

Dear Council Members,

In regards to the City Budget, I urge you not to cut the budget for the Police and Fire Departments. Instead of decreasing their budgets, we should be funding them to reflect a population of 10,000 instead of 7500. When school is in session, our population increases by at least 2000 people. Daily, we easily have 500 visitors. All staffing reports say that both departments are understaffed.

I ask you to fully fund these departments for several, critical reasons.

- 1) We have many schools in our Community: Parkside, Brook Haven, Analy, Sunridge, Sebastopol Charter. Each day, we have over 2,000 students in our community. Sadly and tragically, schools have become targets of violence. In this dystopic reality, we need to have a fully funded local police force which is familiar with these campuses and campus administrators in case there is an emergency situation. In fact, we should probably have a person on the Police and Fire staff who are both familiar with campuses and staff and who serve as school liaisons.
- 2) Schools have big events like football games, which draw more people into the community. We need to have a police department that is staffed and understands our community for general public safety and in case of an emergency during school events.
- 3) We have the busiest intersection in Sonoma County at 12 and 116. Thousands of vehicles pass through this area on a daily basis. We are a town of 7500 but have vehicular traffic closer to a town of 20,000. We need to make sure we have law and emergency services that reflects the amount of traffic and visitors that move through Sebastopol.
- 4) Sebastopol is a hub for West County. While our town is 7500, we have a fluctuating population due to our amenities from nonprofits like the Arts Center and Community Center to shopping and restaurants. We need to maintain Police and Fire service staffing at levels that not only matches our population but also considers the influx of visitors to our community. In addition, we host large scale events like the Apple Blossom Parade and Peacetown, which can double or triple our size.
- 5) We are in an area prone to wildfire and flood. When we have a climate emergency, our fire and police department help to evacuate and guide our community. We need people in these positions who are familiar with our community and can serve our community in emergency situations.
- 6) We are in the middle of a drug epidemic. Overdoses and the proliferation of lethal drugs in the form of "new meth" and very cheap fentanyl are ravaging our communities. We need trained professionals to help prevent drug distribution and drug overdose in our community. Overdose deaths are at an all-time high. Governor Newsom is asking the National Guard and the CHP to help with the fentanyl crisis in San Francisco because San Francisco does not have the resources to help stop the distribution and sale of these dangerous and addictive drugs. Several bills are in the State Legislature to help address this crisis. Now is not the time to reduce our Police staffing. While we are a small town, we have many students, visitors and other nonresidents who spend time in Sebastopol. We are also part of the greater Bay Area which is an epicenter of the drug crisis.

- 7) Our Fire and Police Departments are part of a countywide and Bay Area wide team of first responders. Staffing out Police and Fire Departments at appropriate levels ensures that we have enough responders in Sonoma County and our 9 County Bay Area region in case of emergencies and to help with public events. Recently, several other law enforcement agencies were part of our Apple Blossom parade and festival.
- 8) The Police Department works closely with the Homeless Outreach Coordinator. They seem to be making strides in the right direction. We need this collaboration to continue and not be curtailed by lack of staffing.
- 9) We live in a community with many seniors who frequently make calls to the fire department for medical emergencies.

Council's main function is to make sure that citizens have the proper resources in terms of public health and safety. All studies have shown that both the police and fire departments are understaffed at current rates. Thus we cannot cut their budgets any further and instead should be increasing their budgets.

In terms of reducing the budget, I would recommend the following:

- 1) Remove any staff from the Climate Action Committee and as the Liaison for the Unhoused. Page 23 of the RSG report noted that the Planning Director spent significant time on "non-traditional roles": Page 23:

"For several years, the department has also assumed 'non-traditional' planning roles such as park planning projects and staffing the Public Art Committee. The Director stated that these changes have caused staffing challenges that need to be addressed."

As noted in previous discussion, the CAC is comprised of concerned citizens, the majority of whom are not Sebastopol residents. In addition, the City of Sebastopol pays a Homeless Outreach Coordinator who give a quarterly report. The Homeless Outreach Coordinator should be the staff liaison to Council Member Rich's position. There is no need to have the Planning Department involved.

- 2) Sunset the Public Arts Committee.
 - a. As I've noted earlier, Sebastopol does not have the budget to support large scale public arts projects, which require maintenance, public works and planning department time. This is especially evident in our current budget crisis.
 - b. The Ned Khan Sculpture still has not been installed. The Ives Sculpture Garden has a missing sculpture.
 - c. The Public Art Development fee is a cost to developers and if we are going to have extra taxes on development, they should go toward fire service as our fire department is underfunded.
 - d. Public artworks do not bring in any revenue unlike art events like concerts or gallery openings.

- e. Sebastopol has many art related nonprofits who are struggling financially but have the ability to draw tourists to the area. We should focus support on the Arts Center and Community Cultural center as they are event based organizations that can pull viewers into the area.
 - f. At this point, with the severe budget crisis and the need to reduce budgets in Planning and Public Works, it would be prudent to Sunset the Public Arts Committee and use its remaining funds to commission permanent sculptures in the Ives Sculpture Park, install the Ned Khan sculpture and leave the rest for on-going maintenance.
 - g. The fee for the Public Art fund is an extra cost to developers. At this point in time, we need to encourage development. Interest rates are extremely high for developers. We need to make it more financially feasible for people to invest in the City of Sebastopol. Removing the fee for Public Arts Committee would create one less financial burden on developers.
- 3) Reduce the Planning department budget to reflect less “non-traditional work” and to focus the Planning Department on building permits, vacation rental permits and working with developers to create in-fill housing and hotels.
 - 4) Have the Homeless Outreach Coordinator be the staff liaison for the unhoused. She is already doing great work and gives reports and is directly associated with the WCCS and the homeless population.
 - 5) Collect Rent from Park Village to cover loan obligation and service costs of Park Village. The City has an outstanding debt for the purchase of Park Village. WCCS is a nonprofit and can raise tax deductible donations for their work. The City should see rent from WCCS in the amount of the debt payment. In addition, residents of Park Village use City Services such as fire, police, water, sewer and public spaces. WCCS collects rent from residents. The City should be collecting a fee to cover the public services which residents receive. A nominal sum of \$3000 per month to cover public services would bring in an additional \$36,000 to the City, which could boost funding toward public services.
 - 6) Collect funds from the County to cover public services incurred at Elderberry Commons and Horizons Shine. Elderberry Commons and SAVS both utilize public services and infrastructure. SAVS has a consistent, ongoing relationship with the Police Department. Residents at Elderberry Commons use Sebastopol water, sewer, emergency services, parks, and other public spaces. These facilities should pay an annual fee based on their budgets to help contribute to our public facilities. The budget for Elderberry Commons was \$3,400,000 in 2021. TOT is 12%. That would be a \$408,000 annual contribution from the County and be a huge asset to the City’s budget.
 - 7) SAVS and WCCS are nonprofits and can generate funds from outside the Sebastopol City Limits. They can also apply for grants and other funding. In addition, they can receive County funding. SAVS and WCCS can get donations, which are tax deductible. They have fundraising capacities which far outweigh the City’s ability to generate funds which are limited to sales tax, property tax, and special County, State and Federal grant programs.

Thank you,

Kate Haug