

Dear Council Members,

I'm writing in regards to comments that Council Members made at the previous meeting regarding the vandalization of the Bank of America building.

Vandalism is not free speech. Vandalism is not a legal form of protest; it is the destruction of private and public property.

In the last Council meeting 3/7/23, it seems that some Council Members conflated the vandalism of the Bank of America building with activism. It's not activism to destroy or harm public or personal property, it's criminal.

Regardless of what one thinks about Bank of America's business activities or policies, it does not give them the right to actively deface their building.

Would it be fair for a vegan to spray paint "Meat is Murder" over all the restaurants in town that serve meat? Would that be a good form of protest? Meat is a huge contributor to climate change. Would that justify a wholesale defacing of our local businesses?

Would it be right for anti-choice activists to spray paint "Abortion Kills Babies" all over Planned Parenthood? I don't agree with that. I don't see that as a legitimate form of protest. I see that as a hostile and threatening crime against health care providers who are operating in a legitimate fashion and providing a vital service to women.

In democracy people disagree but that does not grant anyone special privilege to destroy public and private property.

A good example of free speech is this letter. I am writing to my government officials. I am freely voicing my opinion.

Third Act's protest of Bank of America is an excellent example of public protest and free speech. [https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/third-act-comes-to-sebastopol-as?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/third-act-comes-to-sebastopol-as?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

The right to free speech and protest do not also grant the right to destroy and deface public and private property. It sets a terrible precedent and tone for Council to legitimate acts of destruction as acts of free speech and/or legitimate protest. What message is Council trying to communicate - that they think it's fine to harm some businesses?

What does that communicate to our community, to our youth - that some businesses and/or individuals are available targets and that it's up to personal discretion to have the law enforced?

If so, that's a horrible message to communicate to the public. In a democracy, laws are not selectively enforced. In a democracy, people and businesses are not randomly assigned protection of our laws.

I hope that Council Members will clarify that destruction and defacing of public and personal property is not the way to protest or exercise free speech in Sebastopol.

It's wonderful to have a country where people of all ages, races, gender, economic position and otherwise have the opportunity to protest, engage their government and express their ideas. We need to preserve these incredible rights and not confuse them with criminal acts.

In addition, police officers are under the direction of elected officials. Police officers deal with situations - like protestors that their employers (elected officials) - do not have to deal with.

Thus if people have a problem with the duties of police officers, they should address the people in charge. Police officers are often from the working and middle classes. They can be people of color, women, LGBTQ. Law enforcement is a diverse arena of employment and therefore it's incorrect and ignorant to say that "All Cops" are XY and Z. Police do have a very conflicted history in the United States as they are often responsible for addressing the problem of poverty and racism that are systematically produced by capitalism. The capitalists don't have to deal with the social ills of poverty, racism and sexism, the police do.

Police are asked to enforce laws; they are never asked about their opinion on the laws. We don't know if police officers agree with what they are asked to do.

People working in jobs should not be targets of hate.

In the last decade - especially during COVID - teachers, doctors, nurses, airline employees, police officers, retail employees, restaurant staff have all become targets of hostility and anger because they are enforcing rules or ideas that people don't like and don't agree with.

I don't think someone's occupation should expose them to threats and violence. At the end of the day, people are doing their jobs - jobs that we need them to do for the benefit of society. Someone on the job should not be the target of violence.

I hope you will carefully consider how you define acts of protest and free speech and firmly uphold existing laws. I hope you will support all people, regardless of their employment, in their fair and equal treatment under the law.

Best,  
Kate Haug