

Dear Planning Department, City Council and Planning Commission,

I am urge you to keep current zoning downtown to preserve the historic buildings and neighborhoods downtown.

If you change the zoning laws, current historic buildings will be torn down and new, multi-unit buildings with no parking, minimal setbacks and minimal landscaping will be put in their place.

This will have a huge, negative impact on our historic districts and historic neighborhoods.

Essentially, these zoning changes could turn this:



Into this:



Many homes in the downtown area have large lots. Developers could buy these lots and build multi-unit buildings on them. Without parking and set back requirements, more land is available for more units.

Thus it would be financially attractive for out of town developers, like the people who built Woodmark, to buy large lots, get affordable housing loans and build dense, multi-unit apartment buildings in Sebastopol's historic neighborhoods.

If a developer builds affordable housing, they are exempt from property tax.

Does Sebastopol want to lose its historic downtown homes and neighborhoods for cookie cutter multi-family developments?

Does the Planning Department and Planning Commission want to destroy Sebastopol's historical downtown and neighborhoods or preserve it?

No Need for Missing Middle – Sebastopol has Plenty

Sebastopol has many apartment buildings and low-income developments, especially for its size. There is no need or urgency around creating "missing middle" housing as that is already covered by a plethora of low-income, affordable housing and many apartment complexes and condominiums that are located along Bodega, Virginia, Schwartz, Golden Ridge, Covert, Healdsburg Avenue, Norlee and other sites throughout Sebastopol.

In addition, the Canopy, Huntley Square and 7621 Healdsburg Avenue are all in development and all provide housing at different price points.

<https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/canopy-development-good-to-go>

<https://www.huntleysquare.com>

<https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/city-council-recap-of-the-nov-5-council>

In addition, Sebastopol has a very attractive ADU policy where property owners do not have to pay impact fees and can have decreased setbacks. These changes allow for more granny units to increase housing downtown without destroying the historic character of downtown.

Sebastopol already has too many large, low income and property exempt housing developments.

These include but are not limited to:

- 1) Woodmark – 48 2&3 bedroom units
- 2) Burbank Apartments at 699 Gravenstein Highway 60 units
- 3) Burbank Senior Housing on Bodega Avenue 198 Units
- 4) Elderberry Commons – 31 units
- 5) Hollyhock Homes at 961 Gravenstein Hwy S.

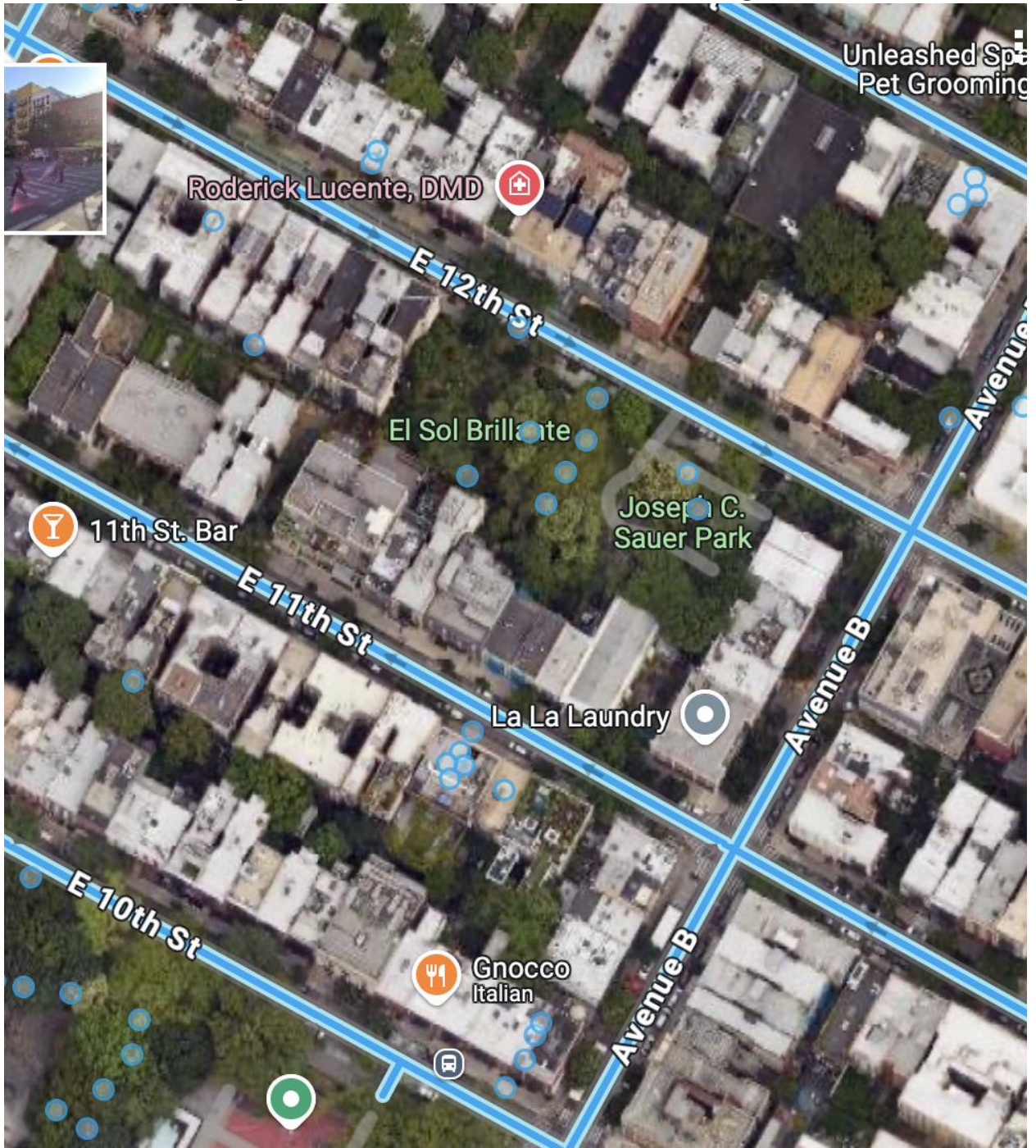
For additional information see:

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/development-services/community-development-commission/divisions/community-development/affordable-housing-inventory>

To Create New Urbanism, Look At the Old

- 1) **Setbacks:** Older neighborhoods often have wider sidewalks which provide natural setbacks from the road. Many cities have sidewalks that are minimum 6 feet wide and also have a buffer near the street which gives an additional 2 feet. Thus creating an 8' setback from the road. Sebastopol has narrow sidewalks thus setbacks in zoning are necessary to create a sense of ease and comfortable passage on the sidewalk and to create light going into buildings.
- 2) **Stoops, porches, stairs and built in buffers.** Many older homes have stairs that lead up to a front porch that create a natural setback. Modern buildings do not have those and building tend to reach the edge of the lot line. Thus set backs are necessary to create a better visual presence on the street.
- 3) **Green Space Built In:** In many cities, backyards create a contiguous greenspace. Even if buildings are edge to edge as in the case in row housing in San Francisco or New York City, the buildings all have backyards which create a large inner greenspace. They do not build buildings back to back. See google image of aerial

shot of the East Village and note all the trees in the back of buildings:



Sebastopol Needs Gardens and Yards

Multi-family buildings need open space and green space. They need space around the buildings to let in natural light.

Residents need green space.

Children need green space. Children that live in multi-family buildings need green space to play.

Sebastopol is in a unique situation as it has ample water, terrific weather and a wonderful climate for growing all sorts of plants, shrubs and trees. The Planning Department and Commission should be looking at ways of preserving and creating green space. Zoning codes should encourage yards and green space. The zoning code should keep or increase the existing green space requirement.

Rural Counties Need Parking

Developments need parking spaces. Sebastopol is a semi-rural community with poor public transportation. People who work need cars. People with families need cars. A 4-plex needs at least 4 parking spaces.

People already complain about the lack of parking downtown. What will it be like if you have multi-unit buildings without parking taking the place of single-family homes that have garages?

No Commercial Enterprises in Residential Neighborhoods

Commercial Enterprises should be in existing commercial zones. Commercial enterprises need parking for their customers. Commercial enterprises would need to have hours that match residential needs. Commercial enterprises have other risks such as odors, noise pollution, trash and traffic, which might be unwanted in a residential neighborhood.

Commercial enterprises require special safety features from venting to sprinkler systems to ADA access.

Commercial enterprises need business licenses and regular inspections.

Sebastopol has a ton of commercial vacancy.

Fill the existing commercial vacancy before looking to expand any commercial zones.

The Future of Downtown

While it would be wonderful if contemporary developers had any interest in creating the cute and charming buildings from the Victorian age or the 1930s, they do not have that interest and tend to build cookie cutter apartments out of cheap material that degrades quickly.

In terms of developing downtown with an eye towards density, the Planning Department and Planning Commission should work with developers on a case by case basis instead of changing the zoning laws. They should look at plans with an eye towards beauty, charm, neighborliness and practicality. For instance, the former

Jayden Day Spa building, next to Honeymoon Yogurt is for sale. It is a small, single story building without much architectural interest. If a developer wanted to build an 3-5 story, residential apartment building on the site within the current footprint with no parking, it would be potentially viable because it would be a great use of that particular space and there is a lot of parking available nearby.

If the Livery wanted to turn its empty space on Main Street into live/work spaces with no parking, that might be viable as it is close to several lots.

Yet, tearing down our historic homes and building multi-family, cookie cutter apartments in the middle of single-family neighborhoods would ruin Sebastopol's charm and its attractiveness to residents and visitors alike.

Map Of Sebastopol and Financial Future

I urge the Planning Commission and Planning Department to make a map of Sebastopol which shows all the different type of housing located in Sebastopol and also the revenue which it generates.

There needs to be a financial plan created that looks at properties which pay no or extremely low property taxes and properties like ADUs which pay no impact fees. The land development in Sebastopol must be grounded in fiscal sustainability. There is a huge crisis in Sebastopol regarding water and sewer infrastructure (\$13-20 million needed) and roads (\$18 million needed). Traditionally critical infrastructure is paid through impact fees, water/sewer bills, property tax and the general fund. As sales tax keeps declining, more and more infrastructure costs will need to be collected by impact fees and property tax. The Economic Development Direction, Planning Department and Planning Commission need to map out the revenue associated with development to see if it is financially viable. At this point, Sebastopol has met its RHNA numbers for extremely low income and low-income housing. There is plenty of middle-income housing. What is needed to help the City right its financial ship.