

	2022 population estimate	2023 Homeless Count	Population supporting 1 homeless person	% population homeless
Sebastopol	7,338	87	84	1.2%
Cotati	7,453	15	497	0.2%
Cloverdale	8,809	9	979	0.1%
Sonoma	10,466	40	262	0.4%
Healdsburg	11,709	33	355	0.3%
Windsor	25,789	26	992	0.1%
Rhonert Park	44,326	210	211	0.5%
Petaluma	58,652	245	239	0.4%
Unincorporated	130,927	429	305	0.3%
Santa Rosa	177,181	1160	153	0.7%
County Total	482,650	2254	214	0.5%

Adapted From the 2023 Homeless census attached to the agenda item 18 – combined with Census data

Sebastapol – Doing More than Our Share

The 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Census reports that Sebastopol 87 homeless. While this number is small in comparison to Santa Rosa with 1,160 it is still alarming given our relatively small population and geographic footprint. There are only 84 taxpayers in Sebastopol to support each homeless person. This is many times the concentration found in any other community in the County. In addition to the Homeless identified in the Census, Sebastopol is providing shelter for more than 50 previously “unhoused” homeless in the Horizon Shine RV Village, Park Village and Elderberry Commons.

Recent experience with Elderberry Commons and the Horizon Shine village suggests it costs at least \$30,000 per year to provide full “wrap around” services for each homeless person. If we divide that among 84 taxpaying citizens, we would be looking at a per-capital tax of \$357 per person per year to shelter the 87-remaining homeless in Sebastopol. In reality as a parcel tax with about half as many parcels as people we would be paying a homeless parcel tax of around \$700 per year.

We manage the cost of the problem largely on our own. We pay for police services to handle issues that arise. We pay for fire and EMS to handle health care issues and the increase in vehicle fires. We pay half the cost of an outreach coordinator. We subsidize the operating costs for Park Village. We subsidize Senior Center Lunches for the Horizon Shine Village. Local Churches contribute both meals and safe parking spaces.

With half the homeless reported to be literally living in the open air it is not a surprise that Public Works has to make a sweep of public buildings almost every day dealing with the consequences. We pay for that service also. City Council doesn’t want to track and report the expenses, so we don’t know the true cost burden. The approved 23-24 budget includes double digit increases in costs in many departments for now three years in a row.

Our outreach coordinator provided a highly detailed and informative report in this week's packet. There is great effort, but real progress is slow. We have a persistent problem year after year. A few get on a list for housing giving them a "chance" to get housing assistance if they can wait for 2 years. It is sad that an intelligent and wealthy society such as ours can do no better.

In reality Sebastopol has problems well beyond just the burden of the homeless. In the spirit of "no good deed goes unpunished; Sebastopol is being sued by the ACLU for not doing enough for the homeless. Apparently, we are not free to expect a safe and healthy community where we can safely walk and shop. To pay these legal costs and the increased costs of public services we need both new hikes in sales and property taxes as well as to pay more than double for water and sewer. We have gotten to the point that only the wealthy and very poor with government subsidies will be able to live in Sebastopol.

Our elected officials have determined that we need even more services. Councilman Zollman constantly points out all of the services available in San Francisco and not in Sebastopol. We need social workers in our library. We need full-time mental health professionals to be on-call to handle mental crises.

One has to wonder if we add multiple new property taxes, sales taxes, increased water, and sewer rates all to levels higher than any other city in the County if we will exacerbate our homeless crisis. We really may see long-time citizens of Sebastopol joining the growing burden of homelessness in the County. Others will leave seeking lower cost alternatives.

It seems possible we have reached a tipping point. We don't have enough taxpayers in the city to pay for the services their elected officials are approving. Too few people having to absorb high fixed costs that should be allocated over broader populations. We can continue by catering to the wealthy among us and those that might move here to replace those forced to leave.

The alternative is to give up. Agree that our small town is not sustainable. Management can be turned over to the County. The county will collect \$250 million over the next 10 year in taxes for mental health and the homeless. Fire and Police Services can be better allocated over many thousands of residents. The county portion of Bodega Highway is beautifully maintained. Maybe they can repair the 1 mile stretch leading into Sebastopol. Maybe the time has come to quit. 7,300 people, most who are not terribly wealthy, cannot solve the Homeless problems for Sonoma County.