

From: [REDACTED]
To: [City Council](#)
Cc: [Stephen Zollman](#); [Jill McLewis](#); [Neysa Hinton](#); [Sandra Maurer](#); [Phill Carter](#); [Mary Gourley](#); [Don Schwartz](#)
Subject: Re: SEB CC March 4, 2025 Item #16 - Vote NO
Date: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 9:59:25 AM

March 4, 2025

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members,

This email is a continuation of my earlier one to you from yesterday. I write you again to make another important point, one that I believe matters greatly to our electorate.

Our electorate needs to know each Council Member individually, not a Council Member who has been schooled by the Mayor on topics of interest to the Press. I urge you to NOT compel each Council Member, when contacted by the Press, to first run the request and any response by the Mayor, especially not behind closed doors.

Each of you brings your own attributes, styles, and life experience to the job. Each of you learns by the seat of your pants, often in a hot seat. The public needs to know what you stand for, how you walk and talk in office, and how well you represent the community you serve. Your work should not be pre-approved by the Mayor or the City Manager.

The Press is a crucial way that citizens get information about you and how you govern. Not many people can attend long meetings at night. Not many of us who might be able to attend your meetings want to sit and listen for hours. Not many of us want to watch long videos that record what happened.

Our community relies on the free and independent reporting by the Press to learn about City governance and the issues in front of you, from a wide perspective.

I understand the need to speak "with one voice," as per the proposed new protocols, but it applies to a very limited situation: when the City Attorney so advises you, under threatened or pending litigation.

Otherwise, democracy compels each of you to engage with the Public and the Press: each of you in your own voice. Knowing how you conduct yourself as a Council Member helps voters determine who to vote for and who to re-elect. Don't make yourselves hide behind the Mayor. Don't allow yourselves to mimic the Mayor. Don't allow yourselves to be cautioned away from your own heart and mind's view. Your work shouldn't be limited by tight protocols that restrict the Press's and, hence, the Public's access to you.

Find the courage to lead in your own way, in your own words. That's your responsibility.

Respectfully,

Sarah Glade Gurney
Council Member, Retired (2004-2022)
City of Sebastopol, California

On Mon, Mar 3, 2025 at 11:39 PM Sarah Gurney [REDACTED] > wrote:
March 3, 2025

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members,

I urge you NOT to restrict press access to Council Members and City Staff, including Department Heads and employees. Communication with the Press should not be run through City Hall, meaning the City Manager, in all instances.

Our community has a long-standing tradition of prompt, open and authentic communication between the Council, City Staff, and the Press, as well as between the same and our Public.

I worked for 18.5 years as a Council Member for accessibility, transparency, and accountability in city government. During my tenure, I took great pride in directing citizens to a Department Head or a Chief, whom, I could assure them, would take their telephone call and/or answer their email to resolve their issues.

At this moment in history, it is imperative that the Press maintain that same access: its ease, responsiveness, and direct engagement. We are fortunate to have a local paper with top-notch professional journalists covering our community. They are the guardians of the public interest. They are our best publicists.

Our governance model has been one of a strong Council establishing policies and directing the City Manager to implement them in the day-to-day operations. To place the City Manager in between the Council and the Press reverses this model. I would be concerned that Council Members would be unduly influenced by the City Manager, temper their responses, and represent management's point of view rather than our citizens.

The electorate wants to know its Council Members directly, without their being schooled by the City Manager. Decisions about what to say to the Press shouldn't be made behind closed doors. Keep the doors open, wide.

Respectfully,

Sarah Glade Gurney
Council Member, Retired (2004-2022)
City of Sebastopol, California