

City Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public,:

I need to express my deep concern regarding the council's handling of police reform and oversight in Sebastopol. This agenda item reflects not only the incomplete follow-through on commitments made during a critical moment of reckoning in 2020 but also a broader failure to ensure transparency, accountability, and timely action in addressing longstanding systemic issues within the Sebastopol Police Department.

In the aftermath of the George Floyd tragedy, and against the backdrop of the Jeremiah Chass and David Ward cases, the city's failure to provide industry-standard reporting on demographics and use of force was glaring. The council's decision to call for an audit in Fall 2020 was a necessary response, but the process has since been marked by unacceptable delays and inconsistencies. These failures undercut the very foundation of the promises made to the community.

The audit conducted by Jerry Threet was completed in 2020, yet its release was delayed until June 2021 without explanation. This lack of transparency eroded public trust. Worse still, while council approved the exploration of a citizen oversight body, no meaningful steps were taken to establish one. The result is a stark gap between the commitments made to the public and the reality of inaction.

The implementation of the Threet report's recommendations has also been woefully inadequate. Despite a clear timeline for progress and updates to council, these commitments were not upheld. Over the course of three police chiefs, the department has deprioritized key items that were previously agreed upon. This disregard for agreed reforms is unacceptable and betrays the trust of the public who participated in hours of testimony to demand accountability and modern policing.

While I acknowledge efforts to reduce the police budget to a more reasonable percentage of city expenditures, this financial adjustment does not absolve the city of its responsibility to deliver on promised reforms. The council must scrutinize its failure to implement meaningful changes envisioned by the community in the summer of 2020. This includes the overdue exploration of a Cahoots-style model for alternative crisis response, a critical evaluation of mutual aid agreements with agencies whose values conflict with Sebastopol's, and the establishment of a robust citizen oversight body.

The council must recognize that delays, broken timelines, and the refusal to prioritize agreed-upon reforms are not just administrative failures—they are moral failures. They diminish the hard work and advocacy of community members who sought a better vision for policing in our city. I urge the council to recommit to these goals, take ownership of these failings, and move forward with urgency and accountability. We cannot afford another chapter of missed opportunities.

- Kyle Falbo