

Sebastopol can't afford the County Plan to house more homeless people in our city.

It is difficult to write about the issues created by the homeless and those in permanent supportive housing and safe parking villages without hearing the cries of NIMBY. We need to get real about the fact that homelessness and even providing permanent supportive housing brings with it numerous issues that require active management and that management costs money.

Sebastopol is learning these issues in real time. Elderberry Commons was promised to bring no issues to Sebastopol. Many of us have experienced the meaning of "no issues" as we are verbally assaulted while trying to enjoy coffee and pastry at a local business. These problems hurt local businesses and sales tax revenues decline, increasing pressure on city budgets.

The police blogs indicate significant increases in crime, some serious near Horizon Shine that was not present before. The fact that SAVS, after almost two years, has had very limited success getting individuals into a more permanent housing solution demonstrates how difficult these problems can be to solve, even if you throw "boat loads" of money at the problem.

Sebastopol is effectively a social services desert. There are no facilities here to provide public health or mental health services. We no longer have a hospital or emergency facilities. We employ no social workers and have no temporary shelter facilities. The City Council has discussed trading police services for mental health workers, but we don't seem to have a surplus of police services to trade given the increase in retail theft and a new outbreak of youth violence in our parks.

Even though we have no services and getting to services from Sebastopol is challenging at best, the county decided to make Sebastopol and Elderberry Commons a cornerstone of their permanent supportive housing program. The county does seem to be abdicating responsibility as it has "donated" our hotel, paid for by taxpayers, to the non-profit Burbank Housing. Another non-profit, St Vincent De Paul is drawing up plans to further expand the permanent supporting housing options using the Horizon Shine site.

This is all going on with the understanding that if these individuals need any services at all they are going to have to drive, walk, bike or bus to Santa Rosa. Without access to care, treatment, and medications there will be issues. The situation becomes more difficult to manage and costs to deal with it locally go up.

In the business world it would be unusual for a developer to build a train station in a community without train tracks. It seems unlikely that a winery would establish a vineyard on land without water. Somehow, we need to get the County to see that Sebastopol is not the answer to their permanent supportive housing problem.

Sebastopol has the highest concentration of "homeless" in the County. If we continue to let the County send us their problems, we are increasingly going to find our declared financial crisis is indeed one that cannot be solved.