

Sarah Glade Gurney
Retired Sebastopol City Council Member, 2004-2022
(Title for Identification Purposes Only)

[REDACTED]
Sebastopol, CA 95472
[REDACTED]

March 20, 2021

Honorable Mayor Hinton
Council Members
City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472

RE: Consent Agenda Item # 4 on March 21, 2023
Letter of Support for Library Staffing

Dear Mayor Hinton and Council Members:

I support Council Member Zollman's request to the Council to authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Sonoma County Library Commission and Library Director advocating for additional staff for our Regional Branch. I urge you to send the letter forthwith due to imminent budget hearings starting April 4, 2023.

Our Library has long been called "Sebastopol's living room." Just visit any time, listen to the quiet contentment of its patrons, and hear the buzz from its activities! Over the last several years, especially under the leadership of Branch Manager Mathew Rose, its programs have expanded, from the traditional book-lending and research to a much wider scope, such as the sewing circle and the upcoming Paint-Out-Hate art project. In addition, throughout the ongoing crisis of homelessness, our Branch has served as a community safety net: not just as a warm and dry indoor location but also as an important source for connection to social services.

While our Branch's community and our Branch's use, whether measured in circulation, reference requests, or service area, have *expanded*, the facility and the staffing have *not*. Sebastopol's situation is *contrary* to the mandates of the Joint Powers Agreement. Surplus funds from Measure Y, property taxes, and ongoing fiscal practices could potentially address the regional lack of parity in staffing.

The JPA states that: the Library shall distribute its personnel, financial and technical resources amongst the various regional branches in an *equitable* fashion

(italics added). Sonoma County's population over age 65 is 21% whereas Sebastopol's, at 25%, is significantly *higher*. However our Branch has the *lowest* number of adult services librarians at only 0.5 FTE. In 2019, our Branch received *nearly as many visitors* as the Rohnert Park-Cotati Regional Library, despite being less than half its size. Our Branch was the *third highest* circulating branch in Sonoma County that year, just behind Santa Rosa Central and Petaluma, despite a *much lower* population and *less-populated* service area. Sebastopol also offered *more* programs than any other branch and attracted the *second-highest* number of teen program attendees.

That a library with this much activity only has 1 FTE more reference staff than the very smallest library, and 3.5 and 5.5 less than the mentioned comparable branches, also the largest branches, makes *clear* the need to *increase* the staff at the Sebastopol Regional Library.

Measure Y, through its Expenditure Plan, is intended to: support library collections, educational programs, and classes for children; improve access to local branch libraries; maintain library collections; and maintain aging library facilities to make them safe, clean and welcoming. Yet, the most recent Report from the Citizens' Measure Y Oversight Committee Report for 2021-2022 states that the Library had an excess of revenues over expenditures of \$3,948,328, to make an *accumulated excess of approximately \$8 million* that is available for future spending.

Now more than ever, I see Sebastopol's Branch Library as providing key services that strengthen our community. It is critical that the Sebastopol community has the Library and the Library Staff it deserves under the JPA. Financial resources are available to optimize the quality of the system's public services, to be accountable to the JPA partners and the taxpayers, in every part the county equally, and to ensure sufficient staff to effectively deliver those public services.

Please authorize the recommended letter. Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Glade Gurney

Encls. by electronic attachment:
Measure Y Report, 2021-2022
SCL JPA Slide 10.18.21