



HOUSING PRESERVATION NEWS

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New Preservation Challenges: The Coalition for Economic Survival and the Defeat of Proposition 98

Editor's Note: In the last issue of Housing Preservation News we focused on the Los Angeles Housing Department's successful preservation program. An essential partner in preserving affordable homes in any community are the people who live in these apartments and the organizations that work with them to preserve their homes. In the Los Angeles area, the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) plays a crucial role in providing outreach and education to residents who may not have information about either the threat to their homes or available options and strategies to preserve the affordability of their homes. CES has worked tirelessly to protect these residents and have helped facilitate the preservation of hundreds of affordable apartments.

The Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) has a lot to celebrate these days. And they're not alone. CES was just one organization in a broad coalition of over 300 groups that came together this spring to publicly oppose and defeat Proposition 98, a ballot measure that would have eliminated renter protections and rent control in the state of California.

The coalition opposing the bill represented a wide-spectrum of interests, many of who found themselves working alongside their past opponents. Larry Gross, the Executive Director of CES, was especially surprised by the diverse interests represented within the coalition.

"It brought people together that never work together," commented Mr. Gross, who helped lead the "No on 98/Yes on 99" campaign with CES. "You had traditional adversaries from all sectors... you had the Sierra Club and National Wildlife Federation working together with the Builder's Association. You had Boxer and Feinstein working together with Schwarzenegger. I never thought I'd be in the same coalition. But this coalition had it because Proposition 98 was so devastating to so many people in so many ways."

In addition to eliminating rent control and renter protections, Proposition 98 would have also affected the powers of cities to enforce the development and preservation of affordable housing.

"Not only would we lose existing housing, but it would prohibit cities from developing ordinances and regulations and laws to produce new affordable housing. Laws such as inclusionary housing would be prohibited if Proposition 98 had passed", said Mr. Gross.

While rejecting Proposition 98, voters overwhelmingly endorsed Proposition 99, a second ballot measure that will prohibit public agencies from using eminent domain powers for private commercial development, but allow the use of eminent domain for public benefit. For Mr. Gross, who has spent nearly 35 years with CES educating and organizing tenants in Los Angeles on their rights to affordable, decent and safe housing, the need for preservation in California is even more critical today than it was in the mid-1970s.

"There's more at stake these days. If the tenant was to get displaced, they're not looking at necessarily finding higher rents in their neighborhoods and staying in their neighborhoods--they're looking at leaving the city, the county or the state, because the housing costs are way out of their means," said Mr. Gross.

Looking Ahead

As thousands of affordable apartments could potentially revert to market rate over the next decade, CES and other housing advocates are faced with the ever-evolving challenge of preserving affordable housing for low-income populations. Looking back over three decades of housing advocacy, Mr. Gross recognizes that the tenant successes of the past are always at-risk. “In the early 70s, you know, there was no rent control. [We were] fighting for those basic rights. [Now] we’re fighting to maintain our victories and expand on them.”

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