

Dear City Council and Staff,

In reading your revenue generating document, I want to simple and easy ways to support local businesses and to increase revenues through an increase in repeat visitors. Leveraging existing resources like our nonprofits and Design and Planning Commission could help. Partnerships, collaboration and basic appeal would go a long way to support Sebastopol's revenues.

Marketing campaigns work if people who visit enjoy their time in Sebastopol. If a visitor comes to Sebastopol and finds it dirty or unsafe or unwelcoming, they will talk about their negative experience to friends and they won't return.

I would suggest that Council Members visit other local towns, which are successful with tourists, and see what their downtowns look like and take inspiration.

Here are some suggestions for Sebastopol which are low cost and should be easy to accomplish with limited funding.

- 1) Clean – sidewalks are clean, store front windows are clean, excess litter is removed from cans regularly, landscaping is neat and tidy, weeds are removed, paint on public buildings is fresh;
- 2) Uncluttered and accessible sidewalks – Sebastopol has old newspaper stands and old benches cluttering up the sidewalks. There is a lot of duplicate signage. Duplicates should be removed. Any objects that are not in use or are in disrepair should be removed from sidewalks. The Planning and Design Review Commissioners could be tasked with walking through downtown to make a list of decluttering and removal of unnecessary object;
- 3) Pretty landscaping – People love plants and flowers and associated greenery with a sense of well-being. Sebastopol should concentrate on making its commercial and downtown public spaces bright and cheery with seasonal plantings and regular trimming and maintenance of plants. Around City Hall, the Library, Town Square, Ives, Parking Lots and Main Street should be focus of plants, tree and seasonal flora decorations;
- 4) Safety – tourists like to feel safe. Most tourist towns like Sonoma and Healdsburg have town square that are very well-kept and feel safe. Sebastopol has a huge homeless population which occupies much of the public space. As the majority of the homeless population are addicts or mentally ill, see Sebastopol Times Transient article(<https://www.sebastopoltimes.com/p/keeping-track-of-the-transients> ) which references meth pipes and other drug paraphernalia, their drug use and erratic behavior does not make Sebastopol appealing to families with children or welcoming to tourists. Sebastopol should expand the current panhandling ordinance to stop panhandling within 300 yards of a business entrance or exit and a public facility entrance or exit. In addition, the City should close the needle exchange run by West County Health on Petaluma Avenue (<https://www.wchealth.org/service/youth-services/>). As the Sebastopol Times article shows, the featured homeless people are IV drug users. While needle exchanges provide a service for IV drug users, it is not appropriate to have drug addicted adults in a Teen Center and it also draws drug addicted adults into our community.

- 5) Event Partnerships with Non-Profits and Local Organizations – Sebastopol has many wonderful nonprofits such as the Senior Center, the Arts Center, the Community Cultural Center, Peacetown, and many Choir Groups. Why doesn't the City work with its Non-Profit Partners to host events on Main Street and throughout town? For instance, the senior Center could host a holiday cookie competition where different bakers would present cookies at different stores – asking tasters to move from store to store. There are many amateur choirs – why not ask them to have holiday caroling or Valentine's Day caroling? Why not have Peacetown do a Mardi Gras second line down Main Street and through Ives? To support these events, the City could give small grants of \$1000-\$1500.
- 6) Connect Main Street to the Barlow via the Town Square with lighting and open wide sidewalks. The Barlow is safe and clean, which is why it is successful. Right now, it is difficult to walk from Main Street to the Barlow. There is a simple solution to connect the two places. Create an archway of lights from Main Street to the Barlow via the North End of the town Square. Remove some of the plantings on the North End of the Town Square to make a wider sidewalk. Connect to the crosswalk. You could task the Design and Planning Commissioners to come up with a solution that costs under \$5000.
- 7) Listen to business owners. Business owners rarely speak at Council meetings yet they are the key revenue generators for Sebastopol. The City should survey local businesses and should hold town halls for business owners. Does the City know the top 5 challenges for business owners? Does the City know how the homeless population impacts business owners? Does the City know what businesses need to make their businesses thrive? Has City staff gone to the local businesses in person to find out what their experiences are running a business in Sebastopol and how the City can help to improve revenue?
- 8) Participate in Countywide tourism events such as restaurant week, bike rides, marathons. What events are taking place in Sonoma County that could include Sebastopol? Sonoma County Tourism has marketing money and marketing plans in place. How can Sebastopol use this existing resource to market Sebastopol?
- 9) First time impressions count. Sebastopol needs to make a great first-time impression on people seeing the City for the first time. What do people see when they arrive to Sebastopol? On North 116, they see a hovel of broken down RVs and an empty shopping center. Not a good first impression. From South 116, they see small, lively shops, anchored by Handline. Pretty good visual for a small town. Heading West on the 12, they see a lot of mismatched signs on the Morris/12 hillside. It looks junky and not cohesive. This should be cleaned up and unified. Heading East on the 12, people pass by the Library, City Hall and West America Bank and an empty retail space. The landscaping at the Library and City Hall should be improved. The City should work with the empty restaurant space to get it occupied. Perhaps, the Legacy Christmas store could be in that space or some other temporary popup? City staff and Council should brainstorm on what makes a good first impression. What do they like to see when they travel to new places, what do they find charming, what make a person feel safe when they are in a new place?

Best,  
Kate Haug