



City of Sebastopol
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UNAPPROVED DRAFT MINUTES

PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF September 12, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION:

The notice of the meeting was posted on September 7, 2023.

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Fernandez called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. and read a procedural statement.

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:	Chair Fernandez, Vice Chair Fritz, and Commissioners Burnes and Oetinger
Absent:	None
Staff:	Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director John Jay, Associate Planner

2. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA:

Eris Weaver, Exec Director of Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition

A couple of events coming up:

- We will be teaching our Smart Cycling Bicycle Skills and Safety Course in Sebastopol on September 23rd at the high school from 9am to 1pm. The course has both a classroom and on-bike component.
- On September 30th we will have our first Golden Spoke Awards gala where we will give out awards for advocates, projects, and people doing things in Sonoma County to make it better for cyclists, as well as a silent auction that will be live online, so you don't have to attend the event to participate in the auction. I refer to the auction as "Bikes, Vacations, and Wine, Oh My!" because most of the items fall into one of these three categories. You can get more information at bikesonoma.org.

Roberta Delgado, Bike Sebastopol

Our group has become very aware of things we would like to see happen with active transportation, and the Planning Commission is going to provide us the opportunity to help you understand what we know about this area.

3. STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

Vice Chair Fritz reported with respect to Item 5A, 354 South Main Street, that he had a conflict of interest due to proximity of his residence to the subject site and he would recuse himself from participating in the public hearing for that item.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

July 25, 2023

Commissioner Oetinger moved to approve the minutes as presented.

Vice Chair Fritz seconded the motion.

AYES: Vice Chair Fritz and Commissioners Burnes and Oetinger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: Chair Fernandez

ABSENT: None

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Vice Chair Fritz left the meeting.

A. 345 South Main Street – Use Permit

This is a use permit application to allow the conversion of a commercial business located within the Office Commercial district of the City of Sebastopol to residential use. As prescribed by the Sebastopol Municipal Code Table 17.25-1, permanent residential uses are required to have a Conditional Use Permit. The project is exempt from CEQA review as it classifies for a 15301(a) exemption "interior or exterior alterations involving such things as partitions, plumbing, and electrical conveyances," as the project proposed is to modify the interior of an existing facility to meet the new use of a residential home.

Director Svanstrom presented the staff report.

Chair Fernandez asked for Planning Commission questions of staff. Seeing none, he asked for the consultant's presentation.

The consultant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

Chair Fernandez asked for Planning Commission questions of the consultant. Seeing none, he opened public comment. Seeing none, he closed public comment.

The Commission discussed the application as follows:

Commissioner Oetinger made a motion to approve a Use Permit for 354 South Main Street for the conversion of a commercial business to 100% residential use, subject to the findings and conditions included in the staff report.

Commissioner Burnes seconded the motion.

AYES: Vice Chair Fernandez, and Commissioners Oetinger and Burnes
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Vice Chair Fritz
ABSENT: None

Vice Chair Fritz returned to the meeting.

5. REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS:

- A. Active Transportation Plan Update** – The City of Sebastopol is undertaking an update to its 2011 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, renamed as the Active Transportation Plan, as part of a citywide planning process led by the Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA).

Associate Planner Jay presented the staff report.

Chair Fernandez asked for Planning Commission questions of staff. Seeing none, he asked for the applicant's presentation.

The applicant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

Chair Fernandez asked for Planning Commission questions of the applicant. Seeing none, he opened public comment.

John Cruz

I live in Sebastopol and walk and bike here frequently. I'm also active in bicycle advocacy groups such as Bike Sebastopol and Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition. My question of the consultant is looking at the schedule it seems that public comment will come late in the game, perhaps even after there is a draft that will go through the Planning Commission and City Council. Why is public comment coming so late? Shouldn't that be the starting point, because who knows better about transportation here in Sebastopol than the local people who use it? I think highlighting the high-stress and low-stress routes is very useful, and the map presented is excellent. Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition also produces a map with much of the same information. My impression is Sebastopol has a funny situation as far as roads: there are two kinds of roads that nobody interested in safety would ever ride on, like Highways 12 and 116, and most of the other roads are okay, some more stressful than others.

Phil Carter

I'm excited for this plan. Are you going to consider other types of trails, like Joe Rodota, that are off the road? Or could you consider widening some of the higher-stressed roads? Like the previous commenter noted, some of the busier roads often don't have a shoulder, so it would be great to have more grade different roads. A lot of people live south toward Hessel and don't feel comfortable riding into town to meet that better bikeable road with the divided highway, so I'm wondering if you're going to address some of Bike Sebastopol's alternate plans for routes? Bikes being next to cars is always stressful for commuting purposes, even if it's on some of the lower-stress roads.

Roberta Delgado, Bike Sebastopol

I'm very encouraged. I think the basic guidelines that were described are in keeping with a broad agreement among those of us who ride bikes or walk, especially bike riders. In

general, I would say that we are really hoping for more Class 1 paths that connect the jurisdictions. Right now there are Class 1 paths, but they end and require one to get off onto a share-the-road situation where it's pretty scary. I am thinking about coming off of the Creek Trail onto Willowside to Hall to Sanford to Occidental, the left turn on High School. It would be really terrific if there would be a way for these Class 1 trails to be connected to one another and not make us be right next to those cars that going way too fast where there is no center lane and no shoulder. In local jurisdictions I have seen the first protected bike lane, and it's wonderful. Other places have more protected bike lanes, meaning with some kind of a visual element, like a bollard, because when I'm driving my car I'm not seeing painting on the side of the street. A bollard, even a flexible one, provides a visual cue that is a huge game changer. Even better is where there is on-street parking that protects the bike lane. Then of course bike parking. One stressful thing for me when going somewhere is where will I put my \$2,000 road bike and feel safe about where I've left it? So often where I'm supposed to put it is out of sight. I have seen really cool bike parking that allows one to slide a bicycle inside and lock it safely in a place where a hundred bikes can be, and they're all available to their individual owners.

Eris Weaver, Exec Director of Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition

I am so happy this is moving forward, because it's been so long since the last plan was done that, for example, Class 4 bike paths didn't even exist as a category when the last plan was done. I'm feeling very positive about the fact that the countywide and the individual County things are happening all at once. I've been in meetings with Fehr & Peers and SCTA and others, and one thing we did in Cotati is myself and other local transportation activists went on a bike ride with some of the planning commissioners and folks from Fehr & Peers to get them out to see the challenges we see and the places that are working well. I would encourage you folks to do that with folks from Bike Sebastopol, to go out in the field, because it looks different when you are actually going on a bike.

Tor Allen, Bikeable Sebastopol and Sebastopol Carbon Conversations

I'm curious about reaching out to the demographics that are riding now to get feedback. Also, we're trying to work with schools who are probably the biggest demographic who could ride short distances to where they go during the day, and just trying to get a little bit of feedback on how best to collect that data that would be useful to this process. In some sense it's how do you personally get from place A to place B and what are you encountering along the way so we can identify places to make improvements. Then in another sense it's what is the holistic flow of cycle routes around town? Are there spokes of safe streets better than others to be tuned up? I can't give you a specific plan. I came here tonight to hear how you're going to guide this process and give feedback on how we can best chime in going forward, because I think there are another couple of months of to-be-determined ways to gather input from the community.

Chair Fernandez asked for further public comment. Seeing none, he closed public comment.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

I'll ask Fehr & Peers to respond to the comment that it seems public comment would not be solicited until later on in the process. Could you go over the process again, and the opportunities the general public will have to make comments?

Taylor McAdam, Fehr & Peers

I'll go back to our slide with the schedule. There will be three phases where we're going to collect public input. The first starts right now; you are our first local jurisdictions plan of milestone updates. These are the formal input opportunities, and then there are informal, and those will include two main things: 1) We will have a website where there will be both

the survey as well as a map-based survey for physical location changes you'd like to see. Right now we know that a number of bicycle and pedestrian efforts in the very recent past have done a similar map-based survey and we're trying to pull those into our map so you can see those comments community members have already made. That will be one way of interacting through the website. 2) A series of events that we will host throughout the fall for this round, and that will include things like farmers markets connecting with particular groups like a school event. If the Bicycle Coalition is hosting the classes that were mentioned, that's the type of event we might plug into. To the question about how we might reach different demographics, we want to reach people who ride today but also people who don't, because maybe they're interested but concerned, so we are going to try to hit a range of types of events, times of day, and geographic locations. The City of Sebastopol distributing our web page through different communication channels would be another way to get a broader perspective. There is opportunity now for people to provide comments, there will be another opportunity once we have draft project ideas, and a final opportunity once there is a full draft plan, so three big opportunities, each of which will be multiple months long. To the question about off-road trails, yes, this plan will look at off-road trail options, which has different challenges, but this plan will include Class 1 facilities that either parallel an existing road or cut across multiple properties.

The Commission discussed the application as follows:

Evert Fernandez, Chair

I am a biker and am very familiar with coming off of the Creek Trail and then either from Sebastopol to get to the trail or coming back into Sanford and all those roads. There are roads that do have a decent sized shoulder and riding lane, but they're littered with rocks and it's not very safe. Does this also address how to keep those areas clean or safe? Also, continual driver education as far as how to drive safely when bikes are around is helpful, and also for bikers, because sometimes bikers don't follow the rules and it makes it difficult for drivers. I know there are some areas that have sections that are dirt, for example, the Forestville Trail, and I don't know if that's something that would be addressed as part of this. Closer to Sebastopol, once you pass Elphick Road going south there is very little shoulder and it's almost taking a chance to get through that road quickly before a car comes.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I'm not sure you are aware, but Sebastopol just applied for and was awarded a Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant as well, focused primarily on downtown but can parallel this process well, and I'm hoping is integrated as well as talking about ways to make the downtown more bike, walkable, and active transportation friendly. The map of pedestrian-friendly areas that have the orange spots, I would extend that up Healdsburg Avenue toward the north and down South Main Street, and even to South Gravenstein. On your map I think Gravenstein South was low-stress, but I find that to be a stressful environment because cars are moving quickly and there are not a lot of stop signs or traffic lights that would slow people down as there are in the downtown area. One of the public comments mentioned the protected bike lanes as well as car-protected bike lanes, and that's a great opportunity downtown, and hopefully with this other grant that we were awarded we can take a look at something like that. I was recently in New York City and they've done amazing things with their protected bike infrastructure. There were so many people biking in New York and I would love to see more of that happening, and giving people more opportunity to feel safe while biking would go a long way in town. I'm happy Sebastopol has such an active bike community and I look forward to their participation and feedback in this process. I'm excited about the opportunities to get this next phase of an Active Transportation Plan implemented to meet the community's needs, because I think

Sebastopol could be a really great community for biking and other means of transportation. I wonder if other communities will look at parts of this plan like bike and scooter share programs, like what I saw in New York where there is so much of that going on.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I wanted to note that our Climate Action Committee does have a transportation group, and Associate Planner Jay has been working with them for some involvement in this. In the past the group discussed the potential of bike or scooter shares and they decided that an electric e-bike share would actually be a better option for the City, given the infrastructure and the types of riders we have here. I don't know if it's part of this plan, but when we talk about VMT mitigations and things like that, it is definitely something that is an option the City could explore. I had a question for the consultant. What does the blue dotted line on the map represent?

Taylor McAdam, Fehr & Peers

They are proposed off-road trails.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

The Apple Blossom Trail is proposed to go through along some of the creek area, also through the Sebastopol cemetery where the owner is supportive of some kind of right-of-way, but that could change if ownership changes, so those types of things should be considered for new trails and so forth. How are those things be addressed or looked at?

Taylor McAdam, Fehr & Peers

Off-road trails will definitely be considered as part of this plan. Where other on-street facilities might have modal tradeoff considerations, off-street facility is one of the biggest considerations; it's going to be ownership, right-of-way, so we can propose a facility, but we will always have to know what the roadblocks or implementation hurdles to getting a facility implemented are, and often in the prioritization phase for projects the implementation difficulty is a criteria that is considered in how high or low we prioritize a project. But that is something we will ask for feedback on, because a project may be hard to implement, but if it is *the* project that the community wants the most, we will note that despite the hurdles, such as right-of-way. This planning project will not take any steps to have any land ownership conversations, but it will note them.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

I know it's difficult to keep all the roadways clear. Does any part of this plan address things like debris removal and rocks on shoulders? Is that something bikers should let people know, or is it just as it comes along? How are those addressed?

Taylor McAdam, Fehr & Peers

Safe and well maintained is one of the goals, and clearing debris from facilities is definitely part of a well maintained network. In addition to coming up with strategies for existing facilities that are maybe Class 2 or large shoulders, someone mentioned excitement about Class 4 facilities, and those come with a whole different challenge of maintaining them. Sometimes special equipment is needed depending on the type of protection used in a bicycle facility. So yes, maintaining the network we come up with will be part of the plan. I'll address the one other question, which was about bike and scooter share, maybe e-bike share; we'll discuss that in this plan. One of our other partners is from Sonoma State University and he focuses on this topic of micro-mobility, and we're excited that he will have the best recommendations, because the scale of cities and towns in Sonoma County is sometimes hard to reconcile with these share programs, but there are examples of them in smaller cities, so we have to figure out the logistics of what might make sense.

Eleanor Leshner, Fehr & Peers

On the question about looking at off-road trails or alternatives to on-street facilities, I've seen it addressed in similar plans that if there is a case where there is an on-street facility that's very high-stress and there are a number of challenges with implementing low-stress facility on-street, sometimes at the active transportation level we would identify that as a corridor for their study where we wouldn't assign a specific facility type as part of the plan, but identify an area that needs further study to see if there is a low-stress option they could put on-street, and if not, what are some off-street options? Then the plan about maintenance, we're not only looking at infrastructure as part of the plan, but also a suite of programmatic improvements, whether that be maintenance, education, and other programs like bike parking and other supportive programs, and that will also be part of the implementation plan and something we would incorporate in cost estimates.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

When we talk about comfort level, one of the speakers mentioned that it's a discomfort when you get to a destination and can't park your bike in a place you can see it, because in our groups there have been bike thefts, and they happen in a blink of an eye, so that's important as far as people feeling comfortable and being able to stop somewhere.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

I have a technical question about the path itself. Is there a legal width to the paths, and if so, are the current trails, like the Rodota Trail, the legal size? Is it arbitrary? Are these going to be about that width? I'm not a bicyclist but an avid walker, and I've often seen two bicyclists riding side-by-side and a mom with a stroller has to pull the stroller over to avoid being hit. I'm hearing impaired, so I've had cyclists come from behind and accidentally hit me because I didn't hear them. I love how well used these paths are, but I've spoken to young moms who just will not walk their kids with a stroller and a toddler.

Taylor McAdam, Fehr & Peers

For off-road trails there is best practice, but it really depends on who the users of the trail are going to be, and if we hear that there is a lot of interest in it being used for walking as well as biking, that is maybe a reason to make it wider or even paint delineation on the trail with a walking side and a biking side, so we would love to hear physical location-specific types of comments.

Eleanor Leshner, Fehr & Peers

As part of the plan process we will review the latest best practices in terms of design and how they have changed since the last plan in 2014, and that will be included in the plan for all the countywide and local jurisdictions to refer to updated best practices.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

I haven't heard of anything recently on these trails, but over the years there have been issues with crime and assaults and different types of issues, so I'm wondering if installing all these additional paths would impact our police department, and have we looked into how that will impact, and do we have an infrastructure there to support anything that might occur?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I can speak to that from a City perspective. For something like the regional trails, which is Joe Rodota and the West County Trails, those are serviced by the Regional Park's park policy, and they do have police that are pretty responsive.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

My question is will this stress it, or are we taking this into account?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

From a safety perspective I don't want to speak for the police, but I'll speak as a resident who lives near the West Country Trail. I don't have a perception of a crime issue along that or the section of the Joe Rodota Trail. Certainly both the physical maintenance and the surveillance of those is a concern. I've talked to the police about Abbott Avenue potentially being extended where the Benedetti Car Wash is going in, that we have the road right-of-way for a certain amount, and then we have a potential to extend the multi-use path to connect in with the trail that goes past the Barlow Town Homes and Park Village up to Highway 12. What the police actually would like is a multi-purpose trail, because if you do it at the 11 or 12 feet, or whatever the normal width is, they actually can use that with their police cars to get out there, so it gives them better access. I will definitely be coordinating with them regarding any potential connections there.

B. Planning Commission Workplan Review

Director Svanstrom presented the staff report.

Chair Fernandez asked for Planning Commission questions of staff.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

When we last looked at this I brought up the idea of looking at The Barlow zoning as a way to possibly provide more housing opportunities there. Is that in this Item 5, Housing Element Implementation Commercial Industrial Zoning Housing Opportunities?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Yes, I put that in in response to your comment.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I appreciate you picking up the grant and putting it in the workplan. I know it's early, but is Planning taking the lead on this, or Engineering?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Planning is probably going to be taking the lead. I have a meeting with Engineering tomorrow to talk about it, and then next Wednesday morning with Caltrans. It is critical to coordinate with both Sonoma County and Caltrans, and Caltrans generally wants to work directly with the City Engineer, and I think that's critical for making this a success.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I hope the Planning Department is taking the lead on it, because the reason I was interested in this grant is because I see a lot of the issues around downtown in particular being more design and planning issues, not so much engineering issues. Obviously it's a street and Caltrans owns it, so there is some engineering required, and I know that part of the grant application is looking at the integration of the wider regional network, but I think the difficulty Main Street has are urban design and planning issues and I hope this process can help that.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Even if we're not the lead, we'll be heavily involved.

Chair Fernandez asked for further questions of staff. Seeing none, he opened public comment.

Brian, local resident

I echo Vice Chair Fritz's comments. Issues of expression, aesthetics, and civic identity are at the top of my mind when I think about the way the solutions are being presented as technical solutions. Throughout this presentation I was also wondering if there is a way they can be constructed and considered aesthetically that would reinforce the existing cultural and social institutions and aesthetic identity of Sebastopol?

Director Svanstrom asked for further public comments. Seeing none, Chair Fernandez closed public comment.

Vice Chair Fritz made a motion to adopt a resolution to approve the Planning Commission Workplan and to send it to City Council.

Chair Fernandez seconded the motion.

Director Svanstrom indicated that Commissioner Oetinger had left the meeting, but there was still a quorum.

AYES: Chair Fernandez, Vice Chair Fritz, and Commissioner Burnes

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Commissioner Oetinger

7. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

None

8. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Svanstrom provided updates.

The Commission asked questions of Director Svanstrom.

9. ADJOURNMENT: Chair Fernandez adjourned the meeting at 7:41 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting will take place on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.