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To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Ana Kwong <akwong@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Don Schwartz <dschwartz@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Subject: March 28 Budget Committee Meeting #1 comment

Council and city staff,

Regarding the March 28th 'budget committee' meeting, I'm a little unclear from the provided agenda on the precise purpose and goals of this meeting.

I think at this time we need to allow our new city manager and staff to lead on this important organizing and management as was previously discussed and I thought agreed upon at the last council meeting, when council voted approval, item by item, of the city manager's excellent subsequent budget proposals.

<https://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/March-19-2024-budget-presentation-CC-Final.pdf>.

We don't now need the past all too typical 'too many cooks' confusion and frustrations, with well meaning but inexperienced councillors meddling with professionally informed ways of navigating out of the financial mess the city has become mired in. Council should provide oversight and insights but stay informed rather than lead on this imo.

Separately much is made of the incorporated city of Sebastopol's 'sphere of influence' over the surrounding area of 'greater Sebastopol', which is organized and controlled by the county. Historically the city was previously the hub of banking, shopping and dining for this greater area, but **at this point I suggest the roles are now somewhat reversed, with the county's 'sphere of city facilities usage' looming large and expensive to city taxpayers.**

A key budget component has to be persuading the county to pay their fair share for heavy usage of city facilities by county residents: for example swimming pool, library, senior center, arts center, community center and so

on. City streets wear and tear can arguably be added to this, given people traveling into the city limits for committees, club meetings and other meetings and events using city facilities. Supervisor Lynda Hopkins told council she drives to the Ives pool every morning for example.

The vast majority of Sonoma residents have a very poor understanding of how the county and cities are organized and funded, resulting in a 'sphere of influence' of people who live nearby **assuming our city council meetings and facilities are discussions they have an equal voice in.**

Past council's looseness in running the city for 'greater Sebastopol' and beyond (and of course recently the many transient people who have been provided shelter within our city limits at enormous financial and social costs) have arguably resulted in the current council declared 'fiscal emergency' due to a lack of focus on running the city for our tax paying city residents and balancing the books.

From the state to the county to the city we are now in a major economic downturn with large deficits looming, so the expectation of loose city funding provision from state and county have largely dried up.

Last year's committee created budget resulted in an unconventionally organized Rube Goldberg contraption that was very hard for city residents to comprehend.

The city manager laid out an extremely coherent and well organized action plan council agreed was the way forward. Please now allow this city staff momentum to continue! I look forward to starting to see results.

Thank you for everyone's time, hard work and attention to detail.

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