



Press Release

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Santa Barbara Voters Submit More Than 6,000 Signatures in Three Weeks to Give Voters a Say on State Street's Future

Petition far exceeds the roughly 5,400 signatures required as merchants call for an open State Street and a real investment to make it special again

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. - October 14, 2026 – The Committee to Reopen State Street today submitted more than 6,000 signatures from Santa Barbara voters to the City Clerk, asking that the future of State Street be decided by the people who live here. The signatures were collected in about three weeks, well above the roughly 5,400 signatures required to qualify the referendum.

"Santa Barbara voters are tired of the mess on State Street," said Jim Knell, president of SIMA Corporation and the committee's lead supporter. "In just three weeks, more than 6,000 Santa Barbara voters signed the petition because they want the street open again. What started as a temporary COVID measure was made permanent while ignoring the negative economic consequences in a post-COVID world. Voters, not just the City Council, should decide what happens to the heart of our city and more importantly, whether over \$100 million we don't have should be committed to it."

State Street was closed to cars in 2020 as an emergency measure to expand outdoor dining. Six years later, the street has been handed over to e-bikes while longtime businesses leave or fail. Roughly one in eight storefronts between the 400 and 1300 blocks sits empty, and downtown office vacancy has reached a record 40 percent. Some State Street real estate owners are reporting that rents that once ran \$4 a square foot now go for about \$1, making it hard to finance improvements, and pop-up shops are replacing long-term tenants.

The numbers tell the story. State Street was once the center of commerce in Santa Barbara. Today it ranks dead last among the city's business districts and is the only one to lose ground over the past nine years. Since the closure, downtown sales have grown just 1 percent in actual dollars, a decline once adjusted for inflation. Over the same period, Coast Village Road grew 42 percent, the Funk Zone 15 percent and Milpas Street 14 percent.

"Merchants and city taxpayers need State Street open, it doesn't need a \$100 million investment to make it special again," Knell said. "Every other business district in this city has recovered and is booming, as are similar districts across Southern California. The difference is the poor vehicular circulation downtown with State Street closed and the reduced visibility for stores, particularly to tourists and those who don't often venture downtown."

"That is why more than 300 local merchants came together as the State Street Business Alliance to take this issue back to the community," Knell added. "We stepped in to help fund the legal and petition costs so they could bring it to a vote."

The City's newly adopted State Street Master Plan carries an estimated price tag of almost \$100 million, none of which yet funded, and one of the City's own consultants gave it at best a 10 percent chance of success.

In 2017, voters approved Measure C to fund public safety and infrastructure priorities. Now the City is looking to those funds to help pay for State Street.

The committee supports a shared-use State Street, with low-speed vehicle access, parking and deliveries, alongside wide sidewalks, outdoor dining and retractable bollards for events and emergencies. Of the more than 200 pedestrian malls built in the United States, nearly 90 percent have failed and been removed or reopened to traffic.

The City Clerk will now verify the signatures. "We are confident the petition will qualify," Knell said. Once it does, the ordinance adopting the Master Plan is suspended, and the City Council must either repeal it or place the question before voters at the next regular election in November 2028.

To learn more, visit statestbusinessalliance.com.

About the Committee to Reopen State Street

The Committee to Reopen State Street is a coalition of Santa Barbara residents, merchants and property owners working to restore access to State Street and give voters a say in its future. Major funding by SIMA Corporation and affiliated entities.

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Paid for by Committee to Reopen State Street, Sponsored by Local Business Owners;
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