

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: January 21, 2025

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**From:** Mary Gourley, Assistant City Manager  
**Subject:** City Sponsorship of Sebastopol Walks 2025

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council Consider Approval of City Sponsorship for the Sebastopol Walks Program 2025 (for its 17th Year) and Request for Assistance with publicity/social media.

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**SUMMARY:**

For 12 of the last 16 years, local volunteers have organized and conducted once-monthly, docent-led walks around town. More than 3,000 people have participated in more than 140 walk events. These statistics are best estimates only.

The program, known as Sebastopol Walks, has introduced people to the fun of exploring town on foot, learning about the social/cultural/political history of the community, and discovering what makes Sebastopol a great place to live and visit. Locals, locals with out-of-town guests, residents from other Sonoma County cities, out-of-county and international visitors have enjoyed the walks. Intended as a community-building experience, the walks became a tourist attraction.

The inspiration for the walks was a booklet called Sebastopol Walks written by local activist Richard Nichols, its first edition funded by the City. For the second edition, then Mayor and Former City Councilmember Sarah Gurney organized three progressive dinner walks, featuring local restaurants, and raised enough money for the booklet's second printing. Funding for the third edition came from the sales of the book, including at Copperfields Books. The local store has sold over 1000 copies. The booklet has been the number one holiday best seller for several years. It has served inexpensive gift and/or souvenir and has been presented to many Sister City/other visitors to City Hall.

Originally, a four-member core group of volunteers assumed leadership for all of the walks. Soon community leaders were recruited to share the responsibilities, expanding the core group. Later, the current Mayor and Former Council Members were invited to create and lead new routes, often highlighting City governance, service delivery, and opportunities for the future.

The WALKS Program has emphasized the value of exercise for good health. Already in existence when Sonoma County Health Action started the iWALK campaign (in 2013), Sebastopol WALKS was highlighted as the demonstration program. It has inspired several other local walking programs: for example, one at the Senior Center; iMOSEY through an earlier Health Action Chapter; at least one private women's group; and a sister program in Novato. It is the only Health Action iWALK activity still in existence.

The 2025 Walks Program continues with the organizational leadership of Simon Lowings. Experienced volunteer Simon Lowings has rekindled interest in the program amongst long-timers and encouraged new local volunteer leaders.

**BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:**

The group proposes 10 walks, February through November. As before, Walk events will be held on the last Saturday of each month, meeting at The Plaza at 9 AM, departing at 9:15 AM, and returning around noon. Each walk will have a leader and a sweep. Participants will sign a Release of Liability. Visitors and residents alike are welcome at these guided and themed walks. Walks are easy and mostly flat on good surfaces, with a few mild climbs. Please consult with your doctor before starting a new exercise regimen. Walking or hiking shoes are recommended. Dress in layers. Bring water, snacks (or lunch if noted), sunscreen and a hat. Walks may be modified by the leader. Walkers may leave the group after notifying the walk leader.

The anticipated 2025 calendar of events is attached. The events will vary in focus, length, and difficulty, based upon the routes chosen by the morning’s leaders.

Some walks will be mainly for exercise to show participants how to connect places in town by foot and others will be informational. Some are new routes and new subject matter; others are updated versions of favorites.

The WALKS will build interest in Sebastopol as a health-oriented community and help people experience the connectivity of our network of streets, sidewalks, paths, trails and alleys. Participants will learn that they can get around town without driving their car and that they can enjoy the outdoors on foot. They will learn about Sebastopol’s social, cultural, and political history as well as its municipal functions.

The group seeks City sponsorship, in part in order to secure insurance coverage as well as to help with social media. The City has served as sponsor for each prior year. The group requests minimal help with publicity: posting on the City’s Facebook page, website and community newsletter; placing flyers in the lobby at City Hall; installing the banner on the Gazebo at The Plaza one week in advance; etc.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** There is no fiscal impact associated with the approval of this item.

**RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council Consider Approval of City Sponsorship for the Sebastopol Walks Program 2025 (for its 17th Year) and Request for Assistance with publicity/social media.

**OPTION:**

The Council could deny the request for City sponsorship.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Sample 2025 Sebastopol Walks

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 1-7-2025

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 1/7/2025

The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 1-7-2025

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget:  Yes  No  N/A

Account Code (f applicable)

City Attorney Approval:  
City Manager Approval:

Approval Date: N/A  
Approval Date:

