

## **NO house insurance increases, annual parcel taxes to fund inferior fire services!**

Like many other local city voters I am once again having to scramble to research and fact find due to yet another sudden surprise edict from another previously dormant 'ad hoc' council 'committee', this time regarding the City of Sebastopol Fire Department. A complete lack of transparency combined with past undisclosed private meeting agreements, carve outs and decision making based on personal predilections and unformed opinions is not a democratic way for councillors who should be serving the local community to behave.

The idea of elected officials in a geographical area with annual serious fire risk issues showing up at a meeting of well established and organized volunteer fire fighters with little prior notice or discussion and telling them with little logic or any cohesive plan in place that they are being 'consolidated' into a larger organization beggars belief. Having previously failed to purchase the budgeted for new wildfire fire engine (the older one is a revenue generating unit for the city, the new one will be a valuable addition to our fire protection if the council can ever get around to organizing ordering it) the 'ad hoc' committee instead show up, patronize and destroy morale at a time when we are ever more in need of our highly qualified local fire fighters.

Like the recent Ives Park Foley field baseball diamond cancelling project fiasco, council have once again over reached attempting to push an illogical agenda. Like the council meeting earlier this

year when people overwhelmingly explained why Foley Field is so valuable to the City of Sebastopol in two minute public comment sound bites, tonight's meeting is likely to be a repeat performance late into the night preceded by much council philosophical chin stroking musing and Brown act debate by council. I expect once again some of our longer multi decade serving councillors will decide they have to go to bed and call a halt to the meeting before the public get a chance to speak and that a special additional meeting will then eat up even more citizen time at some inconvenient future date. Brevity is not this council's strong point....

The 'ad hoc committee' approach of opaque organization whose plans and goals are suddenly surfaced and quickly voted in by council before the public even barely know about them is a feature of recent years, resulting in law suits, unhappy citizens and increasing distrust. By flying so close to sun the council risks incurring more law suits and opprobrium. Council is walking a fine legal line between freestyle 'ad hoc' and standing committees for their ideological goals. Citizen public safety is a vitally important issue and foundational to council's responsibilities that should not be organized by personal proclivities.

The Sonoma County fire fighting community all know and rely on each other in a patchwork quilt of overlaying services and equipment that works well despite bureaucratic organizational challenges. The City of Sebastopol Fire Department has an excellent reputation and a high ISO home owners insurance rating despite being underfunded and ignored by the city.

I'm wondering why council is choosing to lower the quality of our fire protection In concert with the current lame duck, soon to retire fire chief, who appears to be acting as a sixth councillor

rather than liaising with or representing our firefighters. We need a new Sebastopol fire chief hired who is more representative of the entire fire department and publicly available so we can get more volunteers for emergencies based on organization that is not currently in place for evacuations, checking on citizen safety etc. You would think at this point in the year council would be focusing on this before fire season, not meddling with the fire station's organization.

We have extremely experienced ex fire chiefs and other fire fighting personnel who are devoted to protecting our city with seasoned and valuable opinions These are not the inexperienced young salaried Gold Ridge fire fighters who cover a huge geographical area in a politically poorly organized and bureaucratic county to the best of their ability.

**Small is beautiful and easy to organize, something the City of Sebastopol should be able to excel at.**

Growing the city budget by forcing \$300 annual home owner fire parcel taxes so that council can off load (close?) our fire station for what will almost certainly be a future lower standard of fire protection, needlessly replacing long lasting fully owned analog water meters with digital devices that are not likely to last long but will generate subscription revenue for the city... I have to wonder what other 'ad hoc committee' surprises are in our future that will lower the standard of city of Sebastopol living but swell the coffers so that councillors can pursue and fund their personal projects.

No doubt council will again congratulate each other on their hard work to the public and earnestly explain why dumping our fire department is a wonderful idea, but I suspect this time people are

starting to wake up and realize their homeowners insurance may be in jeopardy, the quality and organization of local fire emergency services calls may suffer and that more taxation for 'consolidated' broader regional fire protection is of highly questionable value. The foundations of the city are built on effective fire and policing services. Please focus on facilitating and improving these services instead of meddling and cutting back room deals to offload responsibilities.

We need a city council that can increase the city budget in logical, straightforward ways of supporting local businesses and services, less autocracy, more transparency and CoS voter input.

Please slow down on this vital public safety issue and show more respect for your voters views and opinions, and more importantly our experienced fire fighters perspectives in a transparent, logical and open fashion. Please abandon the explorations of this two person 'committee' and focus on effective city of Sebastopol public safety.

I appreciate all the hard work and public service councillors are putting in but feel you are digging yourselves a deeper and deeper hole.

**Oliver Marks**

City of Sebastopol

