

## Google's Silicon Valley hometown targets \$15 minimum wage

Silicon Valley Business Journal | October 13, 2014

[Read the original article on Silicon Valley Business Journal](#)

The minimum wage in one of Silicon Valley's busiest tech hubs will jump to \$10.30 per hour — and that's just a starting point for the city, which is in a regional discussion about how to reconcile the Bay Area's high costs with its growing population of 1.1 million low-wage workers.

City officials in Mountain View, best known as the hometown of [Google Inc.](#), [gave the green light on Oct. 9](#) to pursue a \$15 minimum wage by 2018 after an initial pay bump to \$10.30 per hour in July 2015.

The move is the latest illustration of how cities in notoriously expensive Silicon Valley [have deviated from a state plan to increase the minimum wage](#) to \$10 an hour by January 2016. Neighboring San Jose became the first city south of San Francisco to implement a higher citywide wage that's indexed to keep pace with inflation after a 2012 ballot initiative.

“We have a tale of two cities happening here,” said [Meghan Fraley](#), a Mountain View-based psychotherapist and social justice advocate for the organization Politically Inspired Action. “It's much more invisible than San Francisco, where you have a lot of homelessness that's visible”

While Mountain View has been inundated with young professionals, new luxury apartments and high-end restaurants during Silicon Valley's current tech boom, the upswing has also ushered in steep rent increases and a spike in homelessness. The city has responded with more urgency than many of its counterparts by requiring new developer fees and landlord payments to evicted tenants.

Beyond the local human impacts, the campaign to raise Mountain View's minimum wage even higher than San Jose's also underscores an increasingly aggressive push by area labor groups to raise pay and work standards while the economy is up.

The push is not only about improving conditions for low-wage workers, but also to begin restoring economic opportunity in an increasingly stratified area, said [Derecka Mehrens](#), executive director of labor advocacy group Working Partnerships US.

“When the floor is too low, it just exacerbates inequality and it creates this race to the bottom,” Mehrens told me. “You have to raise the floor, and you also have to grow the middle.”

### The fight for \$15 an hour

[Tamara Michel](#)'s 10-year-old Mountain View retail business, Boutique 4, employs five to eight people, depending on the season.

Michel and her co-owners already aim to start employees at base pay around \$10 an hour,

Michel and her co-owners already aim to start employees at base pay around \$10 an hour, recognizing how expensive it is to live in the area. They offer additional compensation for reaching sales targets, but pushing pay higher could be dicier.

“I was aware of the \$10.30 an hour. I don’t have any objection to that. I want to pay my employees a fair wage,” said [Tamara Michel](#), who is co-owner of Boutique 4. “I wasn’t aware of the \$15 proposition. That could have a bigger impact on me.”

[Oscar Garcia](#), CEO of the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce, said that sentiment is common among his members.

The business group understands that the area’s high costs make a higher baseline pay a reasonable expectation, but Garcia hopes that the city will consider a more nuanced approach to an even higher wage.

“If they’re going to be exploring anything beyond maybe \$12 or more, we want the staff to really do a thorough analysis of the different industries and how they’re going to be impacted,” Garcia said.

As I have reported, unbiased empirical data on minimum wage increases in Silicon Valley has been hard to come by, with discussion often devolving into predictable business-versus-labor skirmishes between well-funded political groups.

While minimum wage politics play out around the Bay Area — with Sunnyvale also expected to vote on the issue this week — Fraley hopes Mountain View will take advantage of a booming economy to push for higher wages.

“People are suffering now,” she said. “Our city needs to take care of its residents and workers whether or not other cities are in a place to follow.”