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Our Top Story

Low-Income Housing Tops Ballots Across The Country

At least 12 U.S. cities and several counties will be voting on affordable housing issues Nov. 8, a topic considered a key issue for more than half of Americans polled even though it failed to generate much more than lip service in the din of the presidential campaigns.

The focus on affordable housing for middle-class workers, particularly on keeping public service workers in the communities they serve, and subsidized housing for poor families comes at a time of rising housing prices and lack of rental housing availability in many parts of the country.

Most of the housing ballot issues concentrate on housing construction and preservation as well as more support for solutions to the growing homeless dilemma across the country.

The housing appeal to the public conscience comes at a time when housing prices are skyrocketing after years of economic doldrums following the 2008 housing market debacle, an explosion of rental costs reflecting a diminishing supply of cheap rental housing, and an 89% drop in federal and state funding for affordable housing.

Los Angeles hosts the most hefty ballot proposal and a plea from government leaders to raise property taxes to pay for housing the homeless in a region where homelessness is exploding well beyond the region's ability to pay for solutions. Proposition H would raise \$1.2 billion to provide housing for the city's 28,000 homeless people.

Initiative Ordinance J on the Los Angeles ballot would allow the city to conform to HUD's new zoning density concepts. It would impose new rules for developers seeking to build low-income housing in low-density -- single-family home neighborhoods -- by shelving local zoning rules to permit apartment building construction.

In Alameda County, CA, which embraces the city of Oakland, Measure A1 is the main local issue on the ballot. Voters are asked to approve a \$580 million bond issue to help finance an array of housing needs including rental housing expansion, deferred maintenance for the county's subsidized housing portfolio, and a \$120 million set-aside for self-help homeownership initiatives such as downpayment-assistance loans.

California dominates the housing initiatives ballot issue front with at least seven of the 12 or more local efforts nationally.

Oakland, CA wants voter permission to float a \$600 million bond issue to finance infrastructure improvements -- repair city streets and public facilities -- while setting aside \$100 million solely for affordable housing construction.

San Diego officials want voter approval to increase public acceptance to raise money for construction of 38,680 low-income housing rental units without raising taxes.

San Francisco voters must sort through 16 ballot issues including several addressing low-income housing. Proposition C would provide loans to finance the purchase and rehabilitation of affordable housing units. Proposition J would finance homeless services and transportation if voters approve a sales tax increase. Proposition P would provide for competitive bidding for low-income housing on city-owned property. Proposition U would establish low-income housing set-asides for market-rate developments.

San Mateo County, CA voters are asked to extend Measure A through 2043 to continue raising an estimated \$80 million annually through a half-cent sales tax for low-income housing construction. The original measure adopted in 2012 would expire in 2023.

Santa Clara County, CA asks voters to approve a \$950 million bond issue to spend \$700 million on affordable housing for middle-class families, \$100 million to house poor families, and \$150 million to house and provide employment assistance for working families.

Sixteen Massachusetts communities, including Boston, have Question 5 on their ballots asking residents to approve passage of the Community Preservation Act, which would generate about \$20 million for affordable housing, green space and preservation of historic buildings using money raised from a 1% to 3% property tax increase.

Asheville, NC voters will decide acceptance of a \$74 million bond issue which includes \$25 million for affordable housing development, while Greensboro, NC voters are asked to approve a \$25 million housing bond that would include \$3 million for apartment construction and \$8 million for a workforce housing initiative.

Baltimore proposes to amend the city charter to establish an affordable housing trust fund for low-income families. The measure would provide assistance to families earning 50% or less of the area median income.

Eagle County, CO requests voter approval of an affordable housing tax -- a 0.3% sale tax or 3 cents on every \$10 purchase -- to provide workforce housing. The tax would generate at least \$5.4 million annually for 20 years.

Portland, OR voters are asked to endorse a \$258.4 million tax hike to build or preserve 1,300 affordable rental units.

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