

Agenda Report Reviewed by:
City Manager: 

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM**

Meeting Date: May 4, 2021
To: Honorable City Councilmembers
From: Agenda Review Committee
Subject: Relaunch of Sebastopol
Recommendation: City Council Direction to Staff
Funding: Currently Budgeted: ___ Yes ___ No XX N/A
Net General Fund Cost: None

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget AK (verified by Administrative Services Department)

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE:

The item tonight is for City Council Discussion of relaunching of Sebastopol.

BACKGROUND:

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered economic, financial and social shock and in response to the lock down from the COVID-19 Pandemic, many cities have had to focus on not only day to day activities to continue governmental operations for the City but also had to respond to i) social distancing; ii) workplace and commuting; iii) vulnerable groups; iv) local service delivery; v) support to business; and vi) communication, awareness raising by increased technology and social media. Zoom virtual format and telecommuting became the norm for a large part of the population as cities enforced these lockdowns to maintain social distancing measures. Deliveries, curbside pick-up, on line local shopping also became the new norm and as a result further the goals of negative impacts on our environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a near total shutdown of social and economic activity in all corners of the world. Restarting economies and life will be the defining government challenge of our time and information and communication are critical.

DISCUSSION:

The City government is entrusted with the stewardship of the community and its resources in a manner consistent with community priorities. The City’s work to help the community and local economy recover remains a paramount concern in 2021. Although COVID-19 vaccines are now being distributed at the national, state, and local levels, it remains unclear how long it will take to fully administer them. Accordingly, the timeline and phases through which the City will reach the “next normal” remains unclear, and the rapidly evolving circumstances (including revised guidance from Sonoma County through refreshed local health orders) continue to constrain the City of Sebastopol’s resources and ability to provide services to the community.

As the Governor of the State of California recently announced plans to end the lockdown, a new phase in the COVID-19 pandemic is upon us. It is a time for hope but also for caution. It’s incredibly odd to be a City for tourists to come to when the City is not yet open. These are definitely challenging times and they are testing all of us to hang in there, take a moment to evaluate what we can do right now and provide an opportunity for us to evaluate what is the best message we can share after COVID-19 eases and things begin to resume to our new normal.

Nearly everyone has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Most people's lives have been disrupted by social distancing requirements, stay-at-home orders, and homeschooling; Many have lost loved ones or are now unemployed or facing a highly uncertain financial future. The pressure on our city's fiscal health is seen in the early discussions of the City's upcoming Fiscal Year budget. We as well as other cities are under strain for demand of assistance.

The economic challenges of the pandemic are not yet behind us, as many communities, workers, and families are still struggling. This is a time for Sebastopol to do more than survive; we can thrive. We must continue to partner and support each other, and we must learn from the experiences of the pandemic to grow. Many cities such as Sebastopol are continuing discussions for recovering from the economic and social crisis to move forward and work in collaboration with the businesses and community at large to support one another.

The length of the recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the severity of the decline remains unknown. One thing we do know: reopening will need to be done carefully and conservatively but we do know that now is the time to plan to revitalize our economy in a way that boosts long-term competitiveness while at the same time continuing the Council goals of generating enduring, environmentally sustainable, and equitable growth. At a minimum we must:

- Celebrate Sebastopol and support the community in re-engaging with each other as a community
- Prepare for a relaunch effort that engages community members, business, non-profits and government
- Implement changes, programs, and policies to set us up for a successful recovery
- Protect our cash flow
- Research revenue opportunities such as bonds or grants
- Modify how we engage with our community for greater transparency, efficiency and availability
- Support and assist our local businesses, nonprofits and other institutions in relaunching after over a year in suspense.

Public trust and economic confidence are important for maintaining social cohesion and restoring economic growth after over a year on hold. Trusting in the approach we take will be important because citizens, businesses, and organizations themselves must play an active role in making the strategy succeed by adapting to the "new normal" behaviors ensuring safety while re-engaging individuals with the public sphere. Those "new norms" may be virtual City government; permanent parklets; permanent curb side pick-up; working with branding or marketing campaign for safe tourism for our local businesses; tourism to the Laguna Preserve, promotion of our local arts such as the recently approved Ned Kahn art; and promoting "Shop and Eat Local" to name a few. We must all work together to confirm our General Plan goal to protect and increase the Economic Vitality of the City's Main Economic Sectors: Downtown and the Northern and Southern Gateways. It is vital to recognize the importance of supporting existing and local businesses. We must strive to make our economy and recovery work for the people and businesses already here.

Sebastopol has weathered economic turbulence before- most recently when our Reserves went down to almost zero at times the past two decades. But the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is different. The shutdown of our City government and local businesses has hurt all of us but we must revitalize our economy in a way that generates environmentally sustainable, and equitable growth. We need to work together to create and maintain a stable and self-sustaining fiscal base in order to generate the resources necessary to provide desired city services.

This is an opportunity for the City to take proactive steps to help our businesses and our residents rebound. It is not a competition between areas of town (Main Street, Barlow, North, South) but a chance to create a vibrant community. The city has been brain storming to review actions the city and community can take to move the City

forward. This will take volunteers, staff, funding, and the commitment of the entire community to work as one. This engagement of the community will work toward the betterment of Sebastopol and we need to plan, act together and make decisions that will provide positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes and continue the goals of this Council. Sebastopol is resilient and we have a community filled with skilled, adaptable and educated persons devoted to this community who the City believes will step up to work to develop local approaches to Relaunch Sebastopol to commit to supporting our community and continuing to strengthen our local pride and invest locally in the place we live

Some recommendations do not require financial support (other than staff time) while others will need to be analyzed as to the financial costs and feasibility. Some items may require an RFP/RFQ dependent upon the scope of the work.

It is recommended the City review the items below, prioritize action items that the City can take, determine who/how the prioritized items could be implemented and what kind of City financial support may be needed to move the items forward. Many of these items would require staff time or require some additional funding for cross promotions but the items below would jumpstart the Relaunch Sebastopol.

1. Sponsorship/Cross Promotion of Events:

- Expanding the City's partnership with the Chamber of Commerce; Downtown Association and Business Council to include cross promotion of events. This would through event flyers, brochures, social media, working together to help promote each other's events.
- Work with Sonoma County Tourism on cross promotion of events. This would through event flyers, brochures, social media, working together to help promote each other's events.
- Expanding City's partnership with Local Non Profits to include cross promotion of events. Helping to sponsor and promote nonprofit events.
- Use of Community Calendar to Promote Events in the City (Currently housed at the Sebastopol Cultural & Community Center)
- Promote and support activities related to the Laguna especially as a visitor destination.
- Utilizing Sebastopol Walks for Themed Walks

2. Expansion of Parklets/Repurposing of Spaces:

- Expansion of bicycling and pedestrian friendly streets citywide; review of streets for additional parklets
- Repurposing of existing spaces, such as parking lots, for fitness, mental health, and dispersing community and commercial activities and other retail and business support (review of repurposing of spaces)
- Encourage pop up tent events for businesses utilizing empty buildings or city lots
- Use of City parks or parking lots to hold sidewalk sales; food vendors; arts/crafts; etc.

3. Promotion of Businesses:

- Promotion of Restaurant Week; Retail Week; Toy Shop Week; etc. (Showcase a particular type of business each week)
- Street Eateries (Take One night to put tables out on a closed off street and encourage purchase at local restaurants to sit down and eat outdoors)
- Start New Traditions or Promote Old Traditions (Munchy Mondays, Taco Tuesday, Wednesday Night Bites, or Takeout Thursday)
- Support local by: Buying a gift card; tipping when ordering to go; shop local on line; give a great review on yelp or Facebook; tag your favorite restaurant
- Utilize volunteers for distributing City newsletter, Event Brochures
- Work with media for "Facebook Live" events of local businesses
- Streamline Permitting for public areas (discuss fee waivers/sponsorships)
- Changes to façade improvement program process
- Buy Local On Line Campaign

- Stay-Cations – Support local venues/Make it Quick (Long three day weekends versus two week vacations)
Geographic Targets

4. Community Engagement:

- Increasing mental health support for the community for community wellness and wellbeing (working with outside agencies to create health fairs, events, etc.)**This includes addressing homelessness issues..**
- Create neighborhood block parties for community engagement with the city utilizing local businesses (by lottery)
- Clean up Sebastopol Community Day (with picnic for volunteers)
- Work with High School for Credit Hours for Seniors for projects such as painting benches, cleaning windows, having artists/students paint windows; contest
- Creation of Race and Equity Policies for the City - While the work of Council has underscored the urgent need for short-term solutions to help businesses reopen safely, the discussion has also raised longer-term ideas for systemic change to help Sebastopol rebuild a more equitable economy and avoid returning to “business as usual”
- Painting downtown to reflect seasons
- Fourth of July picnic/fundraiser
- Examining options for Sebastopol scrip or a similar merchant gift card;

5. Marketing/Tourism:

- Exploring the creation of an ombudsperson role / community vitality person within the City organization to help businesses (especially retail) navigate regulations, provide a Communications conduit with city staff, and convene and facilitate community engagement activities.
- Use of local media such as Townsy and Sonoma West to help create tourism/marketing campaign to attract tourists;
- Exploring the costs of hiring a Volunteer coordinator as a Facilitator

None of the items listed above have been vetted nor addressed by the City Attorney to determine if any of these potential activities would violate any government code or statute. If these items, or any other items proposed at the meeting, were requested to be explored, it would be requested that the item be vetted by the City Attorney for legal review such as use of city funds for promotion of certain events.

The City’s Community Outreach Coordinator, Townsy, Sonoma West and CoMission have been key in helping to get the message out to the community as well as working the community on programs such as the Loan Program; Community Business Council; Parklets; Curb Site Pick Up Locations to name a few and the City appreciates the hard work that has happened this past year in response to the Pandemic when everyone had to shift gears and react to the COVID 19 Pandemic.

Tonight we want to shift the focus to Celebrating Sebastopol and work to Relaunch Sebastopol. The item tonight is to discuss the suggestions noted above, opportunity for Council to provide additional recommendations, and provide direction to staff. The Council needs to consider what its priorities are and what resources may be needed to implement these priorities. Do we need additional contracted services? With what kind of services? What kind of return would we expect from these services? Will they generate more revenue for our businesses, non-profits and the City? Do we need additional temporary or permanent in-house staff to implement these priorities?

Many of these items will require increased staff time, funding, volunteers; meetings with business council, meetings with nonprofits, etc. If the Council was in consensus with the ideas noted above, it is recommended the Council direct staff to research, provide financial costs, and plan for Council review and discussion or the Council could center their discussion around support for additional duties/funding for Outreach Coordinator; review of specific tasks/funding for CoMission for deliverables of specific work plan; creation of volunteer “Relaunch Sebastopol” committee to include representatives from Chamber, SDA, Nonprofits, etc.; or a request for RFP/RFQ

for Facilitator for Relaunch Sebastopol who would be the facilitator to organize the events as listed above or as discussed and recommended at the Council meeting.

The City believes that many community members would be willing to lend their support and expertise to not only Celebrate the reopening of Sebastopol but to enthusiastically support Relaunch Sebastopol.

GOALS:

This action supports the following City Council Goals and General Plan Actions:

- Improve and beautify the downtown plaza to create a people centric space for community events and gatherings
- Foster a Sense of Community by Providing and Encouraging Participation in Community Events, Volunteering, and working with Non Profits to Support Local Events
- Promote and enhance utilization of community energy and skills by creating opportunities for volunteer service.
- Develop Programs & Policies to Promote, Attract and Retain Local Businesses.
- Support a Vibrant, Attractive and Accessible Downtown That Attracts Residents and Visitors thereby creating a Viable Sales Tax Base
- Promotion of Experience Sebastopol.com to increase visitors to the City

Action EV 4a: Maintain and expand partnerships with the county and regional and local organizations to promote Sebastopol destinations, including festivals, Farmers’ Markets, and natural resources (the Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail, the Laguna Wetlands Preserve, regional open space, and creeks) as a marketing and branding strategy that is aimed at increasing visitors.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received public comment. If staff receives additional public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of this item.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with discussion of this item as this item is for discussion only. However, the Council can direct staff to return to a future council meeting with associated costs for specific items.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council discuss and provide direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

None