

Sales taxes, poorly constructed parcel taxes are band aids instead of self sustaining economic development

Councillors,

As I submitted as public comment for your previous meeting, the vast majority of our current council are well meaning individuals who are working very hard for virtually no compensation to try and find paths out of the financial mess past councils and city employees have created, but with little practical real world experience of anything other than non profits, managing their personal check books and activist visions.

Happily we now have a very capable and experienced new city manager. We must give him the time to focus on finding and proposing ways out the mess we currently find ourselves in before making any decisions.

I would also again urge council to leverage the collective expertise of citizens - who have 'skin in the game' living in the city - to help identify best paths forward together without resorting to clumsy councilor imposed 'fiscal emergency' edicts.

Hastily organized, panicky fuzzy logic tax measures by inexperienced councilors decided within a few hours in a single meeting will almost certainly fail at the ballot box given the stressed state of many tax payers in our highly inflationary times, *costing the city another 100k+ they cannot afford to fritter away.*

The only practical path forward is to focus on economic development goals and any impediments to them in order to make our city self sustaining.

Yes, we will need a well organized and thought out parcel tax with detailed goals and allocations in the next 12-18 months to tide over some of the many pressing shortfalls in water, fire, infrastructure and reserves, but more importantly a sustainable fiscal path has to be found that will be the economic flywheel of the city going forward. The city and its sphere of influence has historically relied heavily on tourism post agricultural era.

A council that has declared a fiscal state of emergency loudly signals two things to the world:

1. *Previous incompetence by council and city staff has resulted in financial failure due to lack of coherent strategy, tactical skills and leadership common sense.*
2. *A warning to entrepreneurs and existing business owners that the city is not a safe*

place to invest, with high taxes and chaotic, bureaucratic and social fashions focused management.

As I have previously stated, we are extremely lucky to have a developer prepared to move forward with a hotel and downtown housing in these scary financial times. Why is this studiously ignored? Surely the city should be doing everything it can to smooth bureaucratic paths, show enthusiasm and allow public discussion. I find this bizarre given the dire straits past councils have led us to.

We have a terrific new city manager starting in the new year who is highly experienced in local politics. Don Schwartz has been a sensible and practical voice within the Sonoma County continuum of care over the last several years and I have great respect for his many city management capabilities and experience.

As current council well knows, we have a county sales tax that will be jeopardized by any attempted insertion of a city sales tax ballot hail Mary.

The council and city strategic imperative should be focusing on economic development, not forcing a vote to make the city of Sebastopol the most heavily sales taxed place in the county as a clumsy, fuzzy focus band aid to serious structural issues, accompanied by the threat of future vague parcel taxes for property owners.

Our many fixed income citizens can't afford the upcoming hefty increases in water and garbage as well as the proposed increased sales taxes, and the many people who drive through the city every day are not going to stop and shop if we are too expensive compared to rolling further down the road.

Let's allow our new city manager time to analyze our many issues and to propose ways to out of the mess we are in. Leverage his expertise and get more people involved. Don't try and again do what has failed in the past: rarified, stiff autocratic meetings and votes by naive and elitist councilors forcing through massive blunders that will negatively affect the city's fortunes with little regard for the two types of city citizens (downtown and suburban) opinions, experiences and in some cases expertise.

No more band aids. Create a well thought through, coherent strategic plan including a well defined parcel tax to ameliorate specific problems, and execute it carefully and properly over time.

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