

## **February Program: Selection of Program Topics for the** **El Cerrito Democratic Club's 2026 Monthly Membership Meetings**

At last month's ECDC Monthly General Membership Meeting, participants put forth ideas for potential program topics for 2026's monthly meetings. Attendees at this month's February meeting will be asked to **select up to eight (8) preferred topics** for discussion at our 2026 General Membership Meetings by checking the square boxes to the left. There is no need to number or rank your choices. With ECDC's 74th Annual Dinner in October and the ECDC Annual Holiday Party in December, there are up to eight remaining monthly programs to be decided upon: March, April, May, June, July, August, September and November.

**In addition to choosing up to eight topics, everyone please vote on the last question.** If we choose "Library Tax" as a meeting topic, would you prefer it be covered "debate style" with both sides splitting time in one meeting or, if scheduling allows, provide more time for each side in two separate meetings?

### **POTENTIAL PROGRAM TOPICS - 2026**

**1. *El Cerrito Library Tax Initiative – Pros and Cons***

Perhaps the most important and contentious issue facing El Cerrito in 2026 is the proposed property tax to fund a new or renovated library. In 2025, the tax's author ECDC Past President and El Cerrito former Mayor/Councilmember Greg Lyman spoke to the Club about it but the opponents did not. In fairness, the ECDC should hear from both sides—the tax opponents as well its proponents—before the initiative goes before El Cerrito voters. On February 19th, the El Cerrito City Council voted 4-to-1 to place the measure on the June 2, 2026 ballot. (Councilmember William Ktsanes voted instead to place the tax on the November 3rd ballot as it would have saved the city and its residents \$80,000 in election fees.)

**Suggested speakers:** Anti-Tax: Wally Nowinski and Barbara Chan; Pro-Tax: Greg Lyman and Charles Taylor

**2. *WCCUSD Parcel Tax Renewal and Plans to Stabilize Finances***

After the December 2025 teachers' strike, the West Contra Costa Unified School District approved a contract giving teachers and district employees – including administrators – significant wage increases, added benefits and improved working conditions (including 100% district-paid family health care by June 30, 2027). The district recently announced plans to cut \$127 million in spending over three years. A districtwide parcel tax that brings in about \$10 million annually will expire on June 30, 2027. School board members indicated that a tax renewal would be placed on either the June 2, 2026 primary or November 3, 2026 general election ballot. What is the plan to stabilize finances and perhaps change budget priorities so that receivership can be avoided, teachers can be retained and similar contract disputes can be avoided? To generate revenue and help retain district employees, given the cost of Bay Area housing, has the district considered developing workforce housing on surplus properties? What information came from Godbe Research's survey of likely voters? What plans are in place if the parcel tax renewal fails and/or budget cuts are insufficient?

**Suggested speakers:** Leslie Reckler, WCCUSD Trustee and ECDC Board Officer; Natalie Tavani-Walchuk, Chief Impact Officer for GO Public Schools, an Oakland-based public education advocacy nonprofit that tracks data and offers resources for parents; or Francisco Ortiz, President, United Teachers of Richmond

### **3. *Electing Democrats in the 2026 Midterm Election, How to Navigate a Governors Race with so Many Candidates***

What can we do to ensure Democratic candidates in the 2026 midterms are elected to Congress as well to other offices both locally and across the country? Which Republican-held Congressional districts have the highest probability of being flipped to a Democrat? Who will run for the remaining term of Doug LaMalfa, and how much does winning the special election matter? How will the passage of Proposition 50 redistricting affect Congressman Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael) and does he need our help? What's the status of the Political Action Committee (PAC) that ECDC President Neil Tsutsui planned to launch?

**Suggested speakers:** Jared Huffman or Neil Tsutsui

### **4. *Update on the Plaza BART Housing/Transit-Oriented Development Plan***

The City Council has approved a plan to build 743 apartments in six apartment buildings on what are now parking lots at the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station. Construction is underway on one 70-unit affordable housing building, which will provide 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments for low, very low, and extremely-low income households. What are the ramifications of the six-building, transit-oriented development (TOD) being behind schedule, with the other five approved apartment buildings not yet fully funded. Is there an updated plan and timeline? Since at least 2019, a majority of City Council members have pushed for construction of a new library on the ground floor of one of the unfunded affordable housing buildings. How is it impacted by the construction delays and uncertainties? Is the plan being changed to allow more affordable housing and less market-rate housing? What's the updated status of the Parking Management District proposed to facilitate library users and others parking on city streets when BART parking is reduced to just 145 spaces? (This topic would broadly address the development of the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station parcels and not specifically focus on the proposed library.)

**Suggested speakers:** Melanie Mintz, Community Development Director; Matt Lewis, Principal Property Developer at BART; and/or a representative from developer Related Companies

### **5. *Proposals to Stop Investors from Buying Up Single-Family Homes***

Recently politicians ranging from Gov. Gavin Newsom to gubernatorial candidate Tom Steyer to President Trump have said institutional investors should be stopped from buying single-family residential homes, which they argue makes home ownership for families even less affordable. The same week that Governor Newsom announced a plan to stop investors from buying up homes, President Trump issued an Executive Order titled "Stopping Wall Street from Competing with Main Street Homebuyers." (January 20, 2026) In his televised campaign ads, Tom Steyer promises to stop Wall Street investors from buying up homes. California bill AB 1240, authored by State Assembly Member Alex Lee (D-Milpitas), would prohibit institutional investors that already own more than 1,000 single-family homes from purchasing any additional properties to convert into rentals. The bill has already passed the full Assembly and now awaits approval from the state Senate. What's the significance and status of these efforts?

**Suggested speakers:** Rep. Alex Lee or Nicholas Chan, Communications Director for Alex Lee ([nicholas.chan@asm.ca.gov](mailto:nicholas.chan@asm.ca.gov)); another possibility is to invite gubernatorial candidate Tom Steyer or one of his campaign surrogates

## **6. *Protecting Immigrants / “Know your Rights” Seminar***

President Trump’s federal police, including ICE and Customs and Border agents, have been operating in ways many of us find bullying and illegal. As we all know, they recently shot two U.S. citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti. An immigration expert could be invited to discuss President Trump’s effort to deport undocumented immigrants, El Cerrito’s sanctuary city status, the use of Flock surveillance technology, potentially conflicting pressures on the El Cerrito Police Department, and best practices to ensure human rights are protected. What can we do proactively to ensure an appropriate and effective response if ICE comes to our neighborhoods? How do we safely protest, demonstrate and push back against these policies in authoritarian measures in an increasingly unsafe space – without being injured or detained?

**Suggested speakers:** Martha Escobar, Supervising Attorney and policy expert at the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC); Jennie Pasquarella, Directing Attorney and civil liberties and ICE enforcement challenges expert at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California; Miriam Pérez, immigration Attorney and advocate focused on community legal defense strategies; or possibility a representative from the nationwide, grassroots, anti-authoritarian nonprofit organizing group Indivisible

## **7. *Securing the 2026 Election***

President Trump has sent federal agents to confiscate ballots and election information from local election officials in Fulton County, Georgia and declared that elections should be “federalized.” What are Democrats and other organizations doing to prepare for challenges to polling and election results in 2026? What are the implications of “federalizing” local elections?

**Suggested speakers:** States United Program Director Sam Trepel, a former attorney for the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division who led the federal prosecution of the officers who murdered George Floyd or California Attorney General Rob Bonta (or a representative from his office)

## **8. *Elected Official Update***

We could invite one of our local elected officials to provide a legislative update or overview of issues facing El Cerrito and Contra Costa County. The specific focus and issues discussed would depend on who is available to speak.

**Suggested speakers:** Jesse Arreguín, 7th District, California State Senate; John Gioia, District 1, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors; or Gabe Quinto, Mayor of El Cerrito

## **9. *Contra Costa County Sales Tax Increase on the November Ballot***

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors recently voted to place a new, added, 0.626 percent ( $\frac{5}{8}$  of a cent), five-year sales tax on the June 2, 2026 ballot. If passed, the tax is projected to generate roughly \$150 million per year for the county’s general fund and help backfill budget pressures — especially impacts from federal funding cuts — over the five-year period. What are the details?

**Suggested speaker:** John Gioia, District 1, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

### **10. Bay Area Transit Tax on the November Ballot**

In response to huge budget deficits facing regional transit agencies — with declines in ridership post-pandemic and the expiration of temporary federal/state relief — California legislators passed Senate Bill 63. It authorizes a regional sales tax measure to appear on the November 2026 ballot for voters in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. The proposed measure, often called “Connect Bay Area,” would raise roughly \$980 million per year for 14 years if approved by voters. It calls for a ½-cent sales increase in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and a 1-cent increase in San Francisco County (higher to also support Muni). Revenue would be dedicated to transit operations and improvements across the region. Without new revenue, BART and AC Transit are warning of drastic cuts, including station closures, reduced service, and staff layoffs.

**Suggested speaker:** Harpreet Sandhu, Director, AC Transit Board; Ryan Luu, External Affairs Representative, AC Transit; could ask El Cerrito Councilmember and former BART Board Director Rebecca Saltzman to recommend a current BART Board Director to speak

### **11. Bike Lane Updates - Richmond Street and Beyond**

El Cerrito has sought grant funding for additional bike lanes throughout the city. In addition to the \$8 million federal grant from the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program earmarked for the \$11 million of work planned for Richmond Street (including a nine-block bike lane on Richmond between Hill Street to the north and Moeser Lane to the south), funding was also tentatively awarded for a “Class IV” protected bike lane on Central Avenue as well as “Class III” bike lanes on Lincoln Avenue and San Diego Avenue. What’s the current design, funding and time status for all these projects? Are there risks of any of the federal grants being rescinded by the Trump Administration? With Richmond Street, as of the summer there was a shortfall of about \$1 million that had not yet been at least tentatively funded by grants (for the Moeser Lane intersection). Has additional grant funding been secured for Richmond Street, as hoped by city officials? If not, will there be design changes to address the \$1 million budget shortfall?

**Suggested speaker:** Jarrett Mullen, Sustainable Transportation Program Manager

### **12. El Cerrito Senior Services – An Update on Efforts to Bring Back the Senior Center**

Older adults who participate in senior center programs experience improved psychological and physical health through the resources, activities and social engagement they offer. El Cerrito permanently closed its Midtown Activity Center in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Every city along the San Pablo Avenue corridor—from Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley and Albany to the south, up through Richmond, San Pablo, Pinole and Hercules to the north—has at least one senior center, except El Cerrito. Greatly reduced offerings are now scattered among various sites—the El Cerrito Community Center, Christ Lutheran Church and St. John’s Community Center. What is the status of the grassroots efforts underway to bring a senior center back to El Cerrito? What are the obstacles and opportunities?

**Suggested speakers:** ECDC Board Director and El Cerrito Councilmember William Ktsanes; El Cerrito Recreation Director Chris Jones; El Cerrito Senior Action Committee co-founder Lisa Martinengo

**13. Healthcare for All – Single Payer Healthcare Informational Session and Q&A**

A presentation on key features of Single Payer Health Care (Universal Coverage, Comprehensive Care, Choice of Providers and Affordability). Healthcare for all is a system that ensures every individual has access to necessary health services, regardless of their financial situation or background. It aims to provide equitable care, where everyone—no matter their income, employment status, or location—can receive the medical attention they need without facing financial hardship. By guaranteeing access to preventive care, treatments, and medications, it can lead to healthier populations, lower long-term healthcare costs, and better productivity.

**Suggested speakers:** Janet Thomas, Stephen Vernon or Jonee Grassi

***My apologies if any suggested topics were inadvertently missed or omitted. – William and Courtney***



## BALLOT – Please check up to eight (8)

*Less than eight is fine, but please choose **no more than eight.***

	1. <i>El Cerrito Library Tax Initiative – Pros and Cons</i>
	2. <i>WCCUSD School District Plans to Stabilize Finances and Retain Teachers</i>
	3. <i>Electing Democrats in the 2026 Midterm Election</i>
	4. <i>Update on the Plaza BART Housing/Transit Oriented Development Plan (<u>Not</u> Library Specific)</i>
	5. <i>Proposals to Stop Investors from Buying Up Single-Family Homes</i>
	6. <i>Protecting Immigrants / “Know your Rights” Seminar</i>
	7. <i>Securing the 2026 Election</i>
	8. <i>Elected Official Update</i>
	9. <i>Contra Costa County Sales Tax Increase on November Ballot</i>
	10. <i>Bay Area Transit Tax on the November Ballot</i>
	11. <i>Bike Lane Updates - Richmond Street and Beyond</i>
	12. <i>El Cerrito Senior Services – An Update on Efforts to Bring Back the Senior Center</i>
	13. <i>Healthcare for All – Single Payer Healthcare Informational Session and Q&amp;A</i>

**EVERYONE – PLEASE CHOOSE:**

If we choose “Library Tax” as a topic, would you prefer it be covered “debate style” with both sides splitting time in one meeting or, if scheduling allows, provide more time for each side by covering the topic in two separate monthly meetings? (Two separate meetings would leave one less month for other topics.)

*Check the empty box below and to the right of your preference.*

***Together in  
One Meeting***

***Separate in  
Two Meetings***