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Subject: Public Comment 10/5/21 Morris Street and Transient Resources: Council Use of Public Money and Resources
Date: Friday, October 01, 2021 9:42:28 AM

Dear Council Members,

I'm writing in regards to agenda items 8 and 10 for the 10/5/21 Council Meeting.

Item 8, restriping Morris Street to become a sharrow, does nothing to address the fact that Council is facilitating an illegal RV encampment on Morris Street and has been using public funds to support the illegal encampment for over a year despite persist complaints by local businesses, crime, fire and illegal activity.

How many times in the last year has Council been contacted by local, small businesses regarding crime on Morris Street and the encampment's impact on their businesses, customers and employees?

Recently, taxpayer money was used to clear an encampment in the Laguna where transients left garbage, started fires and degraded a protected and environmentally sensitive habitat. Transients were responsible for at least 5 fires in a one month period of time.

On Monday, September 27, a fire started by transients burned downtown structures.

Now Council wants to spend more taxpayer money to create a sharrow instead of addressing the real issue which is an illegal RV encampment on Morris Street. Creating a sharrow will not alleviate the crime, trash, drug use and public health and safety risk that is created by the illegal encampment on Morris Street.

A cost effective way to address the illegal RV encampment would be to put in place City-wide RV permit parking. Many small cities have done this as they do not have the tax resources to continually pick up after transients.

RV permit parking requires that RVs have permits associated with a residence or business. Permits can be free or low-cost. There are many models available as it is utilized up and down the state to reduce the burden of transients on communities, like Sebastopol, who have a small and limited tax base.

Council is elected to advocate for the citizens of Sebastopol. Council has a fiduciary duty to the people who pay property tax and to businesses who diligently contribute to the sales tax base through their daily hard work and investment into their businesses.

Transients do not pay taxes. From all accounts, they do not contribute to the labor market.

They do not follow basic laws in regards to blocking sidewalks, littering, dumping, degrading waterways and sensitive habitats. In fact, there is an on-going record of criminal activity associated with Morris Street from petty theft to drug use.

There is no proof that any of the unhoused currently using public resources are 1) employed in Sebastopol, 2) have ever been employed in Sebastopol, 3) have ever paid property tax in Sebastopol, 4) have ever paid rent in Sebastopol.

As there is no requirement of prior residency, employee or current employment, transients are consuming funds which they have not contributed. In addition, they are not following local law regarding litter, illegal dumping, drug use and fire.

At what point are transients asked to contribute through employment, community service and paying taxes?

Council's primary constituency are the property owners and small business owners who reside within the City limits of Sebastopol. Unlike the Planning Commission boundary, which Council has arbitrarily set, Sebastopol's revenue sources and locations are firmly defined.

At this time, how much taxpayer money is being used to support transients at the cost of degrading roads, sidewalks and public facilities? As Council has provided zero data on how many transients are actually within City Limits, it is difficult to tell if it is 50, 100, 200 people in question.

The City of Sebastopol has permanently lost revenue, sales tax, tourist accommodations and tourist foot traffic with the conversion of the Sebastopol Inn to Permanent Supportive Housing for the homeless. This easily represents \$200,000 per year, \$1,000,000 over 5 years and so on. How does Council intend to bridge this gap of lost revenue?

County gave the citizens of Sebastopol \$385,000 to reimburse the citizens for this lost revenue. This small, one-time amount, does not take into account the on-going lost economic opportunity and inflation which would be mitigated if the Sebastopol Inn would have remained a functioning, self-sustaining business hosting tourists.

Council should apply the \$385,000 reimbursement from the County toward public assets like the ADA pathway in Ives park, road and sidewalk repair. This money should not go toward more disposable services for transients such as port-o-potties, hand washing stations and garbage pick up.

Sebastopol's roads are some of the worst in Sonoma County. How does Council intend to pay for the necessary road repair?

Sebastopol's sidewalks are damaged and in need of repair? What is the plan to fix sidewalks?

Sebastopol's fire department is understaffed and in need of equipment. What is the plan to make sure that the fire department is fully supported and staffed?

Sebastopol's public works department is underfunded, many maintenance projects are left without the resources to complete. What is the plan to make sure our public spaces are well maintained and ADA compliant?

Thus far Council has spent public money on transients in the form of handwashing stations, Port-O-Potties, garbage pick up, Public Works Staff time, hiring a \$72,000 per year homeless coordinator, encampment clean up, and facilitating Park Village.

What is the total cost to taxpayers for all these services? How much is the City spending per transient? The total cost of all homeless services, including Staff time, should be a line item in the annual budget.

Item number 10, forming a Council Committee on the unhoused, also uses City Staff to spend more time on transients. From the public document, the "Stakeholders Meeting" will require time from all City departments:

"Stakeholder Meetings: The stakeholder meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee are to include the following participants. These stakeholder meetings will be working sessions not open to the public, with the results to be fully reported in the monthly reports submitted by the Committee to the City Council.

- Two City Councilmembers appointed to the Committee
- City Manager
- Asst City Manager
- Police Chief
- Public Works Superintendent
- Engineering (as needed)
- West County Community Services Executive Director Tim Miller
- West County Community Services Director of Housing and Homeless Services Danielle Danforth
- Outreach Coordinator for Sebastopol Jennifer Lake
- Two advocates for the unhoused, selected with input from WCCS. These two participants will be expected to attend all stakeholder meetings. These positions are not intended to be rotating among different members of the advocate groups, but would be two advocates who would serve on the committee for continuity.
- Other City Staff, WCCS Representatives, and Community Members as appropriate for specific issues. "

How much will these meetings cost taxpayers? All City Staff are paid by taxes.

In addition, no residents or business owners are included in the meetings, only advocates for the unhoused. It seems odd that if you're spending tax money that no one who represents a local taxpayer would be present.

Where are the advocates for people who faithfully pay their property taxes or dutifully follow all the rules required to run a small business?

Property owners pay taxes in good faith under the assumption that elected officials are making infrastructure investments into the community and also directing the community toward on-going financial solvency. Property taxes are supposed to be going toward community assets like parks, roads and sidewalks and toward community health safety in the form of well supported and supplied fire, police and public works departments.

Sebastopol's budget is in a deficit and from the City's own projections, the City will continue to be in deficit.

What is Council's plan to regain financial solvency?

What is Council's plan to fill all the vacant commercial spaces within City limits?

What is Council's plan to create infill housing in Sebastopol?

Why do we have a vacant, trash filled lot in our downtown?

What is Council doing to attract businesses into our vacant retail spaces?

Council's primary duty is to the residents of Sebastopol and to all the small business owners who diligently try to create resources and amenities for our local citizens and also create valuable tax revenue for the City.

Council needs to stop facilitating the illegal RV encampment on Morris Street, stop spending local citizen's public money and resources on transients. Sebastopol, compared to other cities of similar size, has a lot of resources for transients - Park Village, the Sebastopol Inn and safe parking at the Community Church of Sebastopol. In addition, we are spending \$72,000 per year on a homeless outreach coordinator. In comparison, Rohnert Park, a city of 42,000 has no shelter and is just now considering building 50-60 modular units on government owned land.

At this point, implementing RV permit parking would save taxpayers money and encourage the unhoused to take the housing which is being offered to them. Transients are offered housing options; they refuse.

The State of California is allocating over \$12 billion over the next two years to address homelessness. The County is receiving \$25 million from Measure 0. Sebastopol has declining revenue and faces a budget deficit from now until the foreseeable future plus has

many on-going infrastructure needs.

Council needs to work with the County to move RV campers from City Limits into County funded RV parks.

As Council supported the loss of the Sebastopol Inn, why do we still have an on-going, growing homeless population? What is the benefit to Sebastopol's residents and economy to have our only downtown hotel converted to Permanent Supportive Housing for homeless people if we still have an entrenched encampment on Morris Street and in the Laguna?

I ask the Council to be prudent with our limited financial resources, to advocate for people who pay taxes in good faith with the assumption they will have functioning roads, sidewalks and public spaces, and to work with Sebastopol's committed small business community so they have an environment to thrive. We rely on their sales tax to pay for our City.

Best,
Kate Haug