strongly disagree with the notion that the proposed rent control measure will help tenants who are unable to pay rent.”

“Furthermore,” Khalfin said, “rent control policies are likely to have long-term negative impacts on the county’s ability to meet its housing goals.”

Khalfin called on the supervisors to require tenants to submit a declaration that they are experiencing economic hardship due to COVID-19 before being granted protection from rent increases. He also requested that the moratorium expire June 30, when a statewide moratorium on residential evictions is due to sunset, instead of Dec. 31.

Supervisor Damon Connolly said, “The fact is, overall rents are not increasing significantly in Marin right now. I think the average is about 1.8%.”

However, Connolly said the rent freeze was justified as a “prophylactic measure” to ensure that marginalized communities are protected as conditions change.

Marin County’s rent freeze will not apply to single-family dwellings, condominiums and apartments built after 1995 because of a state law that prohibits rent control on such properties.



Marin County Counsel Brian Washington confirmed Tuesday that the freeze will not affect tenants at Ridgeway Apartments in Marin City and similar properties with apartments that are deed-restricted to provide housing for low-income residents.

St. Anton Capital, which owns the 225-apartment complex, recently raised the rents of several of tenants.

Washington told supervisors, “The Tenant Protection Act, which allows California local entities to do rent control legislation, exempts low-income housing restricted by deed or agreement, so we are not able to apply this to Ridgeway.”

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