

Renting in San Francisco

For renters · about 6 minutes · reviewed August 21, 2026

Whether a building is rent controlled, what its record says about how it is kept, and the difference between the two protections people merge.

From Scan the Block

Every public record on one San Francisco address, in a single report: the Assessor's file, permits and violations, zoning, hazards and the published earthquake maps, rent-control indication, and ten years of the surrounding blocks - each count compared with an average San Francisco area of the same size, and none of it scored. scantheblock.com

■ TWO PROTECTIONS, AND PEOPLE MERGE THEM

San Francisco tenants can be covered by two different things, and the difference decides most arguments.

- Price control caps how much the rent can rise each year. It generally reaches buildings with a certificate of occupancy before 13 June 1979.
- Just cause eviction protection means you can only be evicted for one of a listed set of reasons. It reaches far more housing than price control does - including much that is exempt from the rent cap.

Under the state's Costa-Hawkins Act, single-family homes and condominiums are commonly exempt from price control while remaining covered for just cause. So "not rent controlled" is usually a statement about the rent cap, not about whether somebody can put you out.

Note

The report says whether price control is likely, and gives the reason - the year built. That is evidence, not a determination: conversions and substantial rehabilitation move the line, and the Rent Board settles it, not us.

The cap is a number, and it changes every March

Price control does not mean the rent is frozen; it means it rises by a published percentage each year, set by the Rent Board and effective from 1 March. The report prints the current figure rather than describing it in the abstract, because "your rent is capped" is only useful once you know what it is capped at.

There is a lawful route past it. A landlord can petition the Board to pass the cost of capital improvements - real work on the building - through to the rent, and a utility passthrough works similarly. Those petitions are public, and the report counts them nearby, because a block where landlords regularly petition is a block where the cap is regularly exceeded, lawfully.

Buyouts: the thing that never shows up as an eviction

A buyout is a landlord paying a tenant to leave by agreement. It is a contract rather than a notice, so it appears in no eviction figure anywhere - a building emptied entirely by buyout leaves the eviction record completely untouched.

Since 2015 the landlord must disclose your rights in writing before opening the conversation, and must file the agreement with the Rent Board. Those filings are public, and the report shows how many were agreed nearby and what they were worth. If you are offered one, that figure is the only context most tenants ever get.

Note

There is no obligation to accept a buyout, and no obligation to negotiate. The Rent Board publishes the disclosure requirements, and the city funds counseling organizations that will read an offer with you. The report gives you the going rate on the block; it does not tell you what to do with it.

Petitions, and what each side asks for

Either side can petition the Board. Tenants petition most often over a decrease in housing services - something the rent paid for that stopped, from a broken lift to a removed laundry - or over a rent increase they say is unlawful. Landlords petition to pass through improvements, or to have a unit declared exempt. The report counts these nearby by ground, split by who filed. A petition is the start of an argument and not its outcome; most are settled or withdrawn, and nothing in the count says who was right.

■ WHAT THE BUILDING'S OWN RECORD SAYS

Before signing, the parcel sections are the useful ones. They describe how a building has been kept, in the city's words.

- Complaints and violations filed against the parcel, and how many are open. A building with a habitability complaint on file is a building somebody already escalated.
- Permits - what work was declared, when, and whether anything is still open. Long-running open work is worth asking about before you move in under it.
- Soft-story status, if the building is in the retrofit program. A non-compliant building is one with construction in its future.
- The Assessor's record - year built, units, size. The year built is what the rent-control question turns on.

■ WHAT THE BLOCK'S RECORD SAYS, AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

The area sections count records within a radius you choose: police incidents, 311 cases, fire incidents, eviction notices, injury collisions. Each is compared with an average San Francisco area of the same size.

Read those comparisons carefully. A dense block reads high on nearly everything, because more of everything is recorded where more people are. The report does not rate a neighborhood and will not - the figures are there so you can look at them, not so we can grade a place you might live.

Eviction notices in the area

The count is filings, which is the start of a process and not its outcome. Many are withdrawn or settled. A cluster tells you something about a market; it tells you nothing about the flat you are looking at, and the report says so where it prints the number.

■ CHECK THE BUILDING FREE, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

The building's card - rent-control likelihood with its reason, the complaint and violation record, and the Rent Board activity beside it - is free at scantheblock.com/check, no account needed. Check it before the viewing; share the link with whoever is signing with you. The full report is what a plan buys, and this much should never cost anything.

■ THE PRACTICAL THINGS NOBODY LISTS

Internet, which no listing tells you

If you work from home this is a real constraint, and it is genuinely hard to check any other way - a landlord rarely knows, and "fibre available in the area" on a provider's own site often means the next street. The report names the providers that file service at that address with the FCC, the technology each uses, and the top speed each advertises.

- Fibre or not is the question that matters most, and it is binary. Cable can be fast down and slow up; fibre usually is not.
- Fixed wireless and satellite count as service in the filings. They are real options and they are not the same product as a wired line.
- The speeds are advertised maxima from the providers' own filings to the regulator, not a measured throughput on that line. The report says so beside the figure, because a five-figure number reads like a promise otherwise.

Note

The filings are the FCC's Broadband Data Collection - the providers' own returns to their regulator. It is the only address-level source there is, and it is why the answer can differ from what a coverage map on a provider's website shows.

Transit and green space. The nearest stop with the walk to it, every line within a quarter mile, and the nearest park - with the nearest one over two acres named separately, because a pocket plaza and a real park are different things.

Parking. Whether the block is a citation hotspot, what the violations are mostly for, and which residential permit area the parcel is in.

■ WHAT THE BLOCK RENTS FOR

Owners of covered units report rents to the Rent Board annually, and the report shows the median band nearby. Read it for what it is: rents being paid, not rents being asked. In a city where much of the stock is rent controlled, a long tenancy pays far below what the same flat lists for today. It is the income a building produces, not a guide to your offer.

Where the parcel is a single dwelling with the attributes to support it, the report can also fetch an estimate of what that unit would list for today - a third party's model, shown with its range and named as theirs.

■ WHERE YOUR RIGHTS ACTUALLY LIVE

This report is a record of a place. It is not legal advice and it is not the Rent Board. For what you are

entitled to, and for a dispute, go to the San Francisco Rent Board, or to one of the city's tenant counseling organizations. Bring the report - a building's permit and complaint history is often exactly the evidence that is hard to assemble.

Note

This report is not a consumer report and may not be used to screen a tenant. It describes a place, never a person - which also means no landlord can use it to look you up.

■ READ THE RECORD ON AN ACTUAL ADDRESS

Everything described in this guide comes out of one report on one San Francisco address. Type an address at scantheblock.com and it takes a few seconds; re-opening a report you have already run is free, always. Reports are a web page and a PDF you can share, and every figure carries the caveat that qualifies it.

Run a report

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Every guide, free to read

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The 41 neighborhoods, a decade each

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Questions, or a correction

hello@scantheblock.com

■ ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Last reviewed August 21, 2026. Every rule described here is San Francisco's, not ours, and the city changes them - where a date or a threshold matters to a deal, confirm it against the city. This is general information about public records and not legal, tax or investment advice.

Scan the Block compiles and compares public records; it does not produce, review or endorse them. Reports describe a place and never a person, are not a consumer report and may not be used to screen tenants, and are not a valuation or a statutory hazard disclosure. Read this guide online at <https://scantheblock.com/guides/renting>