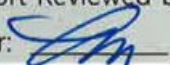


Agenda Report Reviewed by:  
City Manager: 

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL  
CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM

**Meeting Date:** January 18, 2022  
**To:** Honorable Mayor and Honorable City Councilmembers  
**From:** Councilmember Sarah Gurney with Simon Lowings, Sebastopol Walks Program Leader  
**Subject:** Request for City Sponsorship for Sebastopol Walks 2022; Request for Assistance with Publicity; Request for Appreciation for Long-Time Volunteer Kathy Oetinger; Approval of same

**Recommendation :** That the Council approve sponsorship for the program, assist with publicity, and commend Volunteer Kathy Oetinger for her contributions

**Funding:** Currently Budgeted: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No XX N/A  
Net General Fund Cost: N/A  
Amount: \$0

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget (if applicable) N/A AK (verified by Administrative Services Department)

**INTRODUCTION:** This item is to request that the City Council Approve City Sponsorship for the Sebastopol Walks Program (for its 14th Year), Assist with Publicity, and Commend Volunteer Kathy Oetinger for her Contributions

**BACKGROUND:**

For 11 of the last 14 years, local volunteers have organized and conducted once-monthly, docent-led walks around town. More than 3,000 people have participated in more than 120 walk events. These statistics are best estimates only.

The program, known as Sebastopol Walks, has introduced people to the fun of exploring town on foot, learning about the social/cultural/political history of the community, and discovering what makes Sebastopol a great place to live and visit. Locals, locals with out-of-town guests, residents from other Sonoma County cities, out-of-county and international visitors have enjoyed the walks. Intended as a community-building experience, the walks became a tourist attraction, before the pandemic cancelled the 2020 season, which included a new Sebastopol RUNS Program, and discouraged any planning for 2021.

The inspiration for the walks was a booklet called Sebastopol Walks written by local activist Richard Nichols, its first edition funded by the City. For the second edition, then Mayor and now City Councilmember Sarah Gurney organized three progressive dinner walks, featuring local restaurants, and raised enough money for the booklet's second printing. Funding for the third edition came from the sales of the book, including at Copperfields Books. The local store has sold over 1000 copies. The booklet has been the number one holiday best seller for several years. It has served inexpensive gift and/or souvenir and has been presented to many Sister City/other visitors to City Hall.

Originally, a four-member core group of volunteers assumed leadership for all of the walks. Soon community leaders were recruited to share the responsibilities, expanding the core group. Later, the current Mayor and Council Members were invited to create and lead new routes, often highlighting City governance, service delivery,

and opportunities for the future.

The WALKS Program has emphasized the value of exercise for good health. Already in existence when Sonoma County Health Action started the iWALK campaign (in 2013), Sebastopol WALKS was highlighted as the demonstration program. It has inspired several other local walking programs: for example, one at the Senior Center; iMOSEY through an earlier Health Action Chapter; at least one private women's group; and a sister program in Novato. It is the only Health Action iWALK activity still in existence.

The 2022 Walks Program welcomes new organizational leadership. Experienced volunteer Simon Lowings has rekindled interest in the program amongst long-timers and encouraged new local volunteer leaders. Mr. Lowings has also recruited a replacement for the graphic designer, Kathy Oetinger: Gary Morgret, who is a designer, artist, photographer for Pepperwood, and Coastwalker, has agreed to do the Walks flyer.

Ms. Oetinger has been involved since the beginning: she did the design work for the original Sebastopol Walks book and its subsequent editions. When author Richard Nichols and Council Member Gurney conceived the idea of monthly walks, Ms. Oetinger volunteered to do the graphics. She designed the banner and the template, and created each monthly flyer for publicity, often managing the walk leaders to ensure their timely written contributions and to secure event photos. In Mr. Nichols' absence, she administered the email list and distributed the monthly e-blast. Her community service, offered in her unique quiet and generous way, has been exemplary, since the start.

**DISCUSSION:**

The recomposed volunteer team returns for another season of walks for 2022.

The group proposes 10 walks, February through November. As before, Walk events will be held on the last Saturday of each month, meeting at The Plaza at 9 AM, departing at 9:15 AM, and returning around noon. Each walk will have a leader and a sweep. Participants will sign a Release of Liability. Everyone will be encouraged to wear a face covering and maintain a six-foot distance, if desired. The Program will be canceled upon direction from the City Manager/Attorney in the event CDC guidelines indicate.

The anticipated 2022 calendar of events is attached. The events will vary in focus, length, and difficulty, based upon the routes chosen by the morning's leaders.

Some walks will be mainly for exercise to show participants how to connect places in town by foot and others will be informational. Some are new routes and new subject matter; others are updated versions of favorites.

The WALKS will build interest in Sebastopol as a health-oriented community and help people experience the connectivity of our network of streets, sidewalks, paths, trails and alleys. Participants will learn that they can get around town without driving their car and that they can enjoy the outdoors on foot. They will learn about Sebastopol's social, cultural, and political history as well as its municipal functions.

The group seeks City sponsorship, in part in order to secure insurance coverage. The City has served as sponsor for each prior year. The group requests minimal help with publicity: posting on the City's Facebook page, website and community newsletter; placing flyers in the lobby at City Hall; installing the banner on the Gazebo at The Plaza one week in advance; etc. The group commends Kathy Oetinger for her volunteer effort and asks the Council to authorize the Mayor to send her a letter of commendation or take other such action.

**GOALS:**

This item relates to City Council Goal 5: Provide open and responsive Municipal Government Leadership; Goal 4 - Maintain and Enhance the City of Sebastopol as a Walkable/Bike-able Community and Enhance the City's

Commitment to Promotion of our public's health by Creating and Participating in City and Community Programs, Services and Policies; 4.2. Foster a Sense of Community by Providing and Encouraging Participation in Community Events, Volunteering, and working with Non Profits to Support Local Events; 5.2. - Promote and enhance utilization of community energy and skills by creating opportunities for volunteer service.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, staff may receive public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report. Such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of the agenda item.

**PUBLIC NOTICE:**

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meeting date.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with the recommended action tonight.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends that the City Council Approve Continued City Sponsorship of the Sebastopol Walks Program 2022, Assist with Publicity for all 2022 events as requested, and Commend Kathy Oetinger for her Contributions to the Sebastopol Walks Program.

**Attachment:**

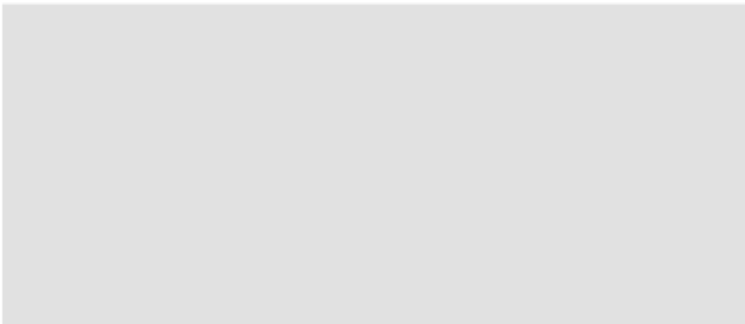
Schedule for 2022



**FEBRUARY 26, 2022 • A Walk to be Determined**

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – Meet at the downtown plaza  
3 to 4 Easy Miles – Moderate Pace

Walk description here:



**FEBRUARY 26 Saturday, 9AM**

Peace Pole Potpourri  
Leader : Sarah Gurney, City Council member

**MARCH 26 Saturday, 9AM**

Controversy  
Leader : Patrick Slayter, City Mayor

**APRIL 30 Saturday, 9AM**

Springtime tree walk  
Leader : Virginia Anderegg

**MAY 28 Saturday, 9AM**

Laguna native plant walk  
Leader : Joan Schwan

**JUNE 25 Saturday, 9AM**

Gardens that make a difference  
Leaders : Anne and Simon Lowings

**JULY 30 Saturday, 9AM**

Sebastopol Funky art walk  
Leader : Diana Rich

**AUGUST 27 Saturday, 9AM**

Sebastopol history walk  
Leader : Donna Pittman, Historical Society

**SEPTEMBER 24 Saturday, 9AM**

Sebastopol art walk  
Leader : Beth Hartmann

**OCTOBER 29 Saturday, 9AM**

Spiritual Sebastopol  
Leaders : Robert Harkavy & Annelia Dalrymple

**NOVEMBER 26 Saturday, 9AM**

Bus to Forestville and walk back to Sebastopol  
Leader : Richard Nichols

For questions about Sebastopol Walks contact Simon: [simonlowings@gmail.com](mailto:simonlowings@gmail.com) or 707.861.9052

