ALLIANCE FOR A JUST, EQUITABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY

VOICES FROM THE GRASSROOTS

The Alliance for a Just Recovery is a community-based project of

NORTH BAY JOBS WITH JUSTICE

P.O. Box 427, Santa Rosa, CA 95402
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Attendees of the Alliance for a Just Recovery forum discussing ways to get involved with participating organizations. The forum was held on July 19, 2018 at Christ Church United Methodist, in Santa Rosa. Aftermath of Santa Rosa fire depicted in Google Earth images.
Still Reeling: What Does A Just Recovery Look Like?

Emilia Carbajal
Program Director, Graton Day Labor Center

The Alliance for a Just Recovery was formed by labor, environmental, faith, immigrant rights and community based organizations to provide a voice for those who have the least resources to recover and to advocate for public policy to address structural inequality, the climate crisis, and the wildfire threat.

Eight months after the most destructive wildfire in California history, many Sonoma County residents are still struggling to recover. Long before the Tubbs fire, widening inequality, increasing poverty, and the expansion of low-wage work had undermined economic security for low and middle-income residents. The Alliance for a Just Recovery was organized just weeks after the fire in order to address the class and racial differences intensified by the fire and the threat of future fires.

The most visible sign of economic distress is the cost of housing. Between 2000-2015, inflation-adjusted median rents increased by 17 percent while median renter annual income declined by 9 percent. Before the fire, housing was unaffordable for 55 percent of Santa Rosa renters because they paid more than 30 percent of their gross monthly income for rent. The fires exacerbated the crisis by destroying 5 percent of the city’s housing and triggering a 36 percent increase of rents by unscrupulous landlords.

A just recovery must include public policy to raise the wage floor, make housing more affordable, and create good living wage jobs.

Moreover, the increasing threat of wildfires and the lengthening of the wildfire season due to climate change have accompanied growing economic insecurity. Cycles of drier and hotter weather, followed by extreme rainfall and then rampant growth of combustible vegetation, coupled with suburban sprawl in high fire-prone areas like Fountaingrove, has increased the risk of wildfires.

A just recovery must limit sprawl, protect urban growth boundaries and community separators, and require higher building standards to minimize fire risk. These are the reasons we decided to form an enduring coalition because no other recovery organization or coalition was addressing our concerns and issues.

The Alliance for a Just Recovery seeks to address the root causes of rising inequality and the climate crisis existing prior to the fire and to provide a voice for those who were already struggling prior to the fires and who have the least resources to recover. We believe that these residents should be at the center of the recovery efforts.

The Alliance is comprised of grassroots organizations:

The North Bay Jobs with Justice, North Bay Labor Council, North Bay Organizing Project, Sonoma County Conservation Action, 350Sonoma, Democratic Socialists of America North Bay, Sonoma County Transportation and Land Use Coalition, Transition Sonoma Valley, Graton Day Labor Center, Sonoma County Democratic Party, Greenbelt Alliance, Christ Church United Methodist, Sonoma Valley Housing Group.
The shared values and vision of the Alliance for A Just Recovery are:

1. Ensure that the structural issues of inequality, the climate crisis, and racial and environmental justice are central to the recovery and rebuilding process;

2. Develop a common agenda and independent progressive alliance of labor, faith, environmental, immigrant rights and community organizations for an immediate and long-term, equitable, just, and sustainable recovery. Our common agenda focuses on good jobs, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability.

3. Promote an inside and outside strategy that emphasizes working with state and local government and elected officials while simultaneously organizing and mobilizing working class and moderate-income residents for a just recovery and rebuilding;

4. Ensure that the recovery and rebuilding processes are transparent, inclusive, and create economic opportunity for low and moderate-income communities and eliminate environmental disparities across communities.

In this report, you will read the public policy the Alliance recommends to address inequality and the climate crisis, and to promote racial and environmental justice in the recovery. Additionally, we invite you to read the testimony from community members who have spoken out about how the fires affected them as immigrants, workers, renters, seniors, and others with the least resources to recover.

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**A Common Agenda for a Just, Equitable, and Sustainable Recovery for the City of Santa Rosa and the County of Sonoma**

**Labor Standards for the Rebuild:**

1. All contractors must possess a valid license from the California State Licensing Board and display their name and number clearly on vehicles and at job sites.

2. All workers must be paid the state prevailing wage for construction including both hourly wage and benefits.

3. All construction workers must complete the CalOSHA 10-hour construction industry traini (costs paid by the contractor).

4. Hiring preference will be given to local residents who meet the above qualifications, with a goal of 50 percent local hire.

5. The Board of Supervisors and Santa Rosa City Council must help provide oversight and collaborate with appropriate federal and state agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Industrial Relations, Cal OSHA, California Environmental Protection Agency, California State License Board, and the Sonoma County District Attorney to ensure compliance with labor, health and safety, and environmental standards.

**Affordable Housing:**

1. Focus rebuilding within Urban Growth Boundaries and Priority Development Areas, not in Community Separators or Priority Conservation Areas.

2. Enforce design review process and only allow expedited permitting of same size, or smaller,
rebuids. Ensure proposed Use Changes receive reasonable public process and review.

3. Improve prioritization of focused, affordable and socially just growth by requiring all new multi-unit housing and mixed used projects to include the same proportion of affordable units (22% Very Low, 13% Low, and 16% Moderate) defined in the Association of Bay Area Governments Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA 2014-2022).

4. The City and the County should extend the 10 percent cap on rent increases beyond current expiration date of December 4th, 2018 in 30-day increments for up to two years;

5. The Santa Rosa City Council should implement a rent control ordinance (or support a rent control ballot initiative in November 2018) that caps annual rent increases at the Consumer Price Index and no more than 5 percent or less than 2 percent in any given year and includes a just cause eviction and relocation assistance provisions.

6. The City and County must strive to immediately house all homeless people and residents displaced by the fire. Both the City and County should permit residents to live in RVs parked in driveways and on public property; both should protect and increase the number of mobile home parks; both should explore the construction of high-density emergency housing such as from shipping containers and tiny homes located on county property such as the fair grounds and the large county-owned Santa Rosa parcel on Mendocino/Chanate.

7. New funding sources for homeless services, emergency housing, transitional housing and affordable housing includes:

   a. City of Santa Rosa can immediately raise the transient occupancy (TOT) or bed tax from 9 to 12 percent dedicating the new revenue to affordable housing. Measure L the voters in November 2016 raised the County TOT to 12 percent; both the City and the County can dedicate staff for more effective TOT monitoring and enforcement – particularly for vacation rentals.

   b. The County can drastically cut back expenditures for advertising and tourism that mainly benefits the wine and hospitality sectors. These funds could be used instead for homeless services, emergency housing, rental assistance, and the construction of new affordable housing. The county already trimmed these expenditures by a modest $1 million for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

   c. The City and County can raise the real estate transfer tax on the sale of homes above $1.5 million and commercial property above $3 million. Such an increase requires two-thirds voter approval if dedicated to affordable housing or just 50 percent threshold if a general tax (accompanied by an advisory measure for affordable housing).

   d. The City of Santa Rosa can draft and submit to the voters a bond measure to fund affordable housing comparable to the ballot initiative approved by voters in Alameda County in November 2016. That $580 million bond measure imposed a $12.50 per $100,000 per assessed value of a home for construction of affordable housing and down payment assistance for low and moderate-income families; for preservation of existing affordable rental housing; for supportive housing for the homeless; and for assistance to prevent displacement of low-income tenants. All construction workers employed on the project will receive the state prevailing wage and local residents will perform 50 percent of all construction hours worked; Thirty percent of construction workers employed on the project will be either graduates or currently registered apprentices in state approved apprenticeship programs for applicable occupation.

   e. The City of Santa Rosa can implement a jobs-housing commercial linkage fee comparable to four other cities (Petaluma, Cotati, Sebastopol, and Rohnert Park) and the County that approved linkage fee legislation between 2005-2008.
f. The County and City of Santa Rosa can increase inclusionary in-lieu fees to provide more incentives for developers to construct on-site affordable housing.

g. The City of Santa Rosa can enact a business license surcharge of 10 percent on companies whose CEOs earn more than 100 times the median wage of their employees and 25 percent for companies with a CEO to median wage ratio greater than 250 to 1. This new revenue can be apportioned to homeless services and emergency and affordable housing. Portland has implemented a CEO pay tax, and San Francisco will likely do so in the near future.

h. The city and the county can each approve a section 8 (federal housing choice voucher) anti-discrimination ordinance.

Jobs:

1. The City of Santa Rosa can implement a $15 an hour minimum wage covering all minimum wage workers and phased-in by 2020 (three years earlier than the state). According to the UCB Labor Center approximately 37,000 workers in the city would directly or indirectly benefit from the minimum wage. The County could implement a countywide $15 minimum wage in the unincorporated areas too. Twenty-eight cities and counties in California have implemented city or countywide minimum wage phased in to $15 faster than the state: San Francisco (2018), San Jose (2019), Los Angeles and L.A. county (2020).

2. Santa Rosa can negotiate a comprehensive Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) for the development of Chanate/Community Hospital property in Santa Rosa to include affordable housing (minimally no less that 30 percent affordable to very-low and low-income residents), a living wage and right to organize protections for grocery and retail workers, and a project labor agreement (PLA) for both residential and commercial construction mandating local hire, prevailing wage, and at least 30 percent apprentices on the job; such a CBA can include a local hire provision for both construction and operations which mandates that at least half the workforce is comprised of local residents.

3. Negotiate a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) for large City of Santa Rosa public works projects that includes a minimum of 20 percent apprentices on any city funded project and that mandates 50 percent local hire and targeted hiring from low-income communities in Santa Rosa.

4. Expand the pre-apprenticeship program developed by the Marin-Sonoma-Mendocino-Lake Building and Construction Trades Council and partner with community-based organizations to recruit low-income, women, Native American, and Latino/African-America applicants.

Environment:

1. To minimize missed opportunities, maximize lifecycle operating, health, and environmental benefits, and help constituents avoid making stranded investments in inherently dangerous and soon-to-be obsolete fossil-fuel appliances and infrastructure, the City and the County should mandate:


   b. “All-electric Ready” new homes, i.e., low cost pre-wiring for future code-compliant electrification of any end use initially designed for a fossil fuel (including space heating, water heating, cooking, etc., as described in Measure 1.7 of Santa Rosa’s 2012 Climate Action Plan)
2. To promote water and energy conservation, and to protect watersheds, working lands, and neighborhoods from drought and wildfires, the City and County should:

   a. Enforce local implementation of the State of California Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO)

   b. Offer financial incentives, expedited permitting, and design assistance to promote:

   c. Improved energy efficiency and demand management, including solar photovoltaics, battery storage, microgrids, and other emerging technologies

   d. Water best management practices on both private and public lands, including lawn removal, low water-use landscaping, rainwater catchment and greywater systems, permeable surfaces, and regenerative horticultural practices, such as replanting with natives and applying bioactive composts and inoculants that support soil health, retention of water, and increased carbon sequestration.

   e. Expand funding for the benchmarking, weatherization, and retrofit of existing low-income and moderate residential housing; require 50 percent local hire and prevailing wage.

3. Mandate more rigorous fire safety standards for new and rebuilt housing in the highest fire-risk areas (as designated by Cal Fire’s Fire Hazard Severity Zone or “FSHZ” mapping). Higher safety standards for construction and materials includes: automatic fire sprinklers throughout a structure; underground power lines; Class A roofs with the most fire resistant materials (i.e. slate, clay, concrete tile, and steel); and prohibition of residential and commercial natural gas and propane appliances.

4. Hazard mitigation mapping (which should include landslides, floods and fire danger mapping) must be taken into consideration in planning, zoning and permitting.

5. In general, the City and County must mandate increased density and multi-family affordable housing in neighborhoods along the 101/S SMART train corridor and in Priority Development Areas, within Urban Growth Boundaries and Urban Service Areas with existing carrying capacity for sewer and water. See map areas, prioritize for housing as well as the county community separators that are not.

6. Both the City and County must prohibit new development in the highest fire-prone areas as the County of Napa and cities/counties in Washington and Colorado have done.

7. Both the City and County must seek additional financing for high density development in city centers from sources such as Prop 68 and the cap-and-trades fund.

*Sierra Club Sonoma Group supports this document but is not a formal member of the Alliance for a Just Recovery.

Please note that the labor standards and jobs sections were developed with input and feedback from the North Bay Labor Council and affiliates of the Marin-Sonoma Mendocino Lake Building and Construction Trade Council; the housing and environmental sections were developed with input and review from 350Sonoma, Sonoma County Conservation Action, Sierra Club, Greenbelt Alliance, and Transition Sonoma Valley.

** Please see the following:
Chapter 7 and the conclusion.
Emergency Plan to Address the Crisis of Low-Wage Employment and the Crisis of Affordable Housing in Santa Rosa June 2018

1. The City must stabilize rents, including:
   a. **Extending the 10 percent cap on rent increases** beyond current expiration date of December 4th, 2018 in 30-day increments for up to two years;
   b. **Approving a rent control ordinance** that caps annual rent increases at the Consumer Price Index and no more than 5 percent or less than 2 percent in any given year and includes a just cause eviction and relocation assistance provisions;

2. **The City must immediately implement a $15 per hour minimum wage**: including most minimum wage workers and phased-in by 2020 (three years earlier that the state). According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, approximately 37,000 workers in the City would directly or indirectly benefit by boosting the minimum wage.

3. **The City can identify and approve new funding sources** for homeless services, transitional housing, emergency and affordable housing including:
   a. Immediately raise the transient occupancy or bed tax from 9 to 12 percent and strengthen enforcement and collection from vacation rentals;
   b. Raise the real estate transfer tax on new homes for residential properties above $1.5 million and commercial property above $3 million. Such an increase requires two-thirds voter approval if dedicated to affordable housing or just 50 percent threshold if a general tax (accompanied by an advisory measure for affordable housing);
   c. Implement a jobs-housing commercial linkage fee dedicated to affordable housing similar to legislation approved by four other cities (Petaluma, Cotati, Sebastopol, and Rohnert Park) and the County between 2005-2008;
   d. Draft and submit to the voters a bond measure to fund affordable housing comparable to the ballot initiative approved by voters in Alameda County in November 2016 That $580 million bond measure impose a $12.50 per $100,000 per assessed value of a home for construction of affordable housing and down payment assistance for low and moderate-income families; for preservation of existing affordable rental housing; for supportive housing for the homeless; and for assistance to prevent displacement of low-income tenants. All construction workers employed on the project will receive the state prevailing wage and local residents will perform 50 percent of all construction hours worked; 30 percent of construction workers employed on the project will be either graduates or currently registered apprentices in state approved apprenticeship programs for applicable occupation.
4. **The City and (and the County) can approve a wage theft ordinance for construction** to ensure that all workers receive a pay stub and that all wages owed by contractors are paid prior to the issuing a “Certificate of Occupancy.”

5. **The City (and the County) can collaborate with community-based organizations to establish a mobile workers’ rights clinic** to provide education about the rights of workers and trainings on how to prevent common labor abuses like wage theft, retaliation, and workplace discrimination. The clinic will focus on prevention of incidents by expanding workers’ knowledge of the law and the measures that can be taken to deter wage theft. The clinic will also intervene in certain cases, assisting workers in mediating disputes, and utilizing a legal network to pursue claims when that is the best option available.

*Sierra Club Sonoma Group supports this document but is not a formal member of the Alliance for A Just Recovery.

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**PUBLIC FORUM PRESENTATIONS**

**Why Do We Need a Just Recovery?**

**Les Proteau**

*Coffey Park neighborhood resident and Vice President, Marin-Sonoma-Lake-Mendocino Building and Construction Trades Council*

My name is Les Proteau. As I mentioned earlier to Maddy from the labor council, this is kind of like preaching to the choir—everybody gets it that’s in the room. My home burnt in Coffee Park. We purchased it in 1978. My family grew up there, the house burnt and we escaped. And then we faced the issues of insurance, rebuilding, how to rebuild, who to get, how to do whatever... And then my neighbors...who were friends, who can't afford to rebuild, who've sold the property and left the area. Some didn't have enough insurance; the homes were purchased years ago, insurance lagged, so they’re gone. And it’s sad.

Now coming from the building trades, I’ve worked in Sonoma County for almost 40 years in the construction industry. I was president of the Sonoma-Lake-Mendocino County Building Trades Council for 15 years, Marin Building Trades Council and was a union representative for Painters and Allied Trades for 15 years and then I worked for 25 years in Sonoma County.

It’s tough now. It’s very difficult to find the end. We’re in the process—you go through engineering, architecture, drag out with the city, trying to get the plan done and then trying to get a builder. But as this is going on, in my neighborhood over there, there’s a few homes going up, but I notice that not too many of those contractors are from this area, not much of the labor is from this area, much of that labor is underpaid, and really overworked. It’s tough; it’s been difficult.

What we’ve done in the building trades is we’ve started a pre-apprenticeship program. All the crafts in our building trades train. There isn’t any union craft that doesn’t have a state registered apprenticeship program. So we created the TIP program—Transitional Introduction to Pre-apprenticeship program. We are graduating our 6th class. We are trying to give these people careers not just jobs. As we graduate them out, we give
them a leg up to get into a certified apprenticeship program where they can get a career. I’ve talked to a lot of the workers who are building the homes in Coffee Park, a lot of them are from way out of the area—Sacramento, Modesto, Tulare—coming in, working all week, staying in a motel or an RV someplace for contractors that are charging anywhere from $300 to $600 per square foot to build those homes. These workers are not getting that kind of money. Materials are up a bit but that’s still not justifying the amount of money that these people are paying.

Insurance companies for people that have insurance and are able to do this are going to get reimbursed from the lawsuit with PG&E. Some of these people won’t. We’re trying to come up with some solutions, get things moving along.

I’d like to thank Marty Bennett and the Alliance for having me here to speak. Like I said, all of you get it; we need to spread the word to rest of the community so that they get it too. Thank you.

Ofelia Alcala
Hyatt Regency Santa Rosa worker and UNITE HERE Local 2850 member

I have been a Santa Rosa resident for 27 years, originally from Michoacán Mexico. I have worked at Hyatt Regency Santa Rosa since 2004 (14 years) as a housekeeper. I am a single mother of 3 and I have struggled financially. I am looking forward to a big labor victory and our first contract at the Hyatt so I can support my daughter’s dreams of attending college at Sonoma State University.

I was part of a campaign to organize a union at the hotel. We won and the company recognized our union, UNITE HERE 2850, in mid-august 2017 and we started negotiations at that time. The workers put forth proposals asking for improvements in the working conditions and better wages and benefits but we still do not have our first contract.

I have been organizing and fighting for a good contract because the workload is overwhelming and often I have been tasked with cleaning up to 27 rooms in one day, compared to a UNION hotel where the average workload is 15 rooms in one shift. Because of the extreme physical demands at the end of the shift I am in pain and my back and knees are sore every day. Housekeeping work is the most dangerous kind of work at this hotel.

The wages are too low, my rent has gone up and the pay is simply not enough. I’m spending 75% of my income on housing; my child is supposed to be off to college next year and I’m hardly making ends meet.

If we had less workload, the stress and the pain would diminish and my coworkers and I would not have to use medicine to calm our muscles and strained joints.

I am here to ask all you good people to join me in this fight. We have been active and strong but we need the community behind us to win. Tourism and the hotel industry in the county are highly profitable, and we who do the work deserve a living wage, good benefits, and safe working conditions.

Thank you, everyone for your support. Si se puede.
Laura Neish
*Executive Director, 350 Bay Area*

We can see that climate change is real. 2017 was a year of events that grabbed our attention and made climate change visible. Sure, there have been plenty of warning signs previously, but here in the US, 2017 felt relentless: droughts here, floods there, Harvey, Irma, Maria, atmospheric rivers, multiple records broken. Firestorms in Santa Rosa and the North Bay brought climate change right to our doorsteps. Climate change has left its fingerprints all over these disasters: the increases in extremes are directly linked to the changes we’ve made to the atmosphere. Warmer oceans and air drive fiercer hurricanes and greater wet and dry swings. This creates climate chaos and increases the intensity and frequency of the wildfires. There will be more fires in the North Bay and they will be more intense. We must address the root causes now.

Like a lot of us, I live in Santa Rosa, and it remains hard to talk about, even though I did not lose my home. But we all lost something. We are forced to come to terms with the fact that the stakes are high. High and immediate. Climate change impacts our housing every year. Now it’s happening to us, not just over there, later, to them.

Like most of us, I awoke one morning in early October to the persistent ping of incoming texts and voice messages: Are you okay? Have you evacuated? Do you need help? And a voicemail from a dear friend, “We’ve lost everything.”

Two of my friends, both climate activists in fact, lost their homes in what felt like an instant. My friend Joy had to leave the area – and relocated to Virginia in her Prius. Never one to miss an opportunity to talk about climate change, Joy put a big sign in the back window of her car that read: Climate Change Refugee.

So, now we truly can see climate change and the way it is intensifying natural cycles and accelerating storm, drought and wildfire damage; what do we do? Well, the antidote to despair is action.

**Step 1:** Vote. And vote on climate. Our representatives at all levels work for us. Let them know you’re voting on climate. Insist that they not just vote on climate, but that they lead the effort to pass effective, swift climate solutions. And here’s the best side effect ever: every time we reduce climate warming emissions, we reduce particulates and other emissions that harm our health today, especially our vulnerable populations and the front line communities that live near primary emissions sources.

**Step 2:** Talk about climate. Research by Yale’s Climate Communications project tells us that a majority of Americans know that climate change is real and caused by humans, but only about 40% of us use it as a voting criteria. It ranks 15th on the list of most important voting issue overall, and still just 4th among liberal voters. Even 4th place is not good enough to force our representatives to take bold, swift action. Talk to your friends. Never fear, Old Uncle Frank who is a big Trump supporter is not your target. We need to start with the folks who are already concerned, and convince them to move it up the priority list.

**Step 3:** Get involved – join a climate action group: As Executive Director of 350 Bay Area, I know a good one. 350 Bay Area works to get effective climate policies developed and passed. 350 Sonoma works here in Sonoma County and is part of 350 Bay Area. Support North Bay Jobs with Justice as they promote good jobs and fair labor practices both in general and specific to a Just Recovery. Also, plan to join all of us for the RISE for Climate, Jobs and Justice, a big march in San Francisco on
September 8, just before the Global Climate Action Summit, an international gathering of governors, mayors, and other leaders who impact climate policies around the world. We will have buses for getting there and back and it will be a fun and upbeat call for action on climate and a just transition.

The antidote to despair is action. Step 1: Vote on climate. Step 2: Talk to your friends about climate. Step 3: Take action.

Our community came together in response to this disaster; let’s keep that going and going strong, and support each other in recovery, healing and preparation for this year’s fire season.

Chip Atkin for Janie Camacho
County of Sonoma worker and SEIU Local 1021 member
(Her statement was read by Chip Atkin, SEIU Local 1021 member)

Chip Atkin: Your agenda says Janie Camacho…she is a colleague, she is a dedicated public servant and she serves on the union political committee to fight for public policies that create just working conditions for all workers. But she was sick and couldn’t be here today, so I am reading her statement.

My name is Janie Camacho. I work as a clerk in the Sonoma County Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector’s office. I have worked for the County for 17 years.

We all faced a horrific experience last fall when our community was hit by the fires. When I was forced to evacuate, I fled with my family not knowing how we would pay for the additional costs. Our concern was for the health and safety of my 3-week old grandson and 3-year-old granddaughter.

After my family resettled, I reported to the emergency assistance center where I helped match residents impacted by the fires with support. County workers are certified as disaster workers, and so we are activated during major disasters.

We incurred many additional costs in the days after the fire. My credit union offered loans to those impacted. I borrowed $1000 to help cover additional costs for myself and my son’s family. My son took a week off when his baby was born, and was out of work for one week due to the fires. Missing two weeks of pay made it especially tight for him.

PG&E offered to reimburse residents for groceries lost due to power outages during the fires, but they required receipts. Very few people keep receipts after they purchase groceries. So this was another additional cost.

About a year and a half ago, we got a cost of living increase with our contract renewal. The next day, I got a 10% rent increase! Recently we got an increase that amounted to 27 cents an hour more for me. Shortly after, I received notice of ANOTHER 10% rent increase.

Moving would be devastating for me. I live one mile from work. I live in the same apartment complex as my grandchildren and my son and daughter-in-law. If I had to move somewhere more affordable, I would not be able to spend nearly the same amount of time with my family.

I pay half of my wages to rent right now. If rents continue to rise at this pace, how long until I am forced to leave? Six years? My son calculates it is 4 years for him before he is forced out.
You have rent, utilities, entertainment, food clothing…the higher the rent goes, the more other things have
to go. No more cable. No family outing to the movies. No going out for a meal. You start with sacrificing
quality of life issues like this. Maybe skipping a birthday gift, or Christmas gifts for my grandkids.

Then you move to utilities. Then the food budget. The cheapest foods are the worst for you. Maybe you fill up
on a calorie-packed fast food burger, rather than cook a full healthy meal.

Unfortunately Sonoma County is getting more and more expensive. My daughter-in-law has gone to the food
bank a couple times to supplement the family’s food. I am giving their family what little I have. I was lucky I got
that $1000 dollar loan so I could help his family. Now I need to pay it down though, so I have less for them.

What is the solution? It would be nice if the rent only went up as much as wages did. Some kind of rent
control would be helpful. The cost of living is the basic problem I am facing, and many like me. Rent is the
largest part of that.

On a very practical level, it serves our local community to have county workers live locally. When disaster
hits, we are there to open the local assistance centers, staff the shelters, clear the roads, answer the call-
center phones, and help keep residents’ children and animals safe.

We like to do this. And we like to live here. But it is getting too expensive for us to stay. We are doing more
surviving than living…..constantly maneuvering finances to make it through another month….robbing Peter
to pay Paul.

One rent increase can reduce a person’s standard of living from low middle class to poor in a very short
time. It’s scary that a few years ago I could be a single parent on my wages but, little by little, I have begun
to live with less. I went from buying clothes at a department store to buying at Goodwill; from putting a little
money into savings to living paycheck-to-paycheck; from holding the American dream in my sight to seeing
that goal get pushed ever further from my grasp.

That is what stagnant wages and increased rents do to people. The balance is tipped against us.

Thank you. ✨

**Amanda Carles**
*In Home Support Services Home Care worker
and SEIU Local 2015 Executive Board*

Good evening, I am Amanda Carles, teacher, interpreter,
Homecare provider, Union activist with SEIU 2015, mother of
four and grandmother of almost seven!

In 1982, I returned from South America after 15 years of
service with the US Peace Corps, UNICEF, World Food
Program and many other hats that I sported. I had with me
my 4 young children. Even though I was educated, with a
Bachelor of Science degree from UC Davis, and spoke several
languages fluently, my status as a single mother of 4, the
youngest of whom has Down Syndrome, was no different than
any other woman, leaving precipitously from a dangerous
situation seeking help from Social Services in Marin County.

I needed housing, food, transportation, help for my disabled daughter, school for my other three children, and
a safe place for us to reside after fleeing violence in South America. In 1983, a single parent with very little
income could apply for Section 8 and be accepted and find a residence in a relatively short period of time, usually under a year. If I were to apply today for myself and my now adult daughter with Down Syndrome, I may have to wait 6 to 8 years, and probably only be able to find a little apartment in a sterile housing complex.

Today, my daughter and I are faced with the all too familiar problem of affordable housing. We live in Cotati, in a pleasant, safe neighborhood in a duplex with a nice yard and a garage. We rented it 7 years ago for $1,200 per month, and our landlady, who also was our next door neighbor and friend, only raised our rent to $1,400 two years ago. I have my garden, over 200 plants, all kinds of little critters in tanks for my science classes, two elderly friendly cats, and wonderful neighbors.

But just before the fires devastated much of Sonoma County, my landlady passed away and her children sold our little oasis to some investors whose only objective is to get a maximum return on their investment, at the expense of our well-being. They first tried to evict us, and then when we agreed to incremental rent increases every three months to be able to stay, they consented, and now, after 6 months, our rent has jumped to $1,950, which is more than half my income on Social Security and part-time interpreting and teaching.

I could go to [District Attorney] Jill Ravitch with a complaint, but our landlords know that they can evict us at any time with no just cause. So far, we have done as so many in our county have, and continued to bite the bullet. We could never afford to move anywhere near here, because of our limited income and lack of any reserve funds.

The rampant greed of landlords, taking advantage of so many who need to live and work in this county, has affected people of all walks of life: the young, as my son’s family in Petaluma, the elderly, as I am at 72 years of age and unable to retire, the disabled as is my daughter with just SSI as her sole income, and those of other ethnicities and backgrounds who face discrimination as insult on top of injury.

I work with IHSS homecare workers, trying to keep our union, SEIU 2015 strong for those of us who dedicate many hours to the care of our less able loved ones and who receive minimal compensation for such a labor of love. This Just Recovery Forum is important to target the needs of so many affected by the housing crisis and the lack of income sufficient to maintain a decent quality of life for ourselves and our families.

Our Union is going into bargaining again this fall to again work toward our goal of $15 per hour for our homecare workers. Aside from our low compensation, which can never reflect the actual hours many of us spend caring for our clients, are the cutbacks of hours allotted to our clients for their care. It is part of our Union objective to address this issue, as well as affordable housing and discrimination in the workplace. We will see if our supervisors will consent to this once we present our case, and we may be out in the streets again, making the public aware of our situation! We hope to see you there! Thank you.

Mario Castillo
Sonoma Valley Housing Group member

¡Hola! My name is Mario Castillo and I’m a member of the Sonoma Valley Housing Group.

We’ve been working on housing and other issues in Sonoma and the Springs for about four years, ever since Anglos from the Methodist Church and Latino parents from El Verano School got together and realized that we were all having the same problems — foreclosures, evictions, homelessness and doubling up, high rents.

There are 40,000 people in Sonoma Valley. And we had our own fires last October. We watched the fires come
over the hills. A lot of houses burned in Glen Ellen. Houses burned going towards Napa. There was a lot of smoke. Part of the Springs was evacuated. A lot of families self-evacuated...scared...to nearby communities.

It was extra difficult for the Spanish-speaking community. Nobody knew what was happening. A neighbor pounded on my door in the middle of the night. I got a lot of phone calls — “What’s happening? What should I do?” I drove around for a couple of hours, finally I decided to leave but I realized people were scared, not knowing what to do. So, I came back and took my cell phone and started live broadcasting on Facebook to show people where the fire was until I finally evacuated myself and my family. We had to go over the mountain to Petaluma.

So I want to tell you tonight how the Spanish-speaking community has been experiencing the fires — and afterwards.

For the Spanish-speaking in Sonoma and the Springs, it’s always a challenge. But it’s worse since the fires. People already had to struggle with the language barrier, and being undocumented, and on top of that with layers of poverty. You can’t address the fire issues without addressing these issues, too. Jobs don’t pay enough. People don’t have transportation.

The fires made things worse. Even though people didn’t lose their houses, with the electricity off they lost the food in their refrigerator, and they lost two or three weeks of work. Sometimes they lost their jobs entirely — landscaping, housecleaning. And this happened just before the end of the month when the rent was due.

A lot of money was collected in Sonoma and the county during the fire. People got one-time help — maybe $500-$800 dollars to help with the rent, maybe some money to help with other losses. But it was a struggle to get even that, and the needs are greater. So people have not been able to fully recuperate.

Just last week, I got a call from a friend who runs a zumba group. Her participants are leaving because there’s not enough work cleaning houses since the fires. People are getting rent increases. People are being evicted because the landlords want to sell their houses. Families are moving out. They’re going to Utah and to Washington State.

These are the things our community is still grappling with. There is still a need for assistance for short-term situations. But the organization that handed out the money in the Springs has turned the page (“Well, that’s over. On to the next thing.”) They told people to connect with additional help in Santa Rosa. But that didn’t happen.

So people feel deceived. With all the money that was gathered, no one will tell them how much and how it was spent. People don’t know how much was handed out to individuals or to organizations like Rebuild Northbay. There’s a lot of distrust.

Finally, part of the struggle people are having right now is: What did we all learn, and how would we react now in a similar situation? For us, the discussion hasn’t started. Nobody seems to be setting up a group to work on disaster preparation. Is there funding? — maybe part of the money still remaining?

Spanish speakers — and not just Spanish speakers — are being left out of the conversations that are happening. The Sonoma Valley Housing Group is glad to be participating with the alliance for a just recovery. Our community was challenged during the fires. And there continues to be a big, big challenge.

Thank you. ♦
Thea Hartman
Vintage Park Tenants Association and
Vintage Vanguard affiliated with Indivisible

I live at Vintage Park Senior Apartments that are low and moderate income senior housing in Santa Rosa. I have lived there about seven and a half years, which is kind of a medium length of time compared to other residents. The first people to move in were there in 1999, and a few of them still live there. The minimum age is 63. Most of the people at Vintage Park, like me, were not always low income. Most once had good jobs, lived in much bigger houses, and drove nice cars. Most had been married, raised kids, and took fun vacations. Most were middle class. Now we are living on Social Security, which does not go up. Not much. This is important to keep in mind. And our rents are going up even though they were meant to be for low-income people.

When I first moved to Vintage Park I was in a state of shock. How was I going to fit all my stuff, years of precious memories, into this tiny 550 square foot apartment? Now I am banding together with my friends and neighbors to fight back against steeply increased rents and apparent harassment.

Vintage Park is “affordable” housing developed as a Low Income Housing Tax Credit or LIHTC. This is different from HUD, Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD housing is also called Section 8. The regulations directing LIHTCs are in section 42 of the federal tax code. With HUD vouchers, the government directly pays the tenant’s rent over the part the tenant pays, which is 30% of their income. With LIHTCs, the owner of a building or complex gets a tax credit every year based on their original expenses building the place. This does not measure up to the profit they could make now if they could rent our apartments at market rate. That’s an incentive to push us out.

According to people who have lived where I do for many years, rent has never gone up much at all. It always stayed within a range that one could afford on a limited, fixed income. 2017 was the first sizable increase. This year we saw a 10% increase which was limited by the fire emergency. I happen to be among the lowest income residents. This last rent increase has cut my monthly disposable income down to $50.00

People are talking about the changes they will make to live within their budgets. They mention seeing the doctor less often or not refilling a certain medicine, or going without air conditioning on hot days, presenting a risk due to a medical situation. For me, I have to forgo the organic food that I believe is healthiest for me. There was a housing shortage before the fire, and as we all know, the problem got much worse since the fire. If we are forced out, there is no place to go.

I suspect that the landlords may want to encourage us to leave. There have been a couple of changes in management policies that we think may be an attempt at harassment. Last Thursday, seven tenants at one building - nearly half the tenants - received lease violations, some for very minor offenses. By history, lease violations have been given with much less frequency and the protocol has been to give a verbal warning before notice is served. Maybe they are hoping that many of us will leave before rent control goes into effect. If the Santa Rosa rent control initiative makes it onto the ballot, and if it passes, it will go a long way toward solving our problem because it will not only keep our rents from making another huge leap next year, but it will help protect us from unfair evictions. However, it won’t cover us unless the state bill repealing Costa-Hawkins also passes, because our complex was built in 1998. Costa-Hawkins exempts buildings constructed after 1997 from rent control. Working with the North Bay Organizing Project, we helped to circulate the petition to get rent control on the ballot. We will be working to pass both of these in the November elections and invite you to join us in that effort.
Berenice Perez Martinez  
*Alianza de Mujeres Activas y Solidarias  
*and Graton Day Labor Center

I am Berenice Perez Martinez and day by day I live with one of the main problems that the low-income population faces which is the lack of new opportunities. Today I want to share my experiences and how it has been for me the last ten years, living here in the US. I am currently in a case of wage theft with Legal Aid Network.

I was born in Mexico City in 1983. We are a family of four and, thanks to my parents and their effort to get ahead in life, my sister and I both finished our professional careers. I remember thinking it would be easy to find a job that would help me to become independent and to walk, little by little through the social classes, but on the contrary I only found the reality in which one lives in Mexico.

This was the situation that made me cross the border believing that things would be better here. I arrived in San Francisco seeking shelter so I could be safe and not on the street. I met some people who could help me find a job to support myself.

I found work in the fast food industry getting paid $10 an hour like many of us who come to this country. I attended culinary arts school to learn to what I needed to know to do my job better and to be more efficient and it made it easier for me to understand.

So over time I enjoyed cooking and I learned different styles and techniques that are used but this meant up to 16 hours of work, standing in the kitchen without taking a break or sitting down to eat lunch. When I wasn't working double to earn the money to help my family, I was attending high school to finish the credits I needed for the non-resident tuition exemptions that promised to give me a better life and a better future with more affordable costs that a resident could pay. That was my work and school situation.

I lived during a time in San Francisco when it was said that landlords were setting fires to empty the buildings of old tenants to raise the rent and displacing families that had long occupied the neighborhoods. I also had to look for a place. I found a place that had affordable rent but I also suffered from harassment by the landlord of the place. In 2013 I found independent rooms in a place that, over time I learned were illegal. The landlord was also a tax preparer who committed fraud when he did my taxes by putting 12 dependents and getting an almost $10,000 check in my name, forcing me to stay at the place I lived until I could resolve my case with the IRS. I spent six months looking for an affordable place to live in San Francisco, but I could not.

Finally some friends from Santa Rosa gave me a hand and offered me a room. This was one week prior to the fires. The city and all of us were shocked for about 2 weeks and thanks to NBOP for putting on the [clinic] where they offered us treatment, therapy and other types of help. During this time I was able to get a job in the kitchen again but it was work that I had no desire in doing anymore.

In December of 2017, I decided to change job paths. I went to the Santa Rosa Mall and found a job at Spencer’s, which is a clothing, gifts and toy store. It was the holiday season and the manager needed extra staff. She offered me $10 an hour and I took the job out of necessity. She knew that English was not my first language and by filling out the application she delivered my Mexican passport along with my other documents. I worked my schedule for 8 hours each day for a week. When it was payday, they I-9’ed me and I realized that my Social did not match. So the supervisor came into the area. So thank you to everyone that’s here from the community and from the Graton Day Labor Center, which is a place where I feel supported and supported by the people there who have also crossed many barriers.
What is the AJR Common Agenda for A Just, Equitable, and Sustainable Recovery?

Teri Shore
Regional Director North Bay, Greenbelt Alliance

Greenbelt Alliance, Sierra Club, Sonoma County Conservation Action, 350.org and our many allies in the environmental community are advocating for a Just, Equitable and Sustainable Recovery from the North Bay Fires in Sonoma County, Santa Rosa and beyond.

We are all realizing that the recovery and rebuild is a marathon, not a sprint. That is why the Common Agenda for a Just, Equitable and Sustainable Recovery is so critical to the future of the people and environment in our region.

We live in a place where the land is supposed to burn. We live in a fire-adapted landscape. Decades of fire suppression combined with unrelenting growth and development into the wildlands in California and across the West has resulted in what Professor Gregory Simon calls the Incendiary. Mother Nature is not responsible for disastrous wildfires, it is mainly us. If you read his book “Flame and Fortune in the American West” you can delve deep into wildfire and urban expansion and the land-use policies, politics and profits that got us into this predicament.

How and where we grow is a key factor in fire risk and climate change, environment and health. The fact that we need to drive so much is a huge problem. In Sonoma County between 2010 and 2015, the number of miles we drove in our cars increased by 12 percent or 260,000 miles per day. And I refer you to the new Regional Climate Protection Authority Update on greenhouse gas emissions. It’s really well done; it’s easy to read.

The good news is that, as a whole, Sonoma County did not increase our emissions—we kind of stayed the same—maybe up 1/2 percent during that time overall (not counting air travel or shipment of goods here). That’s mainly due to Sonoma Clean Power.

But at this rate greenhouse gases will increase and we won’t meet our goals to reduce GHGs by 25% below 1990 levels by 2020.

The solutions to addressing wildfire risk and climate change include, but go beyond emergency response, more fire engines and removal of dead trees and vegetation. We need to rethink how and where we create and rebuild our communities and really the entire status quo to achieve a just, equitable and sustainable recovery.

Most importantly, right now, we need to avoid short-term decisions that could have negative long-ranging impacts on the people, lands and economy of Sonoma County. **No one in Sonoma County should ever die again as a result of poor land use or other policy decisions.**

We need to lobby our elected officials and generate community pressure to adopt and implement the policies in the Common Agenda for a Just Recovery and the policies in the new Fire Recovery Plan, General Plan Updates and new housing initiatives that are moving forward quickly right now.
Here are some of the key environmental elements of the Just, Equitable and Sustainable Recovery:

- Focus on city-centered growth within Urban Growth Boundaries.
- Protect and enhance greenbelts and community separators.
- Prevent sprawl and maintain green buffers to reduce fire risk as the highest wildfire risk occurs in intermediate density housing in clusters of rural development in the Wildland Urban Interface.
- Adopt new fire-smart land use policies to build within existing towns and cities near jobs, services and transit and stop further development into the hills and forests.
- Permanently protect a network of lands that support biological diversity through changing climate conditions and prevent development in high risk areas.
- Uphold and enforce California Environmental Quality Act with full environmental review and public input.
- Require “all-electric ready” new homes and bolster use of green building and natural materials.
- Raise building standards for new fire-safe housing construction and require fire resistant landscaping.
- Require early implementation of cost effective, high performance Zero Net Energy New Homes (no later than 1/1/2019).
- Provide detailed rationale for 30,000 new housing units by 2023 in Sonoma County, including proposed locations, number of affordable units, feasibility, cost and impacts to climate-changing emissions, environment, infrastructure, and emergency response.

Maddy Hirshfield,
Political Director, North Bay Labor Council

I was thinking about the title of this evening—A Just Recovery—“just” means the act of being in conformity with what is morally upright and good. Recovery is a return to a normal state of health, mind, and strength. And I would add spiritually and emotionally for the entire community as well as for us as individuals.

Many of the issues around jobs and the affordability of living here in Sonoma County were serious issues before the fires. The fires definitely magnified them and made them much more urgent, but they’ve always been here.

According to the California Nonprofit Housing Corporation, wages have been falling while housing costs and rents have been rising for years and years. It just got worse with the fires. It doesn’t take a genius to see where that scenario is going to lead us.

After the fires, we all were trying hard just to get over the shock and deal with the immediate future. Dealing with the enormity of what the fire did was overwhelming and truly shocking.

At the North Bay Labor Council we are part of the AFL-CIO; we represent over 70 affiliates, and their thousands of members. We had over 400 members lose their home. And we were evacuated from our office. So we set up, thankfully, at SEIU, and went to work, trying to raise money.
We were in a time of disaster fatigue—we’d had floods, the Las Vegas shooting had just happened, people were just overwhelmed with “give here, give here.” We raised a little over $120,000 which sounds great but when you’re trying to help over 400 people it turns into nothing. But everyone was very grateful for that $300 check.

So, we knew there was no silver bullet and it would take a suite of ideas working together to make this happen. I’m going to focus on jobs tonight.

First, we’re asking for a City-wide minimum wage to be in place by 2020. In 2016, California passed a bill increasing the minimum wage to $15 an hour to be phased in by 2023. We’ve asked for a city-wide minimum wage for Santa Rosa to be phased in by 2020, 3 years sooner than the state minimum.

According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, approximately 37,000 workers in the City would directly or indirectly benefited by this and would increase the average worker’s salary by $3,700 a year.

There is a difference between the minimum wage and a living wage. Minimum wage is not a wage you can live on. According to the California Budget Project, a living wage in California is $23 an hour for a family of four. That’s 2 working parents and 2 kids – with an annual income $81,000.

In Sonoma County, 55% of households earn less than $74k a year; 35% earn less than $50k a year. Half of the workers who would be affected by an increase in the minimum wage live in households that bring in less than $50k a year.

This plays into the displacement caused by the fire. So many can’t afford to live here as rents went up 36% immediately after the fires. Housing stock was already down; with the fires it went way down.

If we do nothing, it’s estimated that 54% of new jobs created will pay less than a livable wage in Sonoma County. A third of those living in the county are considered working poor. In California, 14.5% of residents live in poverty which was slightly above the 13.7 percent nationwide average in 2016. Inequality, poverty and the expansion of the low-wage workforce have reached the highest levels since World War II in Sonoma County and the state.

So here are a couple of myths about the negative impacts of raising the minimum wage:

• A minimum wage would disproportionally impact small business: Two thirds of workers that would be affected by a minimum wage ordinance are employed by businesses with more than 100 workers.

• Only teenagers are earning minimum wages: 95% of workers affected by minimum wage are 20 years of age and older, with the average age being 35.

This is a regional issue so we’re asking cities to propose minimum wage ordinances in Novato, Petaluma, Sonoma and Sebastopol. Ultimately, we want to have the Counties of Marin and Sonoma adopt a $15 minimum wage before the state minimum kicks in.

Other jurisdictions that have passed minimum wage by 2020 are San Francisco, Emeryville, LA County & City, Long Beach, Pasadena and Santa Monica. Berkeley, Santa Clara County, the city of San Jose as well as six others have adopted $15 by 2019 and, in all, two dozen cities in California have approved $15 per hour minimum wage laws, phased in at different rates, but faster than the state.

We’ve commissioned a study from the UC Berkeley Labor Center economists to analyze the economic impacts of a $15 citywide minimum wage on all cities in and the four North Bay counties including Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano.

We are in dialogue with five city councils including Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Novato, Sonoma, and Sebastopol — Santa Rosa has already voted for a study session to begin in the fall.
An August 2015 Field Poll demonstrated that 68% of registered California voters support incremental raising of the state minimum wage and 6 paid sick days so there’s little reason our elected officials shouldn’t be comfortable moving these ideas forward.

Once again, wages are going down while the cost of living is going up. The drastic cutbacks on housing at the state and federal level have also contributed to this problem. The state eliminated the Redevelopment funding that allowed many cities to build affordable housing. This has only made it harder to provide places for low wage workers to live.

Finally, I just want to talk a little about organizing and working for unions. Workers in right-to-work states earn more than 3% less than those in non-right-to-work states and workers who belong to a union make about 20% more than nonunion workers in similar jobs.

We have to work hard to organize. You heard from Ofelia earlier that the Hyatt workers have been working very hard to organize. We were just there last week; we’re trying to make that happen. So, if you’re thinking about what you can do, join us on an informational picket line. That informational picket line down at the Hyatt last Friday was unbelievable, in terms of the energy. And the need to advance people forward and lift people up, we all need to do that. So, come out and join us on the streets.

Perry Angle
North Bay Organizing Project Housing Taskforce

My name is Perry Angle and I am part of the rent stabilization and just cause eviction program of the North Bay Organizing Committee. In late 2016 the Santa Rosa City Council passed a rent control ordinance that applied only to buildings completed prior to 1995, that was due to take effect in a couple of months. The Real Estate industry, led by the Apartment Owner’s Association, immediately put together a fund of over a million dollars and conducted a petition campaign that was done in such a way that those of us now doing petition campaigns are now permanently injured in terms of our reputations. I any event they collected enough signatures, forced a special election in June of 2017 which overturned the City’s ordinance. Over 35,000 people voted; we lost by 800 votes. Rent Control is popular in Santa Rosa.

Last January the NBOP began meetings to explore the idea of bringing rent control back on the ballot this coming November. Our belief is that the rent situation is so bad that no amount of mis-leading and biased information can defeat it in a general election. We got help from Stanford University Public Law project and proposed a rent stabilization and just cause eviction ordinance, collected 11,500 signatures in 7 weeks and submitted it for certification for November’s ballot. We need 9500 signatures. Those are being counted right now and the answer is due next week. Personally, I think it’s going to be razor thin. We could win it by 100 signatures or lose it by 100 signatures. If we got enough good signatures the ordinance will be part of the November general election.

If passed this ordinance would require landlords of covered buildings to look back at the rate they were charging at the day of the fire and would then limit increases in accordance with the rate of inflation, but no more than 5% a year and at least 2% a year. Importantly it would limit all landlords to just cause eviction criteria, which would prevent evictions for other than failure to pay, failure to observe your lease, etc. It can’t be because they don’t like you anymore. If the landlord wishes to violate the just cause criteria—he wants to evict so he can re-do the whole place—he’s gotta pay. He would pay a specified penalty to the affected tenant to help supply moving costs.
Some say, no one will want to build new apartments with this ordinance. New construction would be exempt from rent control for the first 16 years of occupancy—that lets the landlord pay off their loans. And “mom and pop” landlords of one or two properties would also be exempt. But the just-cause eviction clause applies to all of them. That is the ordinance we are hoping to put before you.

Why is rent control so important to Santa Rosa? I don’t think I have to go into a lot of detail. Nearly half of the population in Santa Rosa RENTS their dwelling. Vacancy rates are less than 1%. The rents, we all know, are going up. We all have stories similar to what Thea was telling us. In my building, my rent is up 63% since 2013. Corporations are buying our housing stock, buying our land, and they do not care who lives there as long as they rake the money in. It’s just good old-fashioned American greed.

Our problem is that we need to get things built; we need to get control over the market. The rent control ordinance, if it passes, has a sunset provision, should we ever get a true rental market in place again. We’re not anti-capitalists.

In any event, whether the rent control ordinance makes it onto the ballot or not, or passes or not—because we can expect a very active opposition, if it ever gets to the ballot—there’s three things that we need to do.

Number one, we are forming a Santa Rosa Tenants Alliance; we need to organize the tenants in this city. So that they have a voice, continuously, from now on, whenever housing issues come up. If you are interested in joining that alliance, come over to our table and sign up.

Secondly, we want everybody to register and vote against the Costa-Hawkins amendment.

Thirdly, our city council is considering a bond measure to build low income and moderate income housing. Support that, all the way.

Thanks to all who worked with us on the petitions and thanks to all who signed the petitions. ♦

Photos by Angelica Tercero. Thank you to the members of the Alliance for a Just Recovery, Bonnie Petty, Attila Nagy, SCOE, and the numerous volunteers and members of the community who testified for helping to make this report possible.

For more information please go to NorthBayJobsWithJustice.org or contact us at northbayjwj@gmail.com
Concluding Remarks and Call to Action

Mary Bennett
Co-Chair, North Bay Jobs with Justice and UNITE HERE Local 2850

I want to conclude by discussing how you can become involved in our movement for a just recovery.

AJR is fundamentally about building a multiracial, democratic, grassroots movement for a just, equitable, and sustainable recovery.

Only through building a people powered movement and an enduring coalition from the bottom up, can we address the root causes of inequality, the housing and homeless crisis, racial and gender discrimination, exploitation of immigrant labor, the climate crisis, and the increased threat of more devastating wildfires.

Prior to the fires, according to the U.S. Census data, more than 35 percent of all Sonoma households and 44 percent of Latino households were the working poor. These households received total income of less than $50,000 a year—with at least one household member reporting income from work. After the fire, we know that the economic stress on low and moderate-income families has increased dramatically by the spike in the number of homeless and unsheltered and record numbers accessing food banks. The housing crisis is now unprecedented and catastrophic as the fire destroyed 5 percent of Santa Rosa’s housing, and triggered a 35 percent increase of rents by unscrupulous landlords.

We can start here in Santa Rosa to build a movement for a just recovery during the 2018 election cycle that addresses the housing crisis by implementing a floor and a ceiling for all renters in the city that includes: a citywide minimum wage of $15 an hour by 2020 and six paid sick days for all Santa Rosa workers; and a comprehensive rent control ordinance that limits rent increases to no more than increases in the cost of living, and includes just cause eviction protections for renters. Over the last fifteen years incomes and wages for renters in the county have dropped, while rents have climbed, and in addition, funding for affordable housing from the state and federal government has dropped by nearly 90 percent. We must adopt a multipronged approach to the housing crisis that includes increasing renter incomes, implementing rent control, and developing new local sources of funding for affordable housing.

The Santa Rosa campaign to raise the wage floor can be a stepping-stone towards passing minimum wage legislation in cities like Novato, San Rafael, Petaluma, Sebastopol, and Sonoma, and overtime the counties of Marin and Sonoma, in order to establish a regional minimum wage higher than the state in these costly counties.

Raising the wage floor for renters also includes building community support for campaigns to unionize the service sector--such as the hospitality industry and hotels like as the Hyatt Santa Rosa--as well as other low-wage industries such as food processing, janitorial, childcare and home care. A campaign to raise the wage floor should also support public sector workers and ensure that these workers can afford to live in the community and that their working conditions enable public employees to provide the highest quality of public services.

The Santa Rosa campaign for a comprehensive rent control ordinance and a ceiling for renters can also be a stepping stone to build support for the statewide ballot initiative to repeal of Costa Hawkins, and to apply rent control to most residential units in Santa Rosa, and going forward to win approval for rent control
laws elsewhere in the county and the region. The Santa Rosa rent control campaign can also jump start a campaign to develop new sources of funding for affordable housing such as raising the real estate transfer tax on the sale of high end residential property priced above $1.5 million, and commercial property above $3 million, and dedicating this funding to low and very low income affordable housing and transitional housing for the homeless.

We are at a crossroads in the recovery. As the testimony at this forum anecdotally confirms we, are facing a massive displacement crisis of low and moderate-income residents who cannot afford to live in the community. It may be several years from now that we will know exactly how many, but we know displacement is occurring and we must act now. Raising the wage floor and implementing rent control in Santa Rosa is where we can start.

Moreover, we are at the crossroads because the fire risk is growing. We must address the climate crisis, focus new development inside the urban growth boundaries, and demand higher building and fire safety standards in the highest fire risk areas to prevent another recurrence of a firestorm with the intensity and destructive power of the Tubbs fire.

We must work with progressive electeds on the inside (like those in attendance tonight) and build a movement on the outside to address inequality and the climate crisis. Simultaneously, we must build a movement on the outside to address inequality and the climate crisis. The Democratic Party’s platform has become more progressive with the Bernie Sanders influence. More Democrats are embracing Medicare for All, $15 minimum wage, free community college and other planks in Bernie’s platform. And we cannot forget that Bernie Sanders won the Democratic Party primary in 2016 in Santa Rosa. His platform resonated with voters in this community.

We need to encourage more progressive candidates who support Bernie’s platform to run for office and we must support them after they are elected when they do the right thing. We also need to eliminate the structural impediments to electing Democrats, including gerrymandering, voter suppression, and Citizens United, amongst others. We must make our elected officials accountable to those who elect them and particularly to youth, immigrants, women, people of color, labor, environmental and LGBT voters who are the emerging new majority in California.

Sonoma County and his platform of Medicare for All, $15 minimum wage, slashing military spending, a federal job guarantee, free community college, curbing police violence, and a rapid transition to a clean energy economy, resonated with Democratic voters here and much of his platform has been adopted by the state Democratic Party.

We must make our elected officials accountable to those who elect them and particularly to youth, immigrants, women, people of color, labor, environmental and LGBT voters who are the emerging new majority in California and will reshape the Democratic Party. A long-term just recovery depends upon the Democratic Party responding to the needs and demands of the new majority and we must challenge incumbents who do not – as occurred with the recent landslide Congressional victory by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York City over a 10-term Democratic incumbent.

You have heard about numerous campaigns for a just recovery by various organizations in our Alliance. You can see signs and banners for these organizations at the tables around the room and representatives of various organizations are sitting at the tables. Please spend some time networking and signing up to volunteer in campaigns led by these organizations. ◆