

## **Economic development is self sustaining, sales taxes and poorly constructed parcel taxes are band aids**

Councillors,

The city is very fortunate to have a number of highly experienced, professionally skilled citizens who are seasoned and well versed in management practices, budgeting and strategic and tactical goal setting and execution. This brain trust has worked very hard to contribute detailed observations, guidance and insights now that the city has arrived at the financial cliff we saw looming over the last eighteen months.

The vast majority of our 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 and managing their personal check books. I would urge council to leverage the collective expertise of citizens - who have 'skin in the game' living in the city - to help identify the best paths forward together.

Hastily organized, panicky fuzzy logic tax measures by council 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 impediments to them in order to make our city self sustaining.

Yes, we will need to organize a well organized and thought out parcel tax 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.

I first became involved in city politics after the disastrous purchase by the county of our only downtown hotel for what has proved to be an equally disastrous and hugely expensive bungled effort to help elderly destitute people by the county. We had the Barlow group presenting to the city manager and staff a hotel and housing development that would generate very significant ongoing revenues in September, with financing and project goals in place, but amazingly any references to 'the new hotel' by council in meetings continue to only refer to the Piazza group's endless obfuscation around what they might do in the coming years on the downtown plot of land they purchased.

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

We have incoming fresh minds (hopefully) with a new city manager, fire chief and others over time. We have a county sales tax that will be jeopardized by a city sales tax ballot Hail Mary. **The imperative is to focus on economic development, not making the city of Sebastopol the most heavily sales taxed place in the county as a band aid to serious structural issues, accompanied by vague parcel taxes for property owners.**

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

The new city manager is a great time to do a big reset. Leverage citizen expertise and get more people involved. Don't try and again do what has failed in the past- a rarified, autocratic meeting of elitist councilors making massive decisions that will negatively affect the city's fortunes with little regard for the two types of city citizens (downtown and suburban) opinions and in some cases expertise.

Leverage local expertise and think this through to create a coherent strategic plan. No more band aids.

Oliver Marks  
Downtown Sebastopol

