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FAIRFAX

Town advances new ordinances for rent control

By Adrian Rodriguez
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Fairfax is on the verge of becoming the first Marin jurisdiction to have a rent control program protecting tenants from excessive annual increases.

The Town Council voted unanimously to approve ordinances for rent stabilization and just cause for eviction at a special meeting last week. A final vote is set for Nov. 2. If approved, both ordinances will take effect in 30 days.

Vice Mayor Chance Cutrano said Monday that Fairfax, with a population of fewer than 8,000, is believed to be the smallest municipality across the nation to take this step.

"I think it's indicative of the moment we're in with regard to concerns about equity, concerns about affordability, concerns about making sure that we have working families that not only can survive but thrive in our community," Cutrano said. "It's just one piece of the puzzle of making a Fairfax that's livable for all. It's definitely a historic moment."

Elsewhere in Marin, Larkspur has also begun discussing rent control, appointing an ad-hoc committee to study the issue. City officials planned an online forum Monday night to solicit input from landlords on potential ordinances.

The San Anselmo Town Council previously agreed to discuss rent control, using the town of Fairfax's decision as a launching pad for delibera-

tion.

Over the past few years, Fairfax has taken a number of actions to bolster tenant protections. The council has adopted an income-based rental discrimination prohibition, mandatory mediation for rent increases exceeding 5% and a just-cause-for-eviction law.

More recently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the council adopted an urgency moratorium on evictions without cause through Sept. 30.

The rent stabilization ordinance caps annual increases at 60% of the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index. The annual adjustment, however, cannot be greater than 5%. The cap is retroactive to Feb. 2.

The Town Council will serve as an appeals board. The town will work with Legal Aid of Marin and the city of Berkeley, which has a rent control board, for support services as the rent stabilization program gets off the ground.

The new just-cause-for-eviction ordinance would strengthen the existing law with additional protections for elderly, disabled or terminally ill tenants. It would add school-year eviction protections for educators and students; require landlords seeking no-fault termination to make relocation payments for tenants; and tighten breach-of-lease qualifications.

The ordinance would also establish protections against what fair housing advocates

RENT » PAGE 4

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