

From: [REDACTED]
To: [City Council](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: New sales taxes versus alternatives
Date: Sunday, July 14, 2024 2:48:59 PM

City Council,

I consider myself highly engaged in local civic matters and I was neither aware of, nor did I participate in the poll, outreach or survey conducted by the city in reference to the budget measure to raise sales tax. 300 out of ~7700 residents is not a sufficient enough basis to say that 72% approve of raising a tax. Also, the poll was conducted by telephone, suggesting that it is not representative as I am sure there are many people in Sebastopol who do not have a telephone or would not answer an unknown call. I'd be interested to see the number of attendees at the city held meetings. I thought it was a glaring omission from the document.

I do not think the city has adequately explored other sources of revenue. For a beautiful, walkable and bikeable community that people such as myself and my family seek out for access such as this, there are far too many cars and local trips made by car. The city needs to seriously consider raising revenue from sources that discourage car and truck use and encourage forms of transportation that are slower, more pleasant and better for the environment.

For example, free parking for private automobiles and trucks is a subsidy that is absolutely not sustainable. The city should raise revenue by charging for car parking in/on all city facilities, by eliminating the parking minimums in city code and by charging private lot owners a fee for providing free parking. Those who park on the street at their residence or store their cars on the street should be charged a fee for utilizing public right of way for their personal use. An annual parking pass can be adjusted for those who register large and obnoxious vehicles such as large pickup trucks. Discounts could apply for mobility impaired persons who have no alternative to a car.

The city should seek to raise revenue by taxing destructive behaviors such as speeding in automobiles and use of cellphones while driving. Automated systems can be employed to detect and fine drivers who engage in reckless behavior. California AB 645 created a program to allow municipalities to do this and I have asked our legislative representatives that this program be expanded to Sebastopol. The city should actively lobby to have this program expanded to include Sebastopol.

Implement congestion pricing. The city should charge drivers a toll to enter city limits during peak times. The fee for transiting the city should be variable based on the time of day and should be monitored through automated tolling systems utilizing license plate readers. Revenue from this should be used to offset the local shuttle and promote walking and cycling. This is particularly attractive because so many transit through Sebastopol on 116 /12.

Implement emission pricing. Charge vehicles that do not meet emission standards a fee to enter city limits. Charge an additional charge for tractor trailers, dump trucks and large / loud pickup trucks and large SUVs. Use the collected fees to support walking and biking in town and along local connecting routes such as trails.

Bike sharing programs. Implement a bike-sharing system with membership and usage fees. Provide incentives for bike use, such as discounts for frequent users.

Development impact fees. Charge developers additional fees for new developments that are used to fund pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. Or allow developers to fund improvements in lieu.

Create car-free zones. Designate areas where cars are not allowed and encourage businesses to thrive in these zones, potentially increasing local sales taxes. In municipalities such as Madrid, pedestrianized zones are proven to raise revenue for merchants (and thus sales tax revenue) by as much as 9%. If Sebastopol is known as a car free spot where people can shop outside or dine outside away from cars, it will attract higher sales tax revenue from the existing taxes because our commercial establishments will benefit from increased foot traffic. People want to be in walkable places - it's why they visit places like European cities, attractions in the US such as Disney's Main Street, and car lite places like the Barlow.

Sebastopol must also look long term at development density. Single family residences generate relatively low taxes, take considerable resources in terms of maintaining water and road access and are not conducive to lowering housing prices for low income people by increasing supply. The city must look at ways to increase density and thus revenue in its urban core, encouraging development around existing and future public transit, bike and pedestrian facilities. Gone are the days when the city can forgo revenue by having huge parking lots (for example Safeway) for cars in place of dense, intelligently designed urban fabric. And density doesn't have to mean unsightly or huge. These are easily mitigated by existing or new rules and design approval by committee. Studies consistently show that dense and traditional downtowns produce more revenue and actively carry the single family residence portions of towns. Sebastopol can have both nearby rural amenities, a fun, walkable downtown and some single family residential while balancing revenue in the long term.

I welcome the opportunity to hear your response and to engage with you directly on these ideas.

Thanks, Gavin Waters