SPUR

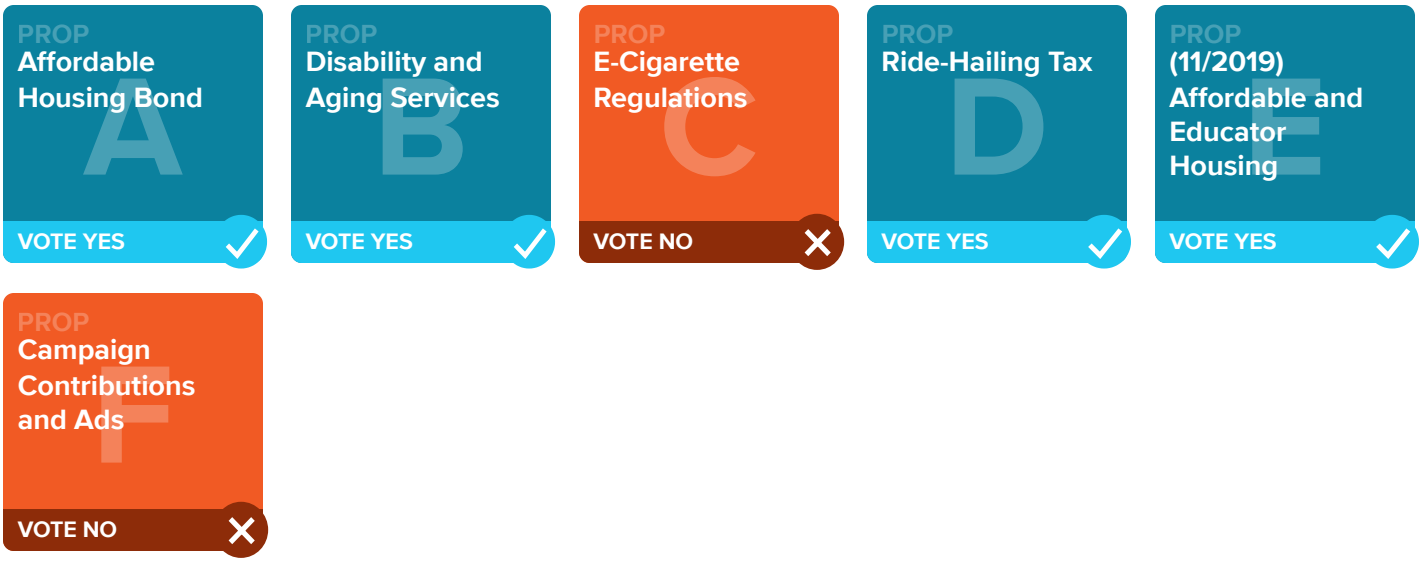
a member-supported nonprofit organization

November 2019 Voter Guide

Ballot analysis and recommendations

Six city propositions appear on the San Francisco ballot on November 5, 2019. SPUR provides in-depth analysis and recommendations on each one.

San Francisco (SF)



SF Prop A

Affordable Housing Bond

GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND

Affordable Housing Bond

Authorizes the city to issue $600 million in general obligation bonds to fund affordable housing opportunities for extremely low-, low- and middle-income households.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Housing affordability and homelessness remain among the most urgent challenges of our time. The city faces high construction costs and land prices, labor shortages, process and structural challenges, and a persistent funding gap — all of which continue to delay or confound efforts to deliver housing to San Franciscans across the income spectrum. This bond would be a significant step toward addressing the problem of funding for affordable housing. It rightly offers solutions for a range of income needs and, as the largest housing bond in history, is scaled to meaningfully address the problem. Importantly, it signals that the city considers housing to be as fundamental to its future as disaster preparedness and school repair — and worthy of San Franciscans' collective investment.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop B

Disability and Aging Services

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Department of Disability and Aging Services

Renames a city department, its commission and an associated fund, and makes changes to requirements for who can be appointed to the commission.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

While we're not generally fans of amendments to the city charter, Prop. B is a worthy one. It provides common-sense changes that would help the Department of Aging and Adult Services better serve its constituents.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop C

E-Cigarette Regulations

ORDINANCE

Vapor Product Regulations

Overturns a recent ordinance effectively banning the sale of electronic cigarettes in San Francisco and establishes a set of regulations for the sale of these products.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

San Francisco has a history of progressive policy-making to reduce tobacco consumption because of its negative impact on public health. Since e-cigarettes entered the market, they have garnered significant attention for their popularity and for their potential to help smokers quit combustible cigarettes. While it may be too soon to tell whether e-cigarettes have medical benefits for adults, it is well known that e-cigarette use among youth is rapidly increasing and has reversed the decades-long downward trend in tobacco use among youth. In light of this, the Board of Supervisors made a unanimous decision to ban the sale of e-cigarettes within the city until the FDA has finished its premarket review of these products.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

Prop. C runs counter to SPUR's principles of good government. Unlike the Board of Supervisors' e-cigarette legislation, the measure would create industry regulations by ballot and would require any revisions to be brought back to the voters. San Francisco's supervisors acted in their capacity as elected legislators to temporarily ban the sale of e-cigarettes in the absence of federal regulation. Once federal premarket review is complete, the board could revisit the legislation and make necessary revisions to safely regulate the sale of these products in San Francisco.

SF Prop D

Ride-Hailing Tax

ORDINANCE

Traffic Congestion Mitigation Tax

Imposes a tax on rides provided by transportation network companies, private transit services and autonomous vehicles, with a lower tax rate for shared rides and rides in zero-emission vehicles.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Prop. D raises a number of concerns for the members of SPUR's board. The amount of the tax would probably be too small to have a substantial effect on the behavior it aims to change. It was not designed as a progressive tax and would have a disproportionate impact on people with low incomes. And any future adjustments to correct these issues would need to come back to the ballot. However, we recognize that Prop. D could be a valuable revenue-raising tool for needed improvements to transit and to bike and pedestrian safety in San Francisco. As the effects of climate change and congestion both continue to worsen, cities must start thinking about what they will do to reduce driving and encourage other modes of travel. This measure is not the final answer, but it is one step on a path that San Francisco needs to take — a path that cities like Portland, Seattle, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. are already on. On balance, we believe this compromise measure is a worthwhile first step toward a more ambitious future congestion pricing system in downtown San Francisco.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop E

(11/2019) Affordable and Educator Housing

ORDINANCE

Affordable Housing and Educator Housing

Encourages the construction of 100% affordable housing and educator housing by creating streamlined permitting processes and loosening requirements,setting timelines for approvals and allowing these types of housing to be built on public land.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

This compromise measure would provide a concrete advantage for 100% affordable housing projects located on public sites by enabling them to access the streamlined timelines available under SB 35. And — if funding to build the projects can be identified — this measure could help supply new housing options for San Francisco's low-income families and educators, who are particularly affected by the city's affordability crisis.

But this measure doesn't live up to its potential. It could have a broader impact if the affordability requirements had been based on the financial feasibility of building educator housing projects without major public subsidy. And it could have offered additional streamlining benefits for affordable housing projects beyond the recent process changes the city has already implemented. In addition to educators, there are many other moderate- and middle-income San Francisco workers who are in need of housing that is affordable to them: Muni drivers, sanitation workers and nurses, for example. This measure is a missed opportunity to make more expansive changes for all affordable housing projects. However, SPUR recognizes that it would be a small step forward in the city's efforts to deliver more housing. Considering the depth of the housing crisis, we cannot recommend against a proposal that provides at least some tangible benefits today. We are hopeful that the clean-up legislation will make the program more expansive and effective.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop F

Campaign Contributions and Ads

ORDINANCE

Campaign Contributions and Campaign Advertisements

Prohibits individuals associated with large development projects from donating to certain city candidates while their project is under consideration and increases donor disclosure requirements for political advertisements.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR recognizes the importance of curtailing the influence of money in politics. We also share the concern that current regulations at the federal, state and local level allow many people who fund political advertising to remain anonymous by hiding behind innocuous-sounding political committees. This opacity reduces voters' ability to discern who is behind campaign ads and limits their ability to judge the ads and issues before them.

Prop. F combines two campaign finance issues — contributions from individuals connected to development projects and increased disclosure of those financing campaign ads — that would have been better addressed separately. The measure's provisions to increase transparency via reformed disclosure laws would likely have a positive benefit by helping voters know who is funding political advertising. However, these reforms could be made through the legislative process, where the trade-offs of the specific requirements could be better weighed and refined.

In regard to contributions from individuals connected to development projects, there is certainly a public interest in either restricting or closely tracking who is funding the campaigns of elected officials with the power to make or break a project. However, it is unclear that the measure's strict provisions are merited. The city's $500 limit on donations from any individual already restricts the amount of money people can contribute to candidates with power over their development projects. Furthermore, when donors contribute to campaigns, they must list their employer. Should a company or organization organize a "bundling" effort within their firm to have many people donate to a candidate, that effort would be discernible through existing campaign disclosure laws and would shine a light on any potential pay-to-play effort.

While there are some good ideas regarding increased disclosure in this measure, parts of this measure would have been better addressed legislatively and other parts are not clearly necessary.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

Acknowledgments

The goal of the SPUR Voter Guide is to offer objective analysis and advise voters on which measures will deliver real solutions. Our Ballot Analysis Committee heard arguments from both sides of the issues, debated the measures' merits and provided recommendations to our San Francisco Board of Directors. The board then voted, with a 60 percent vote required for SPUR to make a recommendation.

SPUR's San Francisco Board of Directors debated and voted on SPUR's local San Francisco ballot recommendations on August 21, 2019.

SPUR Ballot Analysis Committee: Robert Gamble (Co-Chair), Molly Turner (Co-Chair), Michaela Cassidy, Jim Chappell, Carmela Clendening, Kim-Mai Cutler, Don Falk, Diane Filippi, Ed Harrington, Greg Johnson, Jim Lazarus, Terry Micheau, George Miller, Rebecca Prozan, Doug Shoemaker, Katy Tang

SPUR Staff and Interns: Susannah Parsons, Kristy Wang, Karen Steen, Arielle Fleisher, Devan Paul, Katie Ettman, Eli Zigas