

From: [Kate Haug](#)
To: [Mary Gourley](#)
Subject: Spend Tax Money on City Services not Transients - Public Comment on Budget- Item 10 6/21/22
Date: Monday, June 20, 2022 9:32:17 AM

Dear Council,

I am writing in regards to Agenda Item 10 regarding the 22/23 budget.

I do not support any additional public tax monies going toward transient services. Council has proposed funding a homeless outreach coordinator, Safe Parking and Heating/Cooling Centers. I oppose these expenditures for numerous reasons:

1.
Sebastopol has the highest per capita transient beds of any city in Sonoma County, which include Park Village, Sebastopol Inn, Safe Parking at the Community Church and Horizons Shine, the RV camp on Gravenstein Highway. Sebastopol has more transient beds than Rohnert Park, population 42,000. Cotati, Forestville and other cities have no transient beds.;
2.
There has been little public data, including costs and outcomes, on these facilities in terms of occupancy and outcomes. Is the Community Church Safe Parking fully occupied?; Is the Sebastopol Inn fully occupied?; How many people at Horizons Shine have found employment?; What is the annual budget for the Sebastopol Inn?; What is the annual budget for Park Village?; How much have the citizens of Sebastopol already invested in Park Village? We know that Park Village is leased to WCCS at a low rate and was supposed to be a public park. We know that citizens have already paid to improve the site and add more housing to Park Village.
3.
There has been little public data on the exact work and outcomes of the homeless outreach coordinator. It seems excessive and ill-conceived that a town the size of Sebastopol would fund such a position when the City is unable to secure a City Engineer and other vital staff positions and is also in need of funding for our fire department. The City currently relies on consultants for many City roles; the Council should focus on funding positions that serve the majority of residents and build our community resources.
4.
As the homeless outreach coordinator is paid for by the citizens of Sebastopol serving under the umbrella of West County Community Services, why doesn't WCCS apply for a grant to pay for this position? Why doesn't the Council get money from the County for this position if it is deemed critical? Transients do not pay taxes in Sebastopol and the County receives money for transient services. In addition, the County converted Sebastopol's only downtown tourist lodging, The Sebastopol Inn, into permanent supportive housing for homeless people, which permanently removed

tourist beds from the downtown and permanently removed TOT, sales tax and tourist traffic from our downtown. This is a permanent loss of revenue and will continue to impact small local businesses as we live in a tourist area, where it is critical to have tourist lodging. At this point, Occidental has more downtown tourist beds than Sebastopol. Given this permanent loss of tourist beds, the County should be annually reimbursing the Citizens of Sebastopol to make up for this loss of revenue to the general fund.

5.

We do not need any more Safe Parking or cooling/heating centers as we already offer more homeless services than any community of our size and budget. These facilities should be set up and administered by the County on County land. The County has spent over \$92 million in homeless services in the last 2 years. The State has spent \$25 billion collectively over a 5 year period. The County has access to Measure O funds, which are \$25 million annually. The County has 200 identified sites that could be used for these purposes. In addition, these services draw more transients into the community and we do not have the resources to fully address them. For instance, Sebastopol currently has 8-10 permanent transients that sleep in the town square and spend their time in Ives Park and the library and other community facilities. They are not paying to maintain these spaces yet use them on a daily basis. The Sebastopol non-profit services such as free food and showers that draw transients into the community do not extend services throughout the day thus the City is left providing space for people, which requires public funding. We cannot afford to increase our permanent transient population by adding more transient resources as we are not currently able to keep up with the costs of maintaining our public spaces. In addition, there is a needle exchange run at the Teen Clinic on Petaluma Avenue, which could also draw in drug addicts who can then shoot up IV drugs anywhere in town and leave their old needles in public spaces. If needles are found, they are considered hazardous waste and require extra attention by the Public Works Department. As we already have many organizations providing meals, showers, needles and other transient services, we do not need to increase our transient services unless there is an increase in Public Works and other services to mitigate the impact on public spaces.

6.

Small amounts of money go a long way for our town. Our town has many outstanding public infrastructure and service needs. Our downtown needs maintenance and repair from basic weed control to graffiti removal to upgrading of public benches to power washing of sidewalks and streets. In addition, simple upgrades like the outdoor shower at Ives Pool, which costs \$75,000, would benefit the community at large instead of a micro demographic (how many transients are in Sebastopol - 20?). Council needs to invest in our community infrastructure and public service as taxpayers pay property tax and support sales tax with the expectation that investments are made into the public resources which support the majority of the population. It is a betrayal of public trust when elected officials do not use tax money for the benefit of the community at large, especially when need is clearly present.

7.

Do not spend taxpayer funds on a grant writer to raise money for more transient services. We do not need to spend tax money to bring more transients into our community. In addition, grant writers focus on specific areas of fundraising. The Council has a line item for a grant writing generalist. This is completely unrealistic. No professional grant writer can service all the areas Council has listed. If Council has a specific project like the Ives Park master plan implementation, Council would hire for that project and any other park related projects. If Council wants to support a grant writer for Main Street Business District Development, I would support a specific, focused grant writer for that project. I would support a parks grant writer as Sebastopol has many unfunded park needs and our community enjoys and benefits from our public spaces. If Council is unable to support a specific project, then Council should be hiring for the vacant positions in the City administration or supporting the fire department with funding instead of using tax money for unfocused temporary, positions which are loosely based on a desire to raise money for the City through grants instead of focusing on raising sales tax revenue by supporting our local businesses.

8.

In the end, our City is funded by sales tax revenue and if Council wants to bring in more revenue, they should be working with local business owners to see what would enable them to make our business community more successful. In addition, Council should be working with commercial real estate brokers to see why we have such a high rate of commercial vacancy and to see what is needed to bring more businesses into our community. If we want more revenue, we need a healthy, thriving business community, which should be a fairly easy task as we live in a tourist area with great natural resources and wonderful weather in the context of a broadly affluent Bay Area population. It seems that Sebastopol would be a good place for business owners and it is odd that the City struggles with so much commercial vacancy. Council needs to start doing outreach with commercial property owners and commercial real estate agents to see how we can bring more small businesses and professional services into our community.

Best regards,
Kate Haug