



City of Sebastopol

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: September 16, 2025

=====

To: Honorable City Councilmembers
Requestor: Mayor Zollman
Responsible Department: City Attorney Alex Mog
Planning Department
Subject: Review of Formula Business Ordinance and Development of a Curated Vision Plan for Downtown
Recommendation: That the City Council:

1. Direct staff to review potential updates to the Formula Business Ordinance with the Planning Commission and return with recommendations.
2. Direct staff to work with the Planning Commission to explore the development of a curated vision and plan for the City's downtown, and return with recommendations.

=====

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council:

1. Direct staff to review potential updates to the Formula Business Ordinance with the Planning Commission and return with recommendations.
2. Direct staff to work with the Planning Commission to explore the development of a curated vision and plan for the City's downtown, and return with recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Sebastopol has long sought to preserve its small-town character, local business identity, and vibrant downtown. The existing Formula Business Ordinance has supported these goals by regulating the establishment of chain or "formula" businesses.

Council and community members have expressed interest in reviewing the ordinance to ensure its continued effectiveness and alignment with City values. In addition, there is growing interest in developing a curated downtown vision plan to guide business mix, land use, public realm improvements, and cultural identity.

This item seeks Council direction to begin both efforts.

PROCESS FOR AGENDA ITEM

- a. Presentation of agenda item by City Attorney
- b. Questions and discussion by Councilmembers
- c. Public comment
- d. Council Discussion
- e. Motion



City of Sebastopol

BACKGROUND

Sebastopol places a high priority on preserving its unique character and supporting locally owned businesses. The Formula Business Ordinance was adopted to help maintain these values by regulating certain types of businesses.

In recent months, the Council and community have expressed interest in reviewing whether the ordinance remains effective and appropriately balanced. In addition, there is support for developing a more intentional downtown vision—one that reflects community goals for land use, business mix, public space, and cultural identity, and provides a framework for future decisions. The current version of the formula business ordinance was adopted in 2018.

DISCUSSION

Formula Business Ordinance Review: It is requested that staff review the current ordinance and identify options for potential updates. This review is not intended to be a comprehensive update to the ordinance, but rather to make limited and focused updates to the ordinance based on the implementation of the ordinance since adoption, as well as lessons learned from similar ordinances in other jurisdictions.

Curated Downtown Vision Plan: It is further requested that staff provide recommendations for process for developing a downtown curated vision plan.

Interim City Manager Analysis:

The Formula Business Ordinance has served Sebastopol well in protecting the City's unique identity, but it is timely to review the ordinance to ensure it continues to reflect community values.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council:

1. Direct staff to review potential updates to the Formula Business Ordinance with the Planning Commission and return with recommendations.
2. Direct staff to work with the Planning Commission to explore the development of a curated vision and plan for the City's downtown, and return with recommendations.

OPTIONS:

1. Deny the requests and provide direction to staff

ATTACHMENTS:

None

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval:

Approval Date: 9-8-2025

CEQA Determination (Planning):

Approval Date: 9-8-2025

The proposed action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Any proposed changes to the ordinances will be separately reviewed.

Administrative Services (Financial):

Approval Date: 9-8-2025

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

Account Code (f applicable) _____

City Attorney Approval:

Approval Date: 9-8-2025

City Manager Approval:

Approval Date: 9-8-2025