

To: Don Schwartz, City Manager
From: Steve Mermell, Special Advisor
Subject: Sebastopol City Council goal setting workshop – Council interview summary
Date: March 19, 2025

In preparation for the City Council goal setting workshop, I conducted interviews with each member of the City Council. During each interview I asked Councilmembers to respond to a series of questions. The following summarizes the responses received regarding accomplishments and challenges (**bold** text indicates the item was stated by more than one member of the Council). Additionally, based on the interviews, draft goals are provided below as well as particular items/projects that were mentioned.

Accomplishments

- **Fire department merger**
- **Passage of sales tax measure**
- Collegial Council
- **Clarifying budget realities/improvements in financial reporting**
- Identifying key infrastructure needs
- **New trash contract**
- Water reallocation study (after 20 years)
- Clarifying Council policies such as mayor and vice mayor selection process
- **Hired new City Manager** – and filled key vacancies
- Adjustments in sewer and water rates
- Art installations
- Trail improvements
- Approval of affordable housing projects
- Summary judgement in ACLU lawsuit
- Bike and pedestrian improvements

Challenges

- **Infrastructure needs including water, sewer, streets and municipal buildings**
 - Need comprehensive plans for sewers and streets
 - More focus on CIP
- **Homelessness and lack of services on the part of Sonoma County**
- **Balancing the budget/financial challenges**
- **Negative public perceptions of City Hall**
 - Recent sales tax measure
 - Feeling that Council is moving too fast for the community
- **Revitalize downtown**
- **Need of economic development**
- Need for market rate housing, not just low-income
- More 3-2 split votes these days
- Local economy yet to fully rebound from Covid

- Siloed staff due to remote work and multiple work locations
- **Staff vacancies**
- Lack of confidence in financial reporting
- The City is trying to do too many things at once

Goals

- Long-term fiscal sustainability
- Economic Development
 - Economic Development Strategy
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety
 - Retail theft
- Homelessness
 - Need to see more from the County
- Particular items/projects mentioned:
 - Future of downtown cell tower, lease terminates 2031
 - Laguna wetlands preserve trail
 - Ives park improvements
 - Drought tolerant landscaping at City facilities
 - Apple blossom bike and pedestrian trail
 - Equity and inclusion – do more to recognize indigenous people