

Dear Council Members and City Staff,

In regard to the budgets and future financial forecasting, I urge Council and City Staff to act immediately to support existing businesses and to fill current vacant spaces. The best way to increase City revenue is to increase sales at existing businesses. I have written regarding this very simple and direct strategy on countless occasions.

The City seems to be wringing their hands and not acting aggressively toward outreach to existing businesses and commercial landlords.

It is unclear why the Economic Development Director is spending so much time on hotel work. The site has an existing footprint, the developer is experienced, the regulations are straightforward. The biggest task is making sure that the City communicates that the hotel is necessary for the fiscal survival of the City and is part of the Measure U vision. Yet, there has been no communication leaving the City open to misinformation and attacks similar to the garbage vendor change.

At this point, the Economic Development Director should be doing direct outreach – making phone calls and meeting with – commercial brokers and property owners to see how to fill our vacancies.

In addition, the EDD should be working to broker a deal with CVS in regard to the long vacant building in Redwood Market place. Has the CVS been contacted by the City? The City has a direct financial interest in seeing the CVS building sold or occupied. It is causing blight and financial harm to have it unoccupied for so long.

It appears that the City's former lawsuit against CVS might have something to do with the high sales price and stagnation. The EDD or the City attorney needs to reach out to CVS to see what can be done to change the situation. Is CVS satisfied with their current situation at their new building.

It would take less than 2 hours to contact CVS and start a conversation.

In addition, there needs to be time spent on our local businesses. Why isn't the EDD spending at least 6 hours per week talking to our local business community, walking Main Street, talking with people on the Northern and Southern ends of our commercial corridors? What do our business owner's needs? What are their issues? Once again, 6 hours per week would make a huge difference to our hard-working business owners.

Public works need to dedicate time each day to cleaning up downtown – trash, graffiti and stickers. It would be a tremendous moral boost to local businesses to see a City worker or Climate Action Committee picking up trash, cleaning public areas, removing unsightly graffiti. It would send a message that Sebastopol wants its public and commercial spaces clean and welcoming.

The SmartMeters were supposed to cut Public Works by two full-time employees. Has this happened? If so, these people should be directed to Main Street, Ives and the town square, public parking lots and other public spaces.

The City needs to be proactive in its communication and actions toward businesses.

The City should send out a press release that contains an action plan.

An example is below:

Sebastopol Revitalizes 2025.

Starting XXX, Sebastopol and the Chamber of Commerce will have an online survey for businesses to learn how the City can better support local business. Please take 10 minutes and fill out the survey.

On XX and XX, the City will hold town halls for business owners and residents to discuss downtown, the local business environment, and how to strengthen our business community. Topics will include - filling vacancies, what types of businesses would thrive in Sebastopol, events that generate businesses, what would make downtown more beautiful, how can the City help businesses, how can businesses help each other, issues that make it difficult to run a business in Sebastopol.

Between XXX and XXX, economic development director Emi Theriault will be walking downtown and meeting with local business owners. She wants to know your concerns. Let her know how the City can help your business and how it can bring in other businesses to Sebastopol to make our business corridors vibrant and alive.

On XX, the City will present its data and focus on three areas that have the most support in the business community.

On XX, the City will start working on the top three priorities by partnering with X, Y, and Z.

As the City moves forward and has accomplishment, send out updates via the Chamber and the City's website.

Best,  
Kate Haug