

SPUR | Ideas + Action for a Better City

Voter Guide Purpose & Process

The SPUR Voter Guide offers objective analysis and advise voters on which measures will deliver real solutions.



Voter Guide Committees

California and Bay Area Ballot Analysis Committee: Michelle Alba-Chua, Daniel Cedeño, Sally Ann Flood, David Friedman, Ed Harrington, Shannon Peloquin, Carl Shannon, Lydia Tan, Molly Turner

Oakland Ballot Analysis Committee: Lynette Dias, Jonathan Fearn, Savlan Hauser, Kiran Jain, Carolyn Johnson, Tony Leong, Warren Logan, Andrea Lowe, Nikki Lowy, Jay Murphy, Shannon Peloquin, Ari Takata-Vasquez, Amy Tharpe, Molly Turner, Deanna Van Buren, Lauren Wilson

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Proposition RTM

Regional Transit Sales Tax | Initiative

Levies a sales tax to prevent severe transit service cuts on BART, Caltrain, Muni, and AC Transit and to invest in local transportation priorities to protect and improve quality of life, affordability, economy, and air quality.

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What the Measure Would Do

Proposition RTM is a 14-year, 5-county sales tax that would raise approximately $1 billion per year to preserve transit service. In addition to preventing cuts to BART, Muni, Caltrain, and AC Transit, the measure would raise revenue for regional rider-focused programs that make transit more seamless and easy to use. Most counties would also receive funding for local transit improvements and road maintenance.

The tax rate would be set at 0.5% in Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, and San Mateo and at 1% in San Francisco. The varied rates reflect differences in each county's tax base and use of regional transit services.

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Expenditure Plan

Administration and Regional Transit Transformation Investments	Direct Support to Transit Agencies for Operations	County "Return-to-Source" Funds for Public Transit Purposes
Administration • (0.22%) Regional transit transformation programs, including discounted and coordinated fares, accessibility improvements, transit priority, and wayfinding • (4.44%)	Large Operators • BART (31% • Muni (16%) • AC Transit (5%) • Caltrain (7%) Small Operators • Alameda County small operators (0.5%) • Contra Costa County small operators (1.5%) • SF Bay Ferry (0.7%) • Golden Gate Transit (0.1%)	Designated County Entity • Alameda County Transportation Commission (1%) • Contra Costa County Transportation Authority (2.5%) • San Francisco County Transportation Authority (0%) • San Mateo County Transit District (4.7%) • Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (25.1%)

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Oversight

- **Independent financial reviews** of BART, Muni, Caltrain, and AC Transit, with requirements to implement cost-saving recommendations in order to receive funds
- **Citizen oversight** of spending and performance.
- **County-level oversight** to ensure service standards are applied fairly, with authority to withhold funds for noncompliance.

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The Backstory

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bay Area's largest transit systems operated near capacity, collecting a significant share of operational funding from fares, parking revenues, and other local sources tied to the economy's health.
- When federal and state COVID-relief funds are exhausted at the end of this year, BART, Caltrain, Muni, and AC Transit will face annual deficits of 25% to 45% of their operating budgets unless new funding is passed.
- Agencies have been reducing costs. An independent review of AC Transit, BART, Caltrain and SF Muni found that they have collectively saved $1 billion in operating expenses in the last five years through various cost saving actions.

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The Backstory

Facing a fiscal cliff, BART, Caltrain, Muni, and AC Transit could undertake widespread service cuts beginning as soon as January 2027:

- **BART:** To close a $376 million deficit, cut more than 60% of service, reduce service to three primary lines with limited peak service on two others, and end service by 9 p.m. Longer-term cuts could include closing up to 15 stations and potentially the entire system.
- **AC Transit:** To address a $200 million four-year deficit, cut service by 16%, eliminate routes, reduce service hours and frequency, including transbay service, and leave only 13 of 74 lines unchanged.
- **MUNI and Caltrain also planning severe service reductions**

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Pros

- The measure avoids catastrophic service cuts to BART, AC Transit, Muni and Caltrain
- Avoiding cuts protects mobility for people with disabilities, students, older adults and others who are not able to drive .
- Sustaining transit avoids significant new congestion and gridlock on Bay Area freeways and as well as increased emissions
- The measure emphasizes financial accountability and includes strong oversight protocols

Cons

- The measure would impose a new tax on Bay Area residents in the five subject counties

SPUR's Recommendation

The potential collapse of transit services poses a serious threat to the many people who rely on transit to access jobs, medical appointments, and groceries. Vulnerable groups — including people with disabilities, older adults, students, and low-income workers — would bear the brunt of service cuts.

Transit is also vital for the region's economy: half of all transit trips are work-related, and transit supports access to job opportunities. Without robust reanist, traffic congestion will worsen, raising transportation costs for everyone and negatively impacting quality of life and the regional economy.

Vote YES 

Measure FF

Transfer Tax on Foreclosures | Ordinance

Expands Oakland's real property transfer tax to include most foreclosed commercial and multi-family residential buildings, with exemptions for single-family homes, housing conversion projects, and community banking organizations.

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What the Measure Would Do

Oakland's real property transfer tax would apply all foreclosed commercial and residential properties unless one of the following conditions apply:

Exemptions

- The buyer is an individual or a family trust (not a corporation or institution), and the property consists of four residential units or fewer.
- The transfer is for a commercial property that will be converted to interim shelter, SRO, affordable, or permanent supportive housing; or a healthcare facility.
- The transferee is a community banking organization with assets of less than $10 billion.

The City Council would be able to amend, remove, or add to these exceptions by ordinance, rather than going back to the voters. If approved, these changes would become effective January 1, 2027 and generate approximately $4 million to $13 million per year in revenue.

Transfer Tax Structure and Rates

Transaction Amount	Transfer Tax Rate
$300,000 or less	1%
$300,001 to $2,000,000	1.5%
$2,000,001 to $5,000,000	1.75%
$5,000,001 and above	2.5%

- Low- and moderate-income first-time homebuyers receive a 0.5% rate reduction.
- Low- and moderate-income first-time homebuyers who complete a seismic retrofit and/or install a solar energy system can reduce their rate by the cost of these upgrades, up to one third of the total transfer tax amount.

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The Backstory

- Oakland's tiered transfer tax structure was established in 2018 (Measure X).
- Current policy exempts foreclosed properties and properties transferred to the lender in lieu of foreclosure, mirroring policies throughout the state.
- This exemption is meant to encourage economic activity by reducing the value of leveraged, inactive properties to attract new buyers, who will have more capital remaining to invest in properties that have failed.
- Critics argue that it disproportionately benefits financial institutions, lenders, and investors that acquire property by buying distressed debt, and that it prevents the city from recapturing value generated by foreclosure transfers of large properties, such as multi-family and commercial buildings.

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The Backstory (cont.)

- Since 2024, the city has narrowly avoided projected budget deficits through an unsustainable combination of one-time revenue, depleting reserves, and temporary cuts.
- While Oakland cannot rely on highly volatile revenue sources like the transfer tax to resolve ongoing budget issues, California cities have few options to generate revenue outside of property and sales taxes, which increase the tax burden on residents and small businesses.
- In June 2026, voters rejected a special parcel tax measure that would have generated $34 million annually to fund city service programs for nine years, pushing city leaders to identify other strategies to generate revenue.

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Equity Impacts

- Revenues from the transfer tax become part of the general fund and broadly support municipal functions and services, including programs that benefit low-income residents and communities of color.
- This measure exempts properties that are to be converted to single-room occupancy housing (SROs) and interim shelters, which serve extremely low-income individuals and families.

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Pros

- Measure FF would increase revenue without raising transfer tax rates, which is particularly critical given Oakland's projected budget deficit.
- Closing this loophole by limiting foreclosure exemptions brings the city's transfer tax policy in line with the goals of its voter-approved progressive rate structure.

Cons

- Lenders may pass on transfer tax costs to buyers or enact higher transaction fees to compensate for the additional cost, potentially making it financially infeasible for new buyers to purchase and revive certain struggling properties.
- Oakland's commercial office market is still struggling; making it more expensive to buy and sell commercial real estate may slow that recovery.

SPUR's Recommendation

Oakland is struggling to address projected budget deficits and needs revenue to fund city functions and service programs. Closing the foreclosure loophole for most commercial and larger residential properties offers a path to increase revenue that treats foreclosure transactions equally with other types of sales while protecting homeowners, small landlords, affordable housing, commercial to residential conversion projects, and community banking institutions.

Vote YES 

Measure EE

Governance Structure | Charter Amendment

Transitions Oakland from its current hybrid form of government to a strong-mayor system, making the mayor chief executive of city operations while strengthening the council's role in legislation, budgeting and oversight.

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Charter Reform

CURRENTLY

Charter assigns powers & responsibilities in confusing ways

- Combines two models
- Confounds lines of authority
- Undermines accountability

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS' OF OAKLAND

Charter Reform

MEASURE EE

Strong mayor model

- One coherent & complete model
- Balances executive & legislative branches

Clear responsibilities & accountability

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MAYOR:
FULL EXECUTIVE POWERS

- Manages the city and ensures delivery of services as the chief executive officer
- Appoints and directs the City Administrator
- Appoints and directs all heads of departments
  - Except Finance and Human Resources who are appointed and directed by the City Administrator

COUNCIL:
FULL LEGISLATIVE POWERS

- Sets policy and passes laws
- Has authority to establish a Budget and Legislative Analyst office
  - This supports independently informed analysis of the City's fiscal affairs and the impacts of proposed legislation
- Full time responsibilities
  - Eliminates conflicts of interest

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MAYOR ⟷ COUNCIL

- Mayor
  - Mayor may veto any resolution or ordinance and any line item of the budget.

- Council
  - Council may override a Mayoral veto with a supermajority
  - Council may conduct oversight hearings
  - Council may compel testimony at legislative hearings
  - Council confirms key mayoral appointments

Equity Impacts

The strong mayor structure intends to better address disparities across neighborhoods by aligning citywide leadership with citywide outcomes.

Problems such as public safety, homelessness, illegal dumping, and infrastructure affect the entire city: a mayor who neglects historically underserved areas risks worsening citywide conditions and can face political consequences from the broader electorate.

Clearer authority and better coordination between city offices, and between the city and other local governments, could support improved service delivery, housing development, and other government-run programs that directly benefit Oakland's lower-income neighborhoods and residents.

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Pros

- Resolves the structural ambiguity of Oakland's hybrid government
- Gives the mayor the tools to actually deliver on a citywide agenda
- Enhances oversight and policymaking capacity

Cons

- Centralizing executive power in the Mayor’s Office raises the stakes of any single election
- By allowing council salaries to be reset, the measure could increase costs that would need to be balanced elsewhere

SPUR’s Recommendation

Oakland's government has operated for more than two decades under a hybrid structure that gives voters an executive to blame but withholds the tools that executive needs to govern, while leaving the council without independent fiscal capacity to check the budget it approves. SPUR concluded in 2021 that Oakland should commit fully to a strong-mayor system, and the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform reached the same conclusion in January 2026. This measure implements the great majority of both bodies' recommendations, including veto power for the mayor, elimination of the tie breaking vote, a permanent budget and legislative analyst office for the council, subpoena authority, and a full-time council. This measure moves the city towards clearer accountability.

Vote YES 

ENDORSED BY LWVO

The League of Women Voters of Oakland endorses Measure EE

- Checks and balances
- Effective management through clear lines of staff supervision
- Active legislature

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OAKLAND

California

	**Affordable Housing Bond**	**Authorizes $10 billion in general obligation bonds to fund affordable and supportive housing and $1.25 billion in mortgage revenue bonds to fund a homeownership program for veterans and military families.** State financing is critical to address California's housing crisis and leverage federal matching funds.
	**Rainy Day Fund**	**Increases the maximum balance of the state's rainy day reserves from 10% to 20% of annual general fund revenues and expands debt repayment requirements.** Saving more during economic booms protects essential public services and safety-net programs from severe cuts during future downturns.
	**High-Earner Income Tax Extension**	**Permanently extends marginal income tax rates on California's top 2% of earners to fund education, healthcare, and other state programs.** Dedicated, predictable funding for Medi-Cal will be needed to backfill federal cuts from H.R. 1.
	**Campaign Financing**	**Repeals the constitutional ban on public campaign funding, allowing state and local governments the option to establish voluntary programs.** Public campaign financing lowers barriers for first-time and underrepresented candidates and helps reduce the influence of money in politics.
	**Recall Election Process**	**Amends the state constitution to eliminate simultaneous successor elections during recall votes, filling vacancies through established succession rules instead.** This change would prevent recalls from being used as shortcuts to install candidates with less than 50% voter support.
	**Homeowner Loans**	**Authorizes $25 billion in state revenue bonds to provide fixed-rate second mortgages for middle-income buyers of newly constructed homes.** This funding would expand homeownership opportunities and boost housing supply without impacting the state General Fund.

California

	Voter ID	**Mandates government-issued ID for in-person voting or ID numbers for vote-by-mail ballots.** California already maintains strong voter verification safeguards, and strict ID laws create unnecessary barriers for eligible voters while imposing significant administrative costs.
	Billionaire Tax	**Enacts a one-time 5% state wealth tax on net worth over $1 billion to fund healthcare and food assistance.** While the measure raises substantial revenue to mitigate federal Medi-Cal cuts, it could push billionaires out of state, resulting in long-term revenue risks for the state.
	Audits of Special Taxes	**Requires state audits and applies spending caps to all new state special tax initiatives.** Designed to defeat Prop. 40, this measure restricts state and local governments' ability to raise and spend revenue for urgent public needs.
	Personal Property Taxes	**Prohibits new state and local taxes on personal property, financial assets, and retroactive residency taxes.** Placed on the ballot to counter Prop. 40, these sweeping restrictions would permanently limit the state's ability to adopt progressive tax policies.
	Local Tax Threshold	**Mandates a uniform two-thirds voter approval requirement for all local special taxes, eliminating the simple-majority threshold for citizen initiatives**. This expansion of Proposition 13 would undermine majority rule and restrict local funding for important projects like transit and affordable housing.
	Changes to Environmental Review (CEQA)	**Streamlines environmental review under CEQA for eight categories of projects, including housing and infrastructure.** While streamlining infill housing and green infrastructure is essential, the measure's broad scope could also fast-track sprawl development and environmentally harmful projects.

Want to learn more about state measures?

Join us for San José Ballots and Brews (in-person or livestream) on Tuesday, October 13 at 6:00PM

Register using the QR code below:

BALLOTS & BREWS

San José 2026

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NOVEMBER 3, 2026 ELECTION

The SPUR Voter Guide is here!

spurvoterguide.org



