

From: [Danielle Connor](#)
To: [Sandra Maurer](#); [Neysa Hinton](#); [Phill Carter](#); [Jill McLewis](#); [Stephen Zollman](#); [City Council](#); [Mary Gourley](#); [Don Schwartz](#)
Subject: Opposition to Proposed Press Policy
Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 11:01:59 AM

Hello,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed press policy that would restrict how journalists interact with city officials. As a member of this community, I—along with many other residents and small business owners—rely on local journalists like Amie Windsor (Press Democrat) and Laura Hagar (Sebastopol Times) to stay informed about what is happening within our city government. Reading through city council agendas and reports is a tedious and time-consuming task, and without reliable reporting, many of us would struggle to understand critical decisions that directly impact our lives and businesses.

The city council has, time and again, struggled to effectively communicate its positions during meetings, particularly when responding to public comment. The [recent reporting on Councilmember McLewis' response to the SCRR contract](#) is just one example of this ongoing issue that has sown deep distrust amongst the city council and small business community. Too often, instead of clear, professional explanations that foster trust among constituents, responses come across as reactive and lacking in clarity. This is precisely why independent journalism is so important—it provides necessary context and helps the public understand the council's perspective, even when emotions in the moment prevent effective communication. With this media policy, the city is also essentially relinquishing control of how it is perceived by the public, at a time when the feeling is already generally bleak.

Back when the SCRR contract was up for discussion and the city council chose a path forward that was clearly against its constituents' response (based on the number of public comments against the contract), Mayor Zollman and Mary Gourley came into my business the following day. I was told they were meeting to discuss ways to be more communicative with the community. Is this what was decided on? That communication would be restricted and city government employees would be silenced? This is quite the opposite of working on and improving communication. I am also personally shocked that there is not more outrage from other council members over this issue. I would never let someone tell me who I can or cannot talk to, or ask for their approval when responding to questions. That is essentially relinquishing your freedom of speech and individuality as an elected official. We need elected officials who aren't afraid to have opinions and who are capable of articulating them.

Restricting press access by requiring all inquiries to go through the city manager, assistant city manager, and mayor—while also limiting how and when reporters can ask questions—only serves to further erode transparency. It will make it harder for journalists to do their jobs, harder for the city to respond in a timely manner and, in turn, harder for residents to stay informed. **This is not just a matter of bureaucracy; it is a matter of ensuring that the public has the information needed to participate in local democracy.** This will also mean that more city officials will respond to press inquiries under anonymity, which from the public perspective continues to make the city look bad on a larger scale by attempting to silence city government employees.

I urge you to reject these unnecessary restrictions and instead work toward policies that support, rather than hinder, open communication with the press. **Sebastopol has long valued**

transparency and civic engagement—let’s not set a dangerous precedent that moves us away from those principles.

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Photo

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