

TO: Sebastopol City Councilmembers

Mayor Neysa Hinton, Vice Mayor Diana Rich, Sandra Maurer, Jill McLewis, and Stephen Zollman

FROM: Patricia Dines

Editor & Lead Writer of The Next STEP newsletter (“Your handy guide to less-toxic living “)

DATE: June 26, 2023

**RE: June 27, 2023 City Council Meeting/Budget — STEP Newsletter — Request to fund final print issue and library copy**

Dear City Councilmembers —

### **MY UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR POSSIBLE CURRENT PLANS FOR THE STEP NEWSLETTER**

From your discussion at the 6/20/23 City Council meeting, my understanding is that you’re leaning towards choosing the Budget Committee proposal for *The Next STEP* newsletter. Specifically to:

- **Eliminate funding to distribute STEP in print in the City water bills in the next fiscal year.** STEP has been distributed this way for nearly 23 years, six issues a year. (Current annual cost \$3,320 + 10-15 staff hours.)
- **Instead, the proposed STEP annual budget would be \$500, for posting the newsletter to the City website.** This would be a net cut of 85% plus no added staff hours.

### **MY RESPONSE AND REQUEST**

**If you choose to do this, then I’ve decided that I won’t continue producing the STEP newsletter on an unpaid basis for online posting only.** As I noted in my prior memo, I feel that this change would gut the outreach aspect of STEP, which is core to its intention and design. Online posting only would require a new plan.

AND REQUEST: If you do this cut, I ask that you reallocate the planned funding for the upcoming fiscal year to instead fund:

- **Sending a final print STEP newsletter in City water bills** as soon as possible. This issue will include a brief information box notifying readers of this program change, and thanking everyone for their participation. Estimated cost \$500. (Per Ana Kwong.)

I would also appreciate funding for this:

- **A printed spiral bound compilation of all STEP issues, with Index, placed in the Sebastopol library.** This would archive and offer residents ongoing access to this information. (There are limits to what can be archived on the City website.) Estimated cost \$45.

**TOTAL REQUEST: \$500 - \$545**

### **REASONS TO ACCEPT MY PROPOSAL**

- **This mostly would just reallocate money that the Budget Committee has already allocated for the STEP newsletter.**
- **It’s standard with any print periodical to have a last print issue go out through the same means to reach the same audience,** even if they have some customer email addresses. **This is the responsible and dignified way to do this transition.**
- **There’s no other means of informing residents of this change in a way that will reach the same audience.** For instance, if we sent an announcement just to the City’s email list, it would reach a different set of people.
- **It’s too late to do a final print STEP issue in the water bills in this fiscal year (FY 22-23),** because of the late budget decision-making timing of the Council. **Thus this completion step requires funding in next year’s budget (FY 23-24).**
- **Without this action, STEP would just disappear from water bills after consistent delivery for 23 years,** without explanation.
- **Having this graceful ending to this project would respect all the people who contributed to this successful project over the past 23 years.** This includes the City Council in 2000, who envisioned public education and outreach to reduce our shared toxic exposure; the community members (including myself) who worked countless hours to bring this vision into reality; the City staff who supported this project; and the local residents who reduced their toxic use — and consistently gave STEP an 85-90%+ approval rating.

### **ADDED POINTS**

- **The STEP newsletter is inherently ecological,** and has succeeded in reducing the local release of toxics that are known to harm ecosystems, wildlife, people, and pets.
- **Zero waste doesn’t mean eliminating the use of paper for projects that have other value.** It means designing systems to ensure that paper and other waste is reused and/or recycled, and reducing the unnecessary use of materials.

### **ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

- **If the Council really can’t allocate this small amount to finish the STEP production run with dignity, I could ask local STEP supporters for donations to cover this,** to remove cost as the barrier. Therefore, if the Council chooses not to fund my request, I ask that the Council authorize supporter funding of it. Assistant City Manager Mary Gourley would likely know how to do this.
- **As I understand it, if the budget is not finalized/approved at this meeting, the Council can do an interim expenditures and extension of the current fiscal year (FY 22-23).** If you do this, I ask that STEP be clearly included in that extension, to allow the final print issue of STEP to be distributed in the water bills.

Thank you for considering my requests. ~ Patricia Dines