

To: Sebastopol City Council

From: Arthur George, Chair, West County Homeless Advocates, [REDACTED]

Re: AGENDA ITEM 5: May 2, 2023 Council Meeting
**Statement of Support for Library Fee Waiver Request:
Limited Mobile Shower Usage: Library Parking Lot**

Dear Council:

This memo is submitted in **SUPPORT** of Sebastopol Library's request for a fee waiver related to its proposal for limited provision of a mobile shower in the Library parking lot on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. from May through December. This "reduction" in City revenue would be a cost-effective enhancement of continuing City efforts to address problems of unhoused persons as a portion of our citizenry, and promote community health.

Many unhoused are among the "working poor," who have jobs, but may not be able to avail themselves of other shower facilities, such as at Community Church on Tuesday mornings, or Sebastopol Christian Church on Monday and Thursday mornings. A Saturday shower would assist their hygiene efforts, support their employability, and relieve the burden on these other charitable showering efforts.

Generally, the availability of these other showers in Sebastopol (and a bi-weekly laundry program jointly operated by Sebastopol Christian and Sebastopol Methodist Church), freely offered through private church charity in the absence of any public/government shower services, keeps the unhoused at a level of cleanliness and sanitation that promotes public health, a healthy community, individual dignity, and positive personal socialization. The unhoused are thus not perceived as unclean "walking blight" that might offend business or other sensibilities. As former mayor Una Glass, West County's representative to the Continuum of Care, has stated: "Fix the Visual, Safe and Stable:" meaning clean up what may offend visually and then proceed to creating safe and stable environments. The Library proposal would support this.

Redwood Gospel Mission has a good record of conducting its "Nomadic Shelters" among consecutive nights rotated through thirty churches in Sonoma County during winter months, and would likely be a good neighbor operating the Saturday shower facility here. The Library's proposal would minimally impact parking lot use, of only one hour on Saturdays, and leave the parking lot available for other use by library patrons and downtown shoppers. With public visibility of the shower program, it would also remove the unhoused from being a scorned and faceless "other," to view them as individuals, with compassion amid broad economic uncertainty.

The Library has become an extended information resource for all of its patrons including the unhoused, providing them with a large information bulletin board and a directory of social and rehabilitative services; reading and computer access; facilitating a monthly "Social Service Tuesday" to connect with administrative and service providers, such as for drivers licenses, birth certificates, housing, food, and medical services and alternatives. Library staff is welcoming and informative. The Library hours offer temporary relief from the elements, and unhoused persons generally reciprocate with positive conduct. Library access and socialization among all library patrons retrieves unhoused persons from the margins of society, and normalizes good conduct models. The Library's shower program would be another form of live-action public information and community-building. The fee waiver should be granted. Thank You.

West County Homeless Advocates is an ad hoc volunteer organization with membership drawn from Sebastopol churches, service organizations, and interested citizens and activists.