



The League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County opposes Measure P that is on the Menlo Park ballot in November 2026.

If passed by a majority of Menlo Park voters, Measure P, the “Citizen Initiative to Amend Municipal Code” measure commonly known as the [Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance](#) would require voter approval before the City can sell, lease, repurpose, modify, or alter any of the eight City-owned parking plazas in downtown Menlo Park. This proposed ordinance requires a citywide election for ANY development on ANY downtown parking lot; it retroactively blocks the City plan to develop downtown lots 1, 2 and 3 unless there is a citywide vote, and if the ordinance is challenged in court, it requires the City to defend against those challenges (regardless of merit) at unlimited taxpayer expense. If the City elects not to defend the ordinance or appeal adverse judgments against it, three unelected “proponents” are authorized to act as “agents of the people” in litigation, again at taxpayer expense.

The League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County believes that the Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance is bad practice and bad policy for the following reasons:

1. The Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance is bad governance with no expiration date.

- **It undercuts our system of representative government.** Voters elect city council members to lead their communities. We should empower our elected officials to lead. Our city council studies pros & cons, holds public hearings, takes public input, engages consultants, and can be voted out if constituents disagree with its actions.
- **It would shift complex technical decisions to a low-information, single-issue vote.** Development decisions involve engineering, financing, traffic, environmental review, and legal trade-offs that the city council has deliberated on and will continue to deliberate over at many public hearings. A ballot measure would compress this process into a yes/no vote, perhaps decided by whoever runs the more effective campaign rather than by the underlying merits. It is unrealistic and unreasonable to expect every voter to be educated on all the relevant details of complex issues.
- **It disproportionately empowers well-resourced and more vocal opposition.** Signature-gathering and ballot campaigns cost money. This structurally favors groups with time and resources to spend on campaigns over renters, younger residents, or future residents who don’t yet live here and have no voice at all.

2. The Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance would slow down housing production during a housing crisis.

- **It would block badly-needed affordable housing.** The City is planning for at least 345 affordable homes on three downtown parking plazas (along with replacing 100% of the parking currently offered by the plazas). The Ordinance would require voter approval of these homes, which at best would significantly delay the projects.
- **It would delay production of any housing or other development on the downtown lots.** Regular elections are held every two years, so any project would be delayed by months or years while waiting for a vote. This would compound an already severe housing shortage and drive up costs, since delay itself adds costs that are passed on to renters, buyers, or the citizens of Menlo Park. In fact, it would effectively

freeze the City-owned parking lots in their current form, as they have been since they were built in the 1940's-1950's.

3. The Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance would jeopardize the City's ability to comply with state-mandated housing requirements and could subject the City to costs, penalties, loss of state funding, and less desirable developments.

- **It could lead to decertification of the City's Housing Element.** [Since 2022](#), the City has been engaged in complex discussions with the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to certify Menlo Park's 2023–2031 Housing Element. Every city-owned site was considered for its potential to develop affordable housing, and the parking plazas were determined to be a central pillar of this certification. If the Ordinance effectively blocks the production of these 345 affordable units, the HCD could [decertify the City's Housing Element](#). Menlo Park's July 2026 updated housing report details how Menlo Park has few alternative sites and is at serious risk of having its Housing Element decertified if Measure P passes: "it is uncertain whether 92% of very low-income units, 23% of low-income units, and 60% of moderate-income units projected in the Housing Element pipeline are likely to be developed during the 6th Cycle (2023-2031). Inactive pipeline projects account for nearly 2,000 total units that were projected as part of the City's RHNA."
- **Decertification would lead to triggering Builder's Remedy consequences.** Decertification would strip Menlo Park of local zoning control. Developers could bypass local height and density restrictions to build massive, market-rate residential projects anywhere in the city, provided they include a baseline percentage of affordable units.
- **Decertification could lead to a loss of state funding.** The City would likely face severe financial penalties and lose eligibility for state infrastructure, transportation, and affordable housing grants if the Housing Element is decertified.

4. The Downtown Parking Plazas Ordinance requires the City to fund litigation at taxpayer expense to defend the Ordinance against legal challenges, regardless of merit.

- Section 10 of the Ordinance requires that the City defend the Ordinance against all legal challenges. If the City fails to defend the Ordinance or to challenge adverse judgments against it, the Ordinance empowers three unelected "proponents" to incur legal fees "as agents of the people" and requires the City to reimburse the legal costs incurred by these individuals. Final decision-making authority on all legal challenges to the Ordinance is transferred from the voters and City Council to these "proponents," yet remains a taxpayer expense.
- No accountability or guardrails are specified in the Ordinance, and there is no requirement that any defenses against legal challenges have merit.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization. We do not support or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office. The League takes stands on legislation and ballot measures. Our advocacy is focused on issues, not individuals, and is guided by League positions, research, and commitment to informed, active participation in democracy. [Addressing our community's housing crisis has been a key issue for the League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County since 2003.](#)

The League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County encourages voters to reject Measure P by voting NO.