

To the City of Sebastopol,

The Climate Action Committee recommends an adjustment to the priorities for the Sebastopol Main Street Planning and Redesign Project (funded by a Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Grant).

We requested that the City of Sebastopol hire a grant writer to secure funding for climate-related projects and other potential benefits for our city, a request which ultimately resulted in a successful application for the Sustainable Transportation Grant.

Increasing active transportation, which requires improving pedestrian and bicycle safety, is a priority action for meeting goals T1, T2 and T3 of the Climate Action Framework adopted by the City in 2022.

The Planning Commission requested that the grant be applied for to study how Main St. could be made more pedestrian and bike friendly. There were several ideas that were floated as possible options to study. Among them were:

- Widening the sidewalks
- Remove some of the parking
- Add bump-outs for crossing the street
- Slowing the speed limit on Main Street

The RFP did not mention any specific option with one exception: “At least one option should include two-way street concept for the existing SR 116 one-way couplet.”

The Climate Action Committee recommends removing that requirement from the final contract, instead allowing the consultant to equally explore all cost-effective, community-supported, and evidence-driven options for increasing the safety of active transportation within our city.

We are specifically concerned that including this specific requirement will skew the results of the findings. In addition, the two-way Main Street option is both high cost and highly contentious. We are concerned that placing this option as a required priority will consume much of the \$200,000 allotted for this study, leaving other possibilities unexplored.

For background: The citizens of Sebastopol voted to change Main Street into a one way street in 1984 in order to alleviate gridlock traffic and reduce pedestrian accidents. Both traffic flow and safety were substantially improved with the change. The change was made for the following reasons:

- **Bike riders on side streets were impacted by more traffic** because drivers were using side streets to avoid getting stuck on Main St.
- Residents of alternative route streets were **concerned about pedestrian safety** and tired of **people speeding through their neighborhoods** to avoid the congestion.
- **Businesses were moving away** from Main St. because of gridlock. (Redwood Market Place was built as a response to shoppers wanting to avoid Main St.)
- The gridlock was a source of stress, degrading civic spirit. Some drivers got so frustrated that they would “gun it” as soon as they could, often onto side streets.

The one-way system did alleviate the gridlock and improve safety. City traffic engineer Walter Laabs noted that vehicle counts on Main St. were 14,000 a day in 1986. *“Traffic was flowing well. A year earlier, before the change to one-way, gridlock had been the norm”* (Sonoma West, Feb. 19, 1987). Safety was markedly better: *“The accident rate has decreased by 37% since the introduction of one-way streets”* (Sonoma West, June 4, 1987).

After the change to our current one-way system, a community group called for a return to the old two-way system. This questions was put on the ballot (Measure A) and put to a vote on June 2nd, 1987. The result was 1,600 (76%) of voters being in favor of keeping the one-way system, and 387 (24%) voting to return to the two-way system, suggesting widespread satisfaction with the one-way solution.

The Sebastopol Climate Action Committee recommends that the Sustainability Study focus on studying the following to create a more pedestrian friendly Main Street:

- Widening the sidewalks
- Remove some of the parking
- Add bump-outs for crossing the street
- Slowing the speed limit on Main Street

All solutions should be on the table for meeting our climate goals, including returning to two-way streets, if through a non-partial community input process and course of study the consultant arrives at this conclusion. However, we warn against wasting these grant dollars by biasing the results of the study. We are acutely aware that climate solutions must be acceptable to local citizens, in order to avoid unnecessary polarization in meeting sustainability goals.

We hope Sebastopol will benefit from this opportunity to improve the experience for pedestrians on Main St. If the consultant contract has been finalized, we request that it be amended; otherwise, we request this change be made prior to finalization. We also recommend that the consultant meet with the Climate Action Committee as part of their initial information-gathering process.

Respectfully,

the Sebastopol Climate Action Committee