

Council Members and City Staff,

In reviewing the current budget, I want to stress the funding of the Police Department and Roads within the budget as these the budget priorities from the sales tax survey.

“Additionally, 71% are more likely to vote yes on the measure after learning the funds could help improve the City's streets and roads, 68% are more likely to vote yes on the measure after hearing that funding from the measure could help address property crime and maintain emergency response times ...” Page 24/ <https://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Agenda-Item-Number-8-Calling-for-November-2024-Ballot-Measure-Question-FINALCC.pdf>

The City also conducted a public survey which asked similar questions. What were the results? Were public safety and roads a top priority? If so, it seems that the Council has their budget priorities if two separate samplings indicate the same citizen priorities? Will the results of the City Survey be shared in conjunction with the budget meeting?

In light of the information from the Sales Tax Ballot Measure Survey, I as a citizen support the following with the current budget.

- 1) **Fully fund the police department.** The police are a crucial component of our public safety network and are trained to respond to a variety of situations from flood, fire, car accidents, crime, traffic violations and many, many aspects of public safety and emergency. They are trained to deal with evacuations and mass shooting events (knock on wood we never ever have to deal with that!). Given the fact that we have three elementary schools, one middle school and a large high school in the area, our police department needs to be fully staffed and trained. In addition, we have a huge visiting population and the most trafficked intersection 116/12 in Sonoma County. The demands on our police department far exceed our small population of 7500 people. We need to fully support our police department to makes sure that residents, students and visitors have access to and reasonable response times from our Police Department.
 - a. Fund the two vacant Police Positions. Given the survey results, these positions should be a budget priority.
 - b. DO NOT FUND the SAFE Program. We already spend \$36,800 on a homeless outreach coordinator. We already spend \$100,000 on Park Village. We lost TOT because of Elderberry Commons. We are a town of 7500. We should not be spending this much money on homeless services. We should not be spending so much staff time on homeless services. The County does not have enough mental health beds to accommodate all the people who need mental health treatment. If you want to help the homeless, petition the County to create more mental health beds.

2) Charge the County and Nonprofits that provide Homeless Services, Including Homekey Projects, an Impact Fee to offset the Financial Burden of High Needs Individuals

It is noted in the SAFE memo that 50% of police time is spent on calls for service related to homeless individuals. Sebastopol has a disproportionate amount of homeless individuals. In the 2023 Point-In-Time Count, Sebastopol had 81 homeless people compared to 15 in Cotati, 9 in Cloverdale, 33 in Healdsburg, 26 in Windsor and 40 in Sonoma.

See page 11 of this report:

[https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Main%20County%20Site/Health%20and%20Human%20Services/Health%20Services/Documents/Homelessness%20Services/Homeless%20Data/County%20of%20Sonoma%202023%20Point-in Time%20Count%20Results.pdf](https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Main%20County%20Site/Health%20and%20Human%20Services/Health%20Services/Documents/Homelessness%20Services/Homeless%20Data/County%20of%20Sonoma%202023%20Point-in%20Time%20Count%20Results.pdf)

- a. Why does Sebastopol have so many more homeless individuals per capita compared to other Cities? The City Staff and Council need to ask this question and determine what is causing the high concentration of homeless people.
 - b. One driving factor is that the County and local churches offer services to homeless people within Sebastopol City Limits but do not extend their services to cover periods 8 and 24 hour periods which leaves homeless individuals without places to go and thus leaves them in public spaces where they have a negative social impact.
 - c. Homeless people are responsible for 50% of police calls and at least 30% of Public Works time. This amounts to over \$3,000,000 of the City Budget.
 - d. To offset this huge expense to the City of Sebastopol, the City should charge an impact fee, like it does for the Apple Blossom Festival or other public events which require police and public work time, to the County and other organizations which offer homeless services which draw homeless people into the City limits.
 - e. The City should charge an impact fee to Saint Vincent De Paul and the County for the Homekey Projects as these developments will bring an extremely high needs population into the City Limits. It is very likely that the as these developments become occupied that Sebastopol will see an increase in calls for service due to the needs of Homekey residents which are chronically homeless, hard to house individuals who usually have acute mental illness and addiction issues. While these are medical conditions, treatment within Homekey facilities is optional and there is no indication that these facilities will be professionally or properly staffed for the treatment of the residents. It is very likely that Sebastopol will have 30-50 new residents that have untreated mental illness in the community, which will require service from the police department.
- 3) Use the \$100,000 that is to be determined (Page 10) to fix the pathway so it is ADA compliant and not a tripping hazard.** There is discussion of a CERT program to help with falling. The City has a documented tripping hazard in Ives Park. Ives Park is heavily used, now hosting Peace Town concerts. Before any new programs are created, fix dangerous non-ADA compliant walkways in public spaces.

- 4) **CIP Funding For the Community Center Should be Spent only if Community Center is Financially Viable.** In the CIP budget, there was \$150,000 set aside for the Community Cultural Center building. This money should not be spent if the Board of Community Cultural Center determines it is not an economically viable organization. The CIP money should be shifted to public assets like Ives Park which are heavily used by the public and community organizations like Peacetown. The money should also be used to improve the town square as it is a central location and could be used to make the town more attractive to visitors. Why spend money on a building that is in a floodplain and might not be occupied.
- 5) **Work with the Senior Center to Help Prevent Falls.** The Senior Center offers a Fall Prevention Course. See: <https://www.sebastopolseiorcenter.org/fall-prevention-page> As the City Supports the Senior Center, perhaps there is a way to expand this program so it reaches more residents and community members and to have emergency responders share the information with people who suffer from falls. Perhaps, people from the senior center could perform direct outreach to people in the community who regularly suffer from falls.
- 6) **Disband the Climate Action Committee and Public Arts Committee.** Given the fiscal crisis and the lack of available staff time for critical projects, the City can no longer afford to subsidize these committees. Similar to the nonprofits, which are also important, these committees need to be self-sufficient. Staff time is money. In a time of fiscal crisis, the City has to focus staff time on critical functions such as public safety and revenue raising.
- 7) **Focus on Working With Businesses to Raise Sales Volume.** The fastest and most sustainable way to financial viability is to support local business to increase sales volume. What is the City and Council doing to support local businesses? Why doesn't the City survey local businesses to see how the City can better support our local businesses?
- 8) **Fill Commercial Vacancy.** The more businesses Sebastopol has within City Limits, the more potential to increase sales tax revenues. What is City Council and City Staff doing to fill the high percentage of commercial vacancy within City limits? Why don't people want to open businesses here? Have you had a forum with commercial real estate brokers to get their feedback on why they can't rent out vacant commercial spaces? City staff needs to find out why people are not bringing their businesses to Sebastopol. What can the City do to attract and retain new businesses?

Thank you,
Kate Haug