

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: May 6, 2025

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**To:** Honorable City Councilmembers  
**From:** Vice Mayor McLewis  
**Subject:** Responsible Department: Acting City Manager/Assistant City Manager/City Clerk  
Consideration of Request from Cal Cities for Letters of Opposition and Support

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council consider a request from Cal Cities for letters of opposition and support on specific State legislative bills that impact cities, and provide direction to staff regarding the preparation and submission of such letters.

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**SUMMARY**

The item tonight is to respond to the request from Cal Cities for letters of opposition and support on specific State legislative bills as follows:

1. OPPOSE - AB 647 (González, M.) Housing Development Approvals: Residential Units.
2. SUPPORT - AB 1 (Connolly) Residential property insurance: wildfire risk.
3. OPPOSE - SB 634 (Pérez) Homelessness: civil and criminal penalties.
4. OPPOSE - SB 79 (Wiener) Transit-oriented development.

**BACKGROUND:**

Cal Cities, also known as the League of California Cities, is a statewide organization that provides a unified voice for California’s cities. It serves as a platform where city officials can come together to share experiences, exchange best practices, and advocate for policies at the State Capitol that benefit cities and their residents. Through its legislative efforts, Cal Cities monitors bills that impact local government and often seeks support or opposition from member cities to help influence state policy decisions.

**DISCUSSION:**

Cal Cities (League of California Cities) takes positions on hundreds of bills annually. With over 400 city officials serving on its seven policy committees, cities have a direct influence on the direction of Cal Cities’ overall advocacy efforts.

As Council Liaison and Chair of the Legislative Committee, I am requesting that the City Council consider sending letters of support or opposition regarding certain state legislation, as recommended by Cal Cities. These bills have been identified as having a potential impact on cities and their ability to effectively serve their communities. Additional information on each bill, along with draft letters of support or opposition, is attached for the Council’s review and consideration.

**STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The City Council has, in the past, taken positions of support or opposition on various bills submitted through the League of California Cities. While staff are not lobbyists and are not qualified to provide in-depth analysis on the attached bills, staff recommends that the Council support the recommendations of our League representative (Nancy Hall Bennett) and the Council liaison (Vice Mayor McLewis).

Draft letters have been prepared for each bill, with language specifically tailored to explain how the legislation would impact the City of Sebastopol. This approach ensures that the City’s positions are clearly

communicated to the State and reflect the unique needs and priorities of our community.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, if staff receives public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items. The City will provide the appropriate legal notification of changes.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** There is no fiscal impact with submission of the letters.

**RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Council consider a request from Cal Cities for letters of opposition and support on specific State legislative bills that impact cities, and provide direction to staff regarding the preparation and submission of such letters and authorize the Mayor to sign the letters. It is recommended that the Council conduct separate votes on the recommendations below.

1. OPPOSE - AB 647 (González, M.) Housing Development Approvals: Residential Units.
2. SUPPORT - AB 1 (Connolly) Residential property insurance: wildfire risk.
3. OPPOSE - SB 634 (Pérez) Homelessness: civil and criminal penalties.
4. OPPOSE - SB 79 (Wiener) Transit-oriented development.

**OPTIONS:**

That the Council not support the recommendations and provide direction to staff.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. AB 647 (González, M.) Housing Development Approvals: Residential Units/Bill Text/Letter of Opposition
2. AB 1 (Connolly) Residential property insurance: wildfire risk/Bill Text/Letter of Support
3. SB 634 (Pérez) Homelessness: civil and criminal penalties/Bill Text/Letter of Opposition
4. SB 79 (Wiener) Transit-oriented development/Bill Text/Letter of Opposition

**APPROVALS:**

Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 4-29-2025

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 4-29-2025

*This action is not subject to CEQA because it is an administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment, and it relates to government fiscal activities that do not involve any commitment to any specific project that may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment. (CEQA Guidelines § 15378(a), (b)(2), (b)(4) and (b)(5)).*

Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: 4/17/2025

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget:  Yes  No  N/A

Account Code (f applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: 4-29-2025

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 4-29-2025

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Mark González  
California State Assembly  
1021 O Street, Suite 6150  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 647 (González, M.) Housing Development Approvals: Residential Units.  
Notice of OPPOSITION (As of 3/28/25)

Dear Assembly Member González,

The City of Sebastopol must oppose your AB 647 (González), which would disregard state-mandated local housing elements and force cities to allow up to eight housing units — only one of which is required to be affordable — on lots with an existing single-family home or in an area zoned for eight units or less, without any environmental review or public input.

AB 647 would empower developers to bulldoze nearly any home and replace it with eight new units. Once those units are constructed, Government Code Section 66323(a)(4) requires local jurisdictions to allow up to an additional eight ADUs on the same lot, bringing the total allowable units to sixteen, while simultaneously ignoring existing height limits, density requirements, and parking standards.

The City of Sebastopol appreciates your desire to pursue a proposal that boosts housing production. Unfortunately, AB 647 ignores local flexibility, decision-making, and community input, which are critical components that, when coupled with ongoing, dedicated funding, can help spur desperately needed housing construction in the state.

AB 647 and other ministerial or by-right housing approval processes fail to recognize the extensive public engagement and costs associated with developing and adopting zoning ordinances and state-mandated housing elements that are certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. It is concerning that cities are being forced to spend tens of thousands of dollars on housing plans only to have them pushed aside and replaced with one-size-fits-all zoning dictated by the Legislature.

Sebastopol is a small city with limited infrastructure capacity. Allowing up to 16 units per parcel, particularly in traditionally single-family neighborhoods, would overwhelm our sewer, stormwater, and road systems, many of which are already aging and operating at or near capacity.

The charm and livability of Sebastopol is rooted in its small-town feel, diverse housing stock, and strong neighborhood identity. AB 647 would allow mass redevelopment that ignores local design standards, setbacks, and building height limits, creating significant changes to neighborhood aesthetics and walkability.

Eliminating local parking requirements in a city with limited public transit options will lead to increased on-street congestion, particularly in neighborhoods not designed for high-density development. This raises safety concerns for pedestrians, bicyclists, and emergency vehicle access.

Sebastopol, like many cities, has invested substantial staff time and financial resources into crafting a state-certified Housing Element that balances growth, affordability, and community values. AB 647 would override that plan.

Located in Sonoma County, Sebastopol is surrounded by environmentally sensitive areas, including wetlands such as the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Blanket densification policies fail to account for these unique land constraints, increasing the risk of adverse environmental impacts.

While we share the goal of addressing California's housing crisis, the pathway to sustainable housing production must respect the principles of local control, environmental responsibility, and community voice. We urge you to oppose AB 647 and instead support legislation that provides flexible tools, resources, and funding to cities committed to thoughtful, community-driven growth.

For these reasons, the City of Sebastopol regrettably must oppose AB 647 (González).

Sincerely,

Stephen Zollman  
Mayor

Copies Furnished:

Senator

Assembly Member

Nancy Hall Bennett, League of California Cities, [nbennett@calcities.org](mailto:nbennett@calcities.org)

League of California Cities, [cityletters@calcities.org](mailto:cityletters@calcities.org)

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Damon Connolly  
Senator, California State Senate  
1021 O St, Suite 5240  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1(Connolly) Residential property insurance: wildfire risk.  
Notice of Support

Dear Assemblymember Connolly,

The City of Sebastopol writes to express our strong support of AB 1 (Connolly) which would require the California Department of Insurance to review the Safer from Wildfires regulations every five years, and consider if additional building hardening measures and community level wildfire mitigation programs should be added to the program. AB 1 will require the California Department to ensure that the regulations continue to reflect the needs of consumers and the industry and provide the largest benefit to homeowners. Under the Safer from Wildfires program, the state requires insurance companies to give discounts to policyholders who reduce wildfire risks on their properties. The program also informs people how to protect their properties from wildfires.

California has the highest wildfire risk in the US. In recent years, the state has experienced a growing number of highly destructive wildfires due to climate change and over a century of logging and fire suppression. The devastating impacts of these wildfires have led to a state-wide insurance crisis, characterized by insurance price hikes, coverage withdrawals, and instability.

In an effort to save lives, protect property and address the insurance crisis, California has prioritized efforts to prevent wildfires and reduce their severity. Additionally, home and property owners are investing in home hardening and defensible space to reduce the risk of loss due to wildfires and thereby lower the cost of wildfire disasters for communities, governments, and insurers. To support these activities, California has made significant investments in recent years through the state budget. Since 2017, the state has committed more than \$3.6 billion in investments in forest treatment alone.

Although California is making unprecedented investments in wildfire resilience, and local governments and homeowners are investing in home hardening and maintaining defensible space, the current proposed regulations by CDI only briefly mention home hardening and do not incorporate the wildfire risk reduction benefits of these activities in relation to rates. The failure to account for the risk reduction benefits of these activities contributes to non-renewals of insurance and insurers' decisions not to write new insurance for homes facing wildfire risk. At the same time, homeowners are denied the benefits associated with the investments that have been made in hazardous fuel reduction, home hardening, and defensible space.

As new and safer building materials come to market and wildfire prevention methods evolve, it is important that we periodically revisit the regulations to ensure that as much relief as possible is being offered to community members who are hardening their homes against wildfire. AB 1 is a common sense solution to expand incentives for residents to harden their homes and protect against wildfires, which will help reduce insurance costs while simultaneously protecting our communities from future wildfires.

Sebastopol is located in Sonoma County, a region that has experienced repeated and devastating wildfires in recent years. Our community is keenly aware of the need to harden homes and infrastructure to prevent future disasters.

AB 1 expands access to financial and regulatory incentives that make it more feasible for homeowners to implement home-hardening upgrades, especially for those who may not otherwise be able to afford them. This is a critical equity issue, ensuring that wildfire protection isn't limited to higher-income households.

As insurance costs rise or coverage becomes unavailable in high-risk areas, incentivizing wildfire resilience will help residents retain access to affordable insurance—a growing concern in our region.

AB 1 reflects an adaptive approach to regulation by acknowledging that wildfire science, building technology, and best practices continue to evolve. It empowers the state to update rules and incentives in step with innovation, benefiting both residents and first responders.

We appreciate your leadership on this issue and respectfully urge the Legislature to support this important bill. By helping communities like Sebastopol reduce wildfire risk at the household level, AB 1 will enhance public safety, environmental protection, and long-term resilience for communities across California.

For these reasons, the City of Sebastopol supports AB 1 (Connolly).

Sincerely,

Stephen Zollman  
Mayor

Copies Furnished:

Senator

Assembly Member

Nancy Hall Bennett, League of California Cities, nbennett@calcities.org

wienLeague of California Cities, cityletters@cacities.org

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Maria Elena Durazo  
Chair, Senate Local Government Committee  
California State Capitol, Room 407  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 634 (Pérez) Homelessness: civil and criminal penalties  
Notice of OPPOSITION (As Amended 03/26/25)

Dear Senator Durazo,

The City of Sebastopol must respectfully oppose SB 634 (Pérez), which would prohibit local jurisdictions from adopting or enforcing ordinances to address homelessness. While we recognize the bill's intent, SB 634 would severely limit cities' ability to respond to the growing homelessness crisis in communities across California.

Cities are implementing balanced approaches that protect both the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness and the broader community's needs for clean, safe, and accessible public spaces. SB 634 hinders this progress by prohibiting local governments from adopting any regulation, policy, or guidance that imposes civil or criminal penalties on a person experiencing homelessness. By eliminating all enforcement mechanisms, SB 634 gives people the right to stand, sit, lay, sleep, or put up a tent in any public place.

Sebastopol has adopted a compassionate, balanced approach to homelessness—one that emphasizes outreach, services, and voluntary compliance, while still preserving public access to parks, sidewalks, and civic areas. SB 634 would eliminate our ability to enforce even basic time, place, and manner restrictions, preventing the City from ensuring public spaces remain safe, clean, and accessible to everyone.

The City maintains several small parks and greenways that serve as essential recreational and community gathering spaces. Without the ability to regulate camping, sleeping, or the accumulation of personal belongings in these areas, public health risks will increase, including issues related to sanitation, waste management, and waterway pollution.

SB 634 would prohibit Sebastopol from enforcing safety-related ordinances, such as preventing individuals from blocking sidewalks, business entrances, or fire lanes. In a small community with limited public space and narrow roadways, this poses real dangers for pedestrians, seniors, and emergency responders.

Sebastopol partners with local non-profits such as West County Community Services and works in collaboration with the County of Sonoma on mental health outreach, and crisis response. Removing even the minimal consequences for refusing services or violating public space ordinances makes it more

May 7, 2025

The Honorable Scott Wiener  
Senator, California State Senate  
1021 O St, Suite 8620  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 79 (Wiener) Transit-oriented Development  
Notice of Opposition

Dear Senator Wiener,

The City of Sebastopol writes to express our strong opposition to your SB 79 (Wiener), which would disregard state-certified housing elements and bestow land use authority to transit agencies without any requirement that developers build housing, let alone affordable housing.

SB 79 doubles down on the recent trend of the state overriding its own mandated local housing elements. This latest overreaching effort forces cities to approve transit-oriented development projects near specified transit stops — up to seven stories high and a density of 120 homes per acre — without regard to the community's needs, environmental review, or public input.

Sebastopol has spent significant time, public input, and financial resources to develop a compliant Housing Element certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). SB 79 would override these efforts, stripping away local control in areas that have already been planned in good faith and in accordance with state law.

Although Sebastopol is a transit-accessible city, our scale and capacity are vastly different from large urban centers. Imposing development standards of seven stories and 120 units per acre near our modest transit stops is wildly out of scale, and would dramatically alter our small-town character, create significant parking challenges, and overwhelm existing infrastructure.

SB 79 does not require the inclusion of affordable housing, and it does not guarantee any housing will be built at all.

Sebastopol is home to sensitive environmental areas and aging infrastructure. The bill's elimination of environmental review (CEQA) and local discretionary processes means the City would be unable to assess or mitigate the impacts of large-scale projects on water resources, traffic circulation, schools, stormwater, or fire services.

This bill allows land use decisions to be made by transit agencies, which are not accountable to local voters and are not equipped to oversee development projects in a way that reflects community priorities.



This removes residents' ability to influence the development of their own neighborhoods and marginalizes community voices, especially in smaller cities.

Sebastopol supports transit-oriented development and housing production—but these goals must be pursued through collaborative, community-based planning, not top-down mandates that ignore local realities. We respectfully urge you to reconsider this bill and pursue legislative solutions that empower communities to plan responsibly for growth, housing equity, and sustainability.

Most alarmingly, SB 79 defies cities' general plans and provides transit agencies unlimited land use authority on property they own or have a permanent easement, regardless of the distance from a transit stop. Transit agencies would have the power to determine all aspects of the development including height, density, and design, without any regard to local zoning or planning.

This broad new authority applies to both residential and commercial development. Transit agencies could develop 100% commercial projects — even at transit stops — and not provide a single new home, while simultaneously making the argument that more housing must be constructed around transit stops.

The City of Sebastopol appreciates and respects your desire to pursue a housing production proposal. However, as currently drafted, SB 79 will not spur much-needed housing construction in a manner that supports local flexibility, decision-making, and community input. State-driven ministerial or by-right housing approval processes fail to recognize the extensive public engagement associated with developing and adopting zoning ordinances and housing elements.

California will never produce the number of homes needed with an increasingly state-driven, by-right housing approval process. What we really need is a sustainable state investment that matches the scale of this decades-in-the-making crisis.

For these reasons, the City of Sebastopol must oppose SB 79 (Wiener).

Sincerely,

Stephen Zollman  
Mayor

Copies Furnished:

Senator

Assembly Member

Nancy Hall Bennett, League of California Cities, nbennett@calcities.org

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difficult to engage chronically unhoused individuals who may be resistant to help, reducing the effectiveness of coordinated outreach efforts.

As a small city with limited no shelter capacity and few dedicated services, Sebastopol relies on collaboration and reasonable regulation to manage its public spaces effectively. SB 634 would create legal uncertainty and operational paralysis for smaller municipalities that do not have the infrastructure to respond to the consequences of unrestricted public encampments.

Sebastopol believes that housing, not criminalization, is the answer to homelessness, but we also believe that communities need the legal authority to manage public spaces in a way that works for everyone—residents, businesses, families, and those experiencing homelessness alike. SB 634 strips away all local control without providing viable alternatives.

We urge you to oppose this bill and instead support legislative solutions that invest in affordable housing, behavioral health services, and sustainable outreach, while preserving local governments' ability to maintain safe, clean, and accessible communities.

Cities have been sued by business owners for allowing encampments to block access to businesses and by disability rights advocates over encampments that have obstructed sidewalks and public spaces. Without the ability to use civil or criminal enforcement remedies, cities would face increased legal liability and more importantly, have no meaningful way to respond to urgent health and safety concerns. The City of Sebastopol recognizes that we must remain focused on connecting unhoused residents to housing and services, but cities also need basic tools to meet their legal obligations and protect public spaces.

SB 634 also directly contradicts cities' efforts to address encampments in response to the Governor's November 2024 executive order. The order directed state departments and agencies to adopt policies to address homeless encampments on state properties and encouraged local governments to adopt similar policies or risk losing access to state homelessness funding. Cities want to help the state to realize our shared vision of reducing homelessness and supporting our most vulnerable residents. However, SB 634 leaves cities without any enforcement tools, hindering cities' ability to carry out the Governor's directive and jeopardizing state funding cities receive to address homelessness.

Local jurisdictions are already working within a complex and evolving legal landscape, including recent federal court decisions like *Johnson v. Grants Pass*, which clarified constitutional limits on how cities can address homelessness through enforcement actions. In response to the Grants Pass ruling, the Governor stated:

*"Today's ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court provides state and local officials the definitive authority to implement and enforce policies to clear unsafe encampments from our streets. This decision removes the legal ambiguities that have tied the hands of local officials for years and limited their ability to deliver on common-sense measures to protect the safety and well-being of our communities."*

SB 634 directly undermines this decision by stripping local governments of the authority to tailor enforcement strategies to their unique circumstances. It also disregards the years of legal effort cities have invested to gain the clarity now provided by the Court.

The City of Sebastopol urges the Legislature to support policies that empower local governments to act with compassion and urgency — not tie their hands behind their backs. SB 634 does not reflect the nuanced, community-led solutions that are showing promise across the state.

For these reasons, the City of Sebastopol must oppose SB 634 (Pérez).

Sincerely,

Stephen Zollman  
Mayor

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Senator

Assembly Member

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