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## San Bernardino Renters Call for Tenant Rights Amid Housing Crisis, Demand Community Benefits for Downtown Redevelopment

5 min read

8 hours ago [Manny Sandoval \(https://iecn.com/author/manny/\)](https://iecn.com/author/manny/)



Deborah Harmon, representing the Inland Equity Community Land Trust, organizing her booth's flyers promoting tenant rights and unions at the event.

The worsening housing crisis in San Bernardino has sparked a strong response from local tenant unions, housing advocates, and community organizations, culminating in a community-wide event aimed at addressing renters' concerns and advocating for tenant rights. Hosted by [Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement](https://copesite.org/) (C.O.P.E.), a Block Party on October 19th brought together several key housing and social justice organizations—including Just San Bernardino, Time for Change Foundation, Inland Equity Community Land Trust (IECLT), and IE Tenants Union—to offer resources and support for those affected by the housing crisis.



The event provided a platform for local advocates to discuss pressing issues such as skyrocketing rents, poor living conditions, and the neglect many renters face. Through a collective voice, attendees urged city officials to prioritize affordable housing and tenant rights.

### **Housing Advocates Speak Out Against Rent Increases**

Lorena Barbosa, a housing advocate for the Time for Change Foundation, was among the leaders who spoke at the event, highlighting the difficulties many tenants in San Bernardino face as rents continue to rise at alarming rates. Barbosa described an environment where tenants live with “holes in roofs, infestations, no hot water, no heat,” while some landlords raise rents up to three times in a single year, resulting in deteriorating apartment complexes with few tenants remaining.

“The reality is, some landlords don’t care about the conditions their tenants are living in,” Barbosa said. “They’re hiking up rents while leaving buildings to fall into disrepair. But if we can put a cap on rent increases and hold these landlords accountable, we can make a difference.”

Barbosa believes that collective action is the key to change. “It’s when we come together as a community that our voices are truly heard. When tenants speak up, especially those who are undocumented and afraid of retaliation, we can make real change,” she added.

Undocumented renters, she emphasized, are among the most vulnerable, often staying silent out of fear that speaking up could result in retaliation or even deportation. Barbosa’s message to the community was clear: unity and collective action are the only way forward.

### **Inland Equity Community Land Trust Fights for Tenant Rights**

Deborah Harmon, representing the Inland Equity Community Land Trust (IECLT), shared her personal experience of housing instability, which inspired her to take action. Harmon recounted her experience as a renter at Day Park Apartments in San Bernardino, where she faced neglect and poor treatment by her landlord.



“We didn’t have hot water, there were roaches, and basic maintenance was ignored,” Harmon explained. “But what pushed us to form a tenant union was the lack of knowledge about our rights. We were tired of being taken advantage of.”

Harmon emphasized that tenant unions are critical in ensuring landlords provide basic living essentials like hot water, electricity, and safe conditions. Inland Equity Community Land Trust has since expanded its reach, establishing tenant unions in Riverside, Hemet, Redlands, Ontario, and San Bernardino, with the goal of empowering communities to hold landlords accountable.

“Every city should have a tenant union to ensure that landlords are being held accountable. Our tenant union started with just a few of us, but now we’re growing, and we believe this is a movement that can bring change,” Harmon said.





Just San Bernardino providing community members with information on the Downtown Revitalization Projects proposed Community Benefits Agreement.

Formed in 2020 as a project of the Inland Equity Partnership, IECLT is focused on providing affordable rental and ownership housing in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The organization shifted its focus during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist renters in staying in their homes, advocating for rental assistance and ensuring that aid from the CARES Act reached those most in need.

Reflecting on the importance of the event, Harmon remarked, "We're here today to come together to bring resources to the community that they may not know are available to them and



to help lift them above their circumstances.”

## **Balancing the Narrative: Landlords' Perspective and Community Response**

While tenant unions and advocates have raised legitimate concerns about living conditions and rent hikes, some landlords argue that maintaining properties in low-income communities can be challenging. Citing the adversity many renters face, landlords say that the neglect of properties is sometimes a reflection of tenants' lack of care for their living spaces. However, advocates at the event were quick to point out that this perspective could also be seen as an excuse to avoid necessary maintenance and repairs.

“Sure, there are slumlords who don't do the bare minimum, but there needs to be a balance,” San Bernardino Resident Marcus Lopez noted. “Landlords need to provide basic essentials like hot water and safe, livable structures, but tenants should also take pride in their living spaces and treat them like their own.”

## **Community Action for Downtown Redevelopment**

In addition to tenant rights, another key focus of the C.O.P.E. Block Party was the revitalization of downtown San Bernardino. Local advocacy group Just San Bernardino is urging the community to attend the upcoming City Council meeting on November 6 to demand a community benefits agreement (CBA) for the Downtown San Bernardino Redevelopment project. The CBA outlines several key priorities, including the construction of affordable housing, environmental protections, and economic opportunities for local residents.

The proposal includes a commitment to construct no less than 25% of the housing units in the redevelopment project as affordable housing, ensuring that rent for affordable units will not exceed 30% of a qualified tenant's annual income. The CBA also seeks to establish a community stabilization fund to support underserved residents through eviction prevention assistance and relocation aid. Additionally, the agreement calls for identifying parcels of land for



stewardship by community-based organizations, such as community land trusts, to develop and sustain affordable housing through long-term ground leases.

Economic development within the CBA prioritizes the food economy, encouraging food businesses and incubators such as micro-kitchens. It also calls for the leasing of retail and office space to women- or minority-owned businesses, as well as support for contracting with women- and minority-owned vendors.

Labor practices were also highlighted in the CBA, which includes commitments to fair scheduling and labor peace agreements for businesses operating within the downtown redevelopment area. Additionally, the proposal outlines the creation of a first-source referral center to connect San Bernardino residents with employment opportunities generated by the project.

The City Council meeting will take place on November 6 at 5 p.m. at Feldheym Central Library, located at 555 West 6th Street in San Bernardino. Community members are encouraged to attend and make their voices heard via public comment regarding the future of downtown redevelopment. For more information on the Inland Equity Community Land Trust and their tenant union efforts, visit their website at [Inland Equity Community Land Trust \(https://civicrm.inlandequityclt.org/civicrm/event/info?id=1\)](https://civicrm.inlandequityclt.org/civicrm/event/info?id=1), or contact Deborah Harmon at [harmon.deborah.d@gmail.com](mailto:harmon.deborah.d@gmail.com).

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