



# City of Sebastopol City Council Goalsetting Workshop

April 1, 2025

1:00 pm

Sebastopol Youth Annex, 425 Morris Street

**Steve Mermell | Special Advisor**



**bakertilly**

# Welcome from the Mayor



Mayor  
Stephen Zollman



Vice Mayor  
Jill McLewis



Councilmember  
Neysa Hinton



Councilmember  
Sandra Mauer



Councilmember  
Phill Carter

# Public Comment

# Comments from the City Manager



City Manager  
Don Schwarz



# Agenda for the day

- Discussion of what makes effective governance
- Recent accomplishments and current challenges
- Budget and financial update
- Staff capacity
- Introduction and context for priority setting discussions
- Establish City Council goals
- Public comment
- Identify strategies to further established goals
- Staying on course with the priorities
- Wrap up and next steps



# Ground Rules



**Assume  
positive intent**



**Seek  
consensus  
and areas of  
agreement**



**Stay focused  
in your  
comments**



**Listen with  
curiosity**

# Bike Rack

Time management tool

Items to discuss at a later time



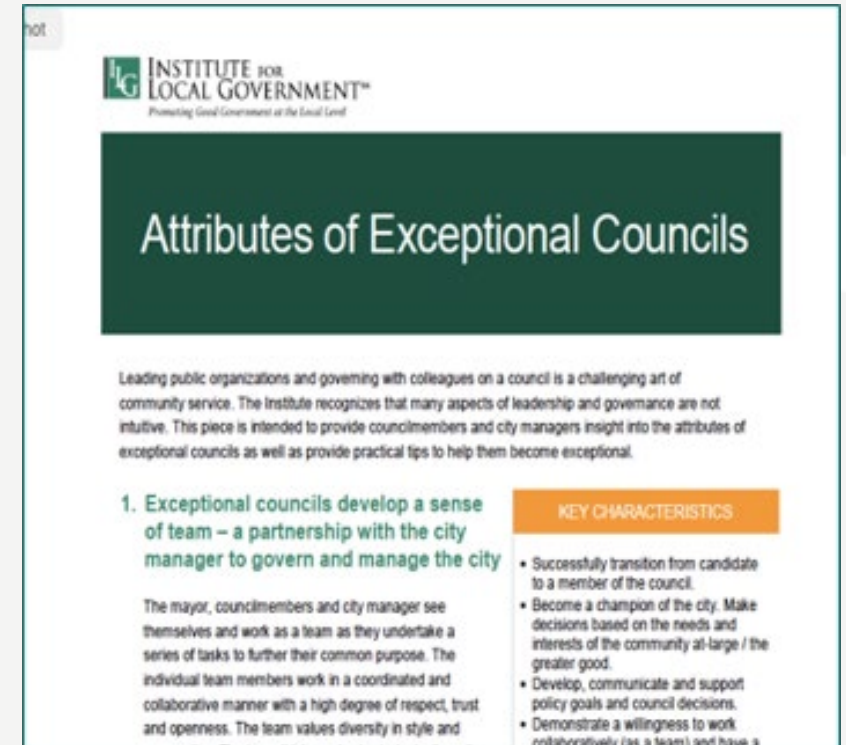
# Effective Governance



# Exceptional City Councils

*Institute for Local Government*

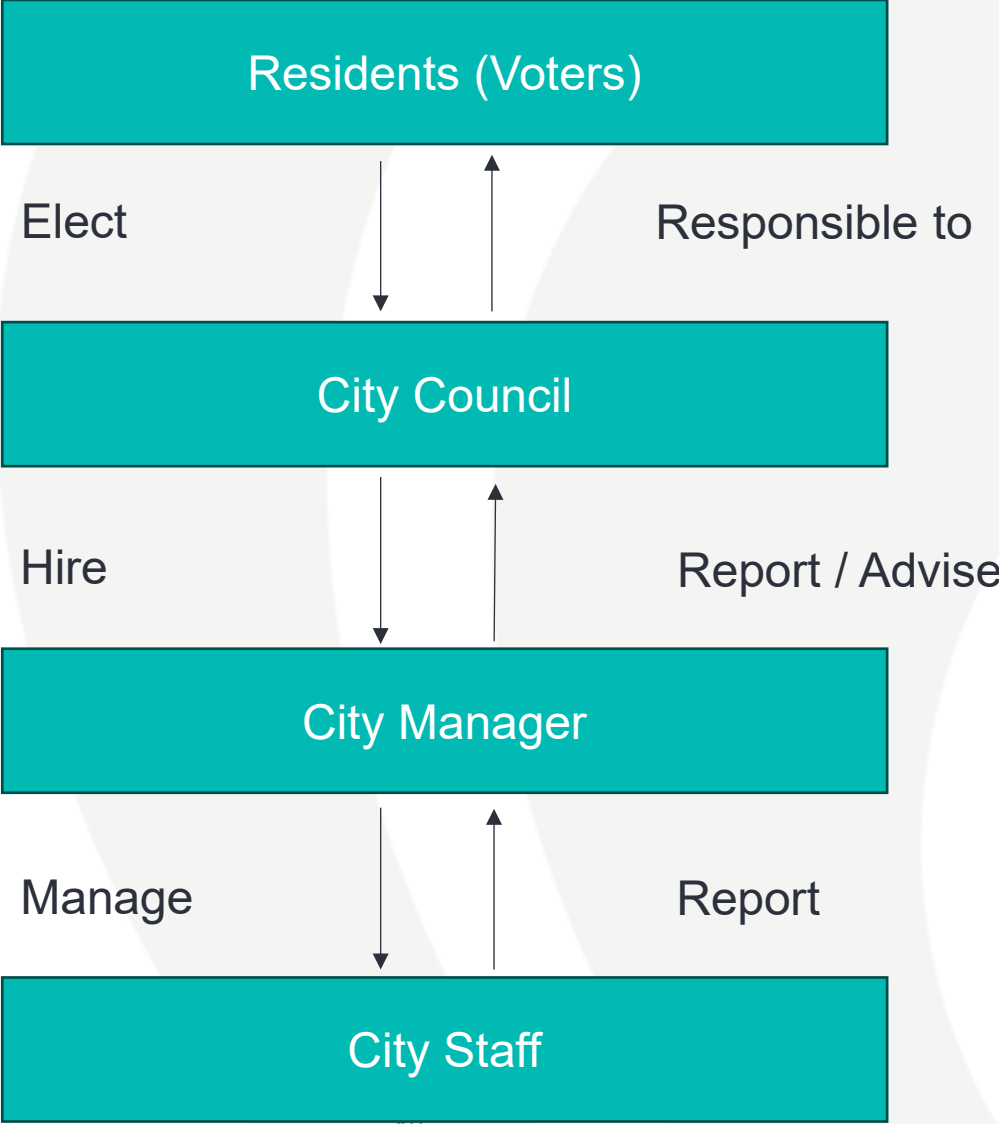
1. Have a **sense of team**; a partnership with the city manager to govern and manage the city
2. Have **clear roles** and responsibilities that are understood and adhered
3. **Honor the relationship with staff and each other**
4. Routinely conduct **effective meetings**
5. Hold themselves and the city **accountable**
6. Have members who practice **continuous improvement**



# Council - Manager Form of Government

**Council sets policy – *the what and the why***

**The City Manager implements the Council's direction – *the who and the how***



# Effective Council - Manager Teamwork

*Makes for Good Policy and Solid Organizations*

## City Council

- Respect the professionalism and expertise of staff and assume good intent
- Be sensitive to the need to pace the organization
- Employ the City Manager, City Clerk and City Attorney
- Majority of Council provides policy direction and City Manager translates and implements policy to achieve results
- Refrain from directing staff - even informally
- Focus on outcomes rather than blame – to help create a “no blame” culture
- Do not criticize staff – if Councilmembers have concerns, bring them to City Manager privately

## City Manager

- Carry out the role as chief executive, provide leadership to City staff and ensure accountability
- Employ, discipline, or remove City employees, including department heads other than those employed by Council
- Be direct and transparent with Council
- Practice the “no surprise” rule
- Communicate equally with all members of Council
- Provide clear analysis and recommendations to Council
- Serves as primary advisor, including telling Council what he/she thinks they need to hear
- City Manager will work to help Council see the “big picture” including impacts of policy positions

# Recent Accomplishments



# Council Interview Themes

## 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 cost 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 judgment in ACLU lawsuit
- Bike and pedestrian improvements



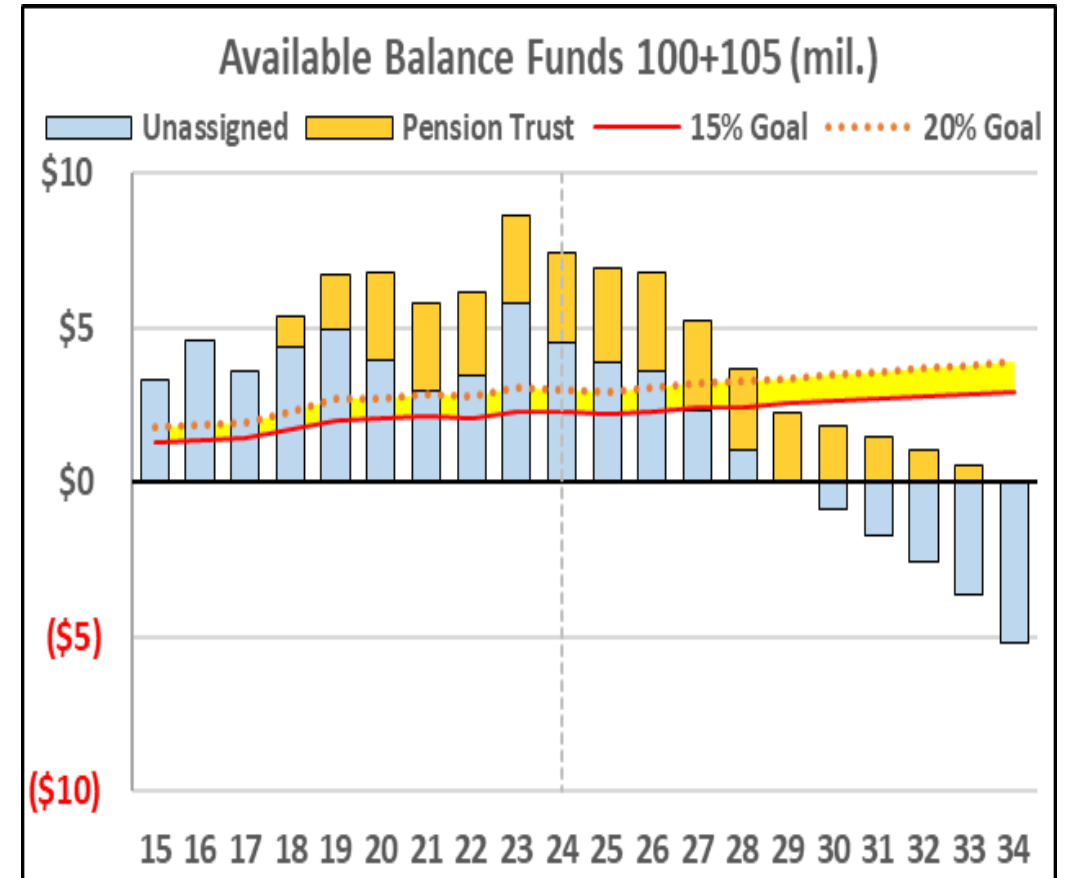
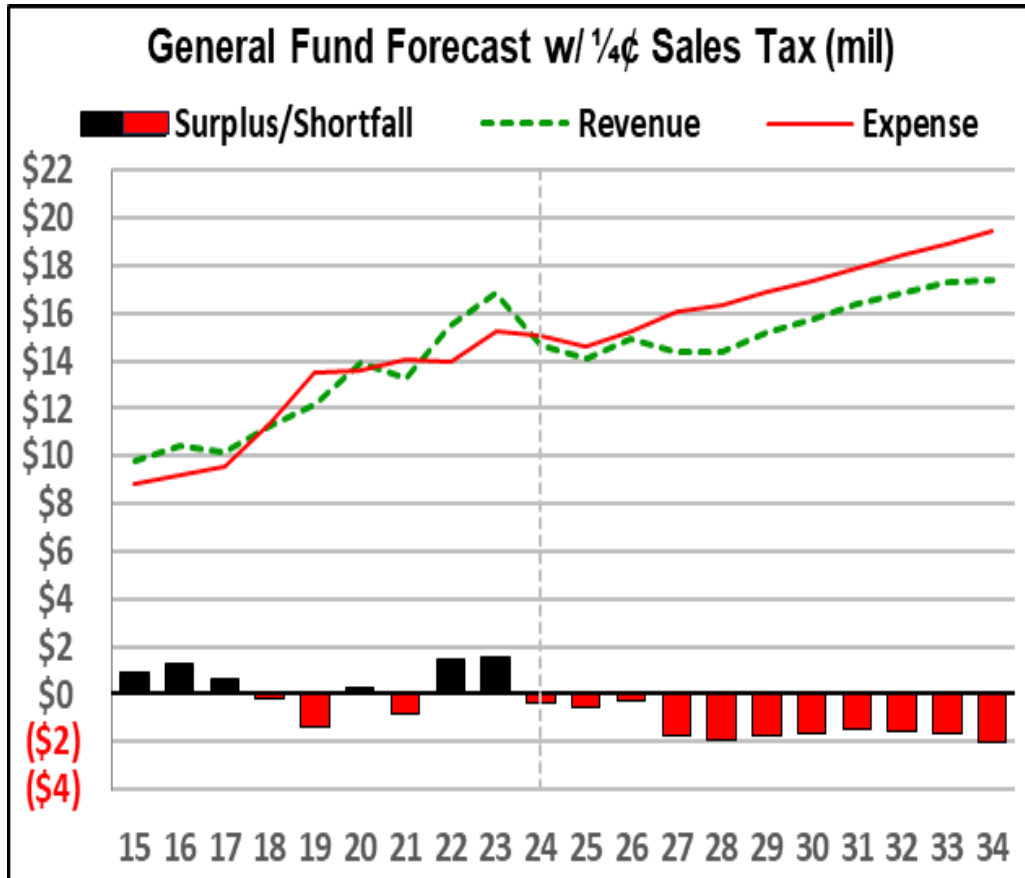
# **Current and Upcoming Challenges**

# Council Interview Themes

## Challenges

- **Infrastructure needs** including water, sewer, streets and municipal buildings
- **Homelessness** and lack of services on the part of Sonoma County
- **Balancing the budget/financial challenges**
- **Negative public perceptions** of City Hall
- **Revitalize downtown**
- **Need of economic development**
- Need for market rate housing, not just low-income
- More 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

# Long-term finances: Base Model





# Implications

- \$300K deficit next year, then grows
- Need two out of three for sustainability:
  - Second ½ of Measure U sales tax
  - Barlow Hotel
  - Hotel Sebastopol
- Continue pursuing efficiencies
  - Building Department to City Hall
  - New Model for Fleet Management?
  - Cross-training

# Financial Outlook: FY 25-26 Budget Preview

- Measure U helps, even at  $\frac{1}{4}$  cent
  - Purpose: Maintain City services
  - No \$ to add new programs/projects – even at  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent
- No Lay-offs
- Will propose some use of reserves for Buildings/Infrastructure, Fleet/Technology
- Some challenges:
  - No room to add new positions without deleting some
  - New amenities v. maintaining what we have
  - Need to invest in the organization

# Balancing Capacity and Achieving Council Goals



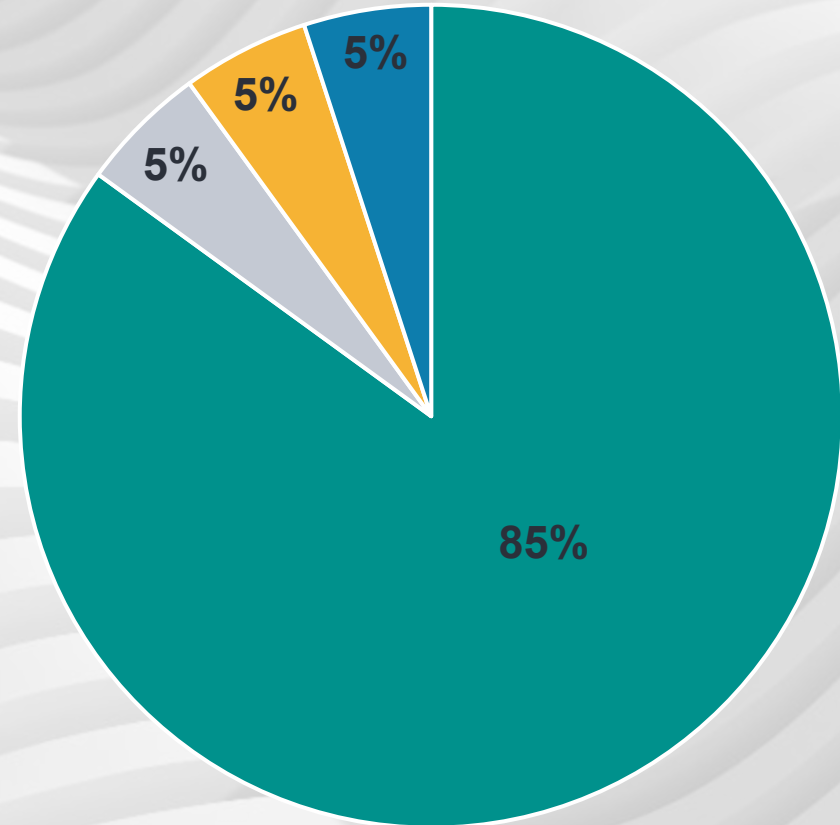
- Council goals and priorities
- Policy direction

## Routine work of the City

- Providing services to the community
- Planning for the future
- Managing human and financial resources
- Responding to unplanned events
- Interacting with other government agencies
- Maintaining infrastructure
- Meeting statutory requirements and state mandates

# How Management's Time is Spent

Management's Time



- Day-to-day management of municipal services
- Unforeseen challenges
- New initiatives
- Strategic improvements and training

# Goal Setting

We can't do everything



But we can do some things very well

## Successful Local Governments

- Respect the **ongoing work** of departments as the **day-to-day operations** must be well managed, and this takes time
- Maintain a **collaborative, trusting relationship** between the City Council and staff
- Set a **few focused priorities** with a staff work plan (strategies) to achieve them

# “Big Rocks”

Don't fill up the bucket with so many small rocks that there isn't room for the big ones

Put the big rocks in first

Then add the small ones where there is room

# Some Definitions...

## Goals

Brief statements of the desired outcome to be achieved in the long term

## Strategies

Initiatives/projects designed to move the City toward achieving a goal

## Priorities

Those strategies deemed most important by the City Council

# Council Interview Themes + 1

## Goal Areas

Long-term  
fiscal  
sustainability

Economic  
Development

Infrastructure

Public Safety

Homelessness

High  
Performing  
Organization<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Suggested by the executive leadership team.



# Public Comment

# Current/planned/potential projects and strategies

SEE ATTACHMENT

Is anything missing?

# Maintaining Success



Create an Implementation Action Plan to track progress with regular reporting back to City Council



Build Council direction into budget and work plans



Stay on track with priorities; maintain parking lot of new ideas/projects for *future* consideration



Remember that resources are limited and shifting them away from Council goals is not strategic

# Implementation Action Plan – **SAMPLE**

Economic Development Action Strategies	Implementation Steps	Lead Department	Support Departments	Time Frame	Funding	Status	Comments / Barriers
1. Update the Economic Strategic Plan		Economic Development	Consultant	18 months; complete by December 2025	ARPA	3%	
2. Identify development alternatives for surplus lands		Economic Development	City Attorney's Office	Phase I by May 2025	General Fund	50%	
3. Waterfront and downtown specific plan		Economic Development	City Attorney's Office	18 months following funding	None identified	Not yet started	
4. Small business grants		Economic Development	SBDC	12 months; complete by June 2025	ARPA	15%	
5. Improve roadway construction citywide		Public Works		Multiyear	Various potential funding opportunities	Ongoing / yearly	Funding
6. Citywide broadband project		Information Technology		Expected completion December 2025	ARPA Other potential grants	10%	

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Emergency (natural disaster, pandemic, civil unrest)

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New outside funding opportunity that is time-sensitive

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New multi-agency opportunity that cannot be delayed

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Community safety issue that must be addressed in near term

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Changes in law or mandates

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*Otherwise, wait until next priority-setting process*

# Best Practice Criteria for Adding Initiatives and Projects Mid-Cycle

Closing comments from  
the Councilmembers  
and City Manager

All participants fill out  
an evaluation form

Wrap Up

# Thank you!

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