

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF:

September 2, 2025

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Interim City Manager
Subject: Land Acknowledgement

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider whether City Council meetings should include a land acknowledgment. If approved, staff seeks direction on whether this practice should also apply to City Council standing committees, ad hoc committees, boards, commissions, and other future committees or bodies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A land acknowledgment is a formal statement recognizing the Indigenous Peoples dispossessed or displaced from their ancestral homelands. It acknowledges that a city, organization, or facility operates on these ancestral lands. Typically, such statements are used to open events, ceremonies, or meetings.

BACKGROUND

According to the Sonoma County Tourism website, “Long before we became known as Wine Country, Sonoma County was home to thousands of Native Americans, including those of the Pomo, Miwok, and Wappo tribes. And despite mass displacement, humiliation, illness, and death at the hands of European and American colonists, Native American cultures and presence persist in modern-day Sonoma County. ”

Cities researched read the land acknowledgment out loud, as well as listing it on the agendas such as Cotati and Rohnert Park.

The City of Cotati recognizes that we’re on the ancestral lands of the Coastal Miwok, who are the original caretakers of this area. We respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous peoples who have been stewarding and maintaining a relationship on this land as knowledge keepers for millennia. This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with Indigenous communities but serves as a gesture of respect to the land we are on.

The City of Rohnert Park acknowledges Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land. Let it be acknowledged that the City of Rohnert Park is located within the traditional homelands of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, comprised of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo peoples.

Other agencies such as The County of Sonoma, Santa Rosa Junior College and Sonoma State University took a different approach and includes a longer Land Acknowledgment on their website:

Land Acknowledgement

The County of Sonoma recognizes that we’re on the ancestral lands of the Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo who are the original caretakers of this area. We respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous peoples who have been stewarding and maintaining relationship on this land as knowledge keepers for millennia.

The county of Sonoma is dedicated to understanding and educating the public about historical and ongoing connections between land conservation and social inequities. This includes the histories of genocide, forced

removal and displacement and broken promises with Indigenous peoples as a part of American history.

Indigenous people are not just in our histories. We strive to optimize Indigenous voices to share their own history, as to not perpetuate another form of being silenced. While recognizing the past, we honor the resiliency of Native people still in their ancestral territories in relationship with their land and culture.

This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with Indigenous communities but serves as a gesture of respect to the land we are on.

Santa Rosa Junior College:

To acknowledge the traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, reaching beyond colonization and the establishment of European colonies, as well as its significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon this territory, and whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the land and its other inhabitants today.

Acknowledgment by itself is a small gesture. It becomes meaningful when coupled with authentic relationships and informed action. However, this beginning can be an opening to greater public consciousness of Native sovereignty and cultural rights, a step toward equitable relationship and reconciliation.

Acknowledgment is a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people's history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth.

Sonoma State University: Honoring the Land

Sonoma State University sits on the borderlands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok Nations, the descendants of whom today are the enrolled citizens of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. The mission of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria is social justice and environmental stewardship. The Tribe hopes and encourages the larger community to join them in this necessary mission.

Long before California, Sonoma County, and Sonoma State University, the surrounding land was inhabited by indigenous peoples collectively known as the Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo. Now, they are formally recognized as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and led by Tribal Chairman, Greg Sarris.

Sonoma State acknowledges in gratitude the Rancheria's ancestors for their stewardship of the land and all of its resources, and thank the current membership for their partnership in a number of educational initiatives, including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria Learning Center at the Fairfield Osborn Preserve, located on Sonoma Mountain.

City of Berkeley California

The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of xučyun (Huchiuñ), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, the ancestors and descendants of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to all of the Ohlone Tribes and descendants of the Verona Band. We acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of Berkeley, the documented 5,000-year history of a vibrant community at the West Berkeley Shellmound, and the Ohlone people who continue to reside in the East Bay. We recognize that Berkeley's residents have and continue to benefit from the use and occupation of this uncaded stolen land since the City of Berkeley's incorporation in 1878. As stewards of the laws regulating the City of Berkeley, it is not only vital that we recognize the history of this land, but also recognize that the Ohlone people are present members of Berkeley and other East Bay communities today. The City of Berkeley will continue to build relationships with the Lisjan Tribe and to create meaningful

actions that uphold the intention of this land

acknowledgement. <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-2025%20Berkeley%20Poet%20Laureate%20Guidelines.pdf#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20Berkeley%20recognizes%20that%20the%20community,of%20the%20sovereign%20Verona%20Band%20of%20Alameda%20County>.

Sonoma Land Trust

As we pursue our mission of conserving land in Sonoma County, we recognize that we stand upon the unceded ancestral lands of many Indigenous peoples. We honor their knowledge, care and stewardship of this special place across the ages and acknowledge the deep and lasting damage that colonization has inflicted on them. We embrace our responsibility to learn from and protect their cultural and traditional connections to the land.
<https://sonomalandtrust.org/acknowledgment-statement/>

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation respectfully recognizes and acknowledges that we live and work within the unceded homeland of the Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo people. To raise awareness of ancestral and current indigenous peoples' presence in the Laguna de Santa Rosa Watershed, we pay our respect to the past, present, and future generations of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo people and their Wappo neighbors by continuing to learn and incorporate Native American traditions into our restoration practices and community education offerings. We are grateful for these Indigenous Peoples as the original stewards of this territory.
http://lagunafoundation.org/pdfs/LDSR_Annual_Report_FY_21-22_web.pdf

DISCUSSION:

The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land and that the City of Sebastopol is located within the traditional homelands of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, comprised of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo peoples. The City has proclaimed that the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok had inhabited the land now occupied by the City of Sebastopol for thousands of years.

The Pomo maintained a harmonious relationship with the ecology of this area, including knowledgeable and respectful harvesting of animals, plants, and mineral resources; and the Pomo people have struggled to maintain health, identity, prosperity, and cultural traditions since the settling of their land by Euro-Americans. The City recognizes their wisdom and crafts traditions hold important values for our community.

The City of Sebastopol provided language to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria Tribal Council who supported the approved long and short version in red below.

Approved by Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (long version)

The City of Sebastopol acknowledges that we are currently gathered on the ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo. The Southern Pomo people have been the stewards and caretakers of these lands since time immemorial. Today, the Southern Pomo are one of two Tribal groups, alongside the Coast Miwok, who comprise the citizenship of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

(short version)

Present day Sebastopol is traditionally home to the Southern Pomo people, many of whom today are Tribal Citizens of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

The City also proposed a revised version listed below to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. Per the Tribe, either version of the language is acceptable.

New Proposed- longer version

The City of Sebastopol acknowledges that we live and work on the unceded ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and the Coast Miwok people, who have been the stewards and caretakers of these lands since time immemorial. We pay our respect to the past, present, and future generations of these peoples, including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

New Proposed - shorter version

The City of Sebastopol acknowledges that we live and work within the unceded ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and the Coast Miwok people. We pay our respect to the past, present, and future generations of these peoples, including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

The City Council should discuss and decide if they would like to incorporate a land acknowledgment as part of the City Council meetings. The Council may direct whether the land acknowledgement should be stated on the agenda and/or read out loud by the Mayor.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS:

This agenda item is reflective and in line with the following goal:

GOAL: COMMUNITY VITALITY

Enhance Sebastopol as a great place to live that values community health and well-being. Preserve Sebastopol's unique character.

Pomo and public art and updating city web site/land acknowledgement.

Action COS 10a: *Work with the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria to prepare a narrative description of the Native American background of the Sebastopol area and request the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria provide pictorial examples of the types of Native American resources present in the vicinity. Place this description on the City's website as a link under the History of Sebastopol section.*

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.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with approval of this consent calendar item.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider:

1. Whether or not the City Council meetings should include a land acknowledgment. If so;
2. Should the Mayor orally recite the proposed land acknowledgment at the beginning of each meeting following the pledge of alliance? Or,
3. Should the Council direct staff to modify the agenda format to include the proposed land acknowledgment excerpt instead of having an oral recitation at each meeting?
4. Should a longer statement be placed on the City web site?

5. Should this practice apply to the City's subsidiary bodies such as the City Council standing committees, City Council ad hoc committees, and City boards, commissions, and committees, or other future committees, boards or commissions not specifically listed herein. This Council can direct this practice apply to all bodies, or only those bodies who currently recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

If approved, direct staff to amend the city council protocols and procedures.

OPTIONS:

1. That the Council deny placement of a land acknowledgement on Council agendas or the City web site and provide direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval:

Approval Date:

CEQA Determination (Planning):

Approval Date:

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:

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

Account Code (f applicable)

City Attorney Approval:

Approval Date:

City Manager Approval:

Approval Date:

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
RESOLUTION NO. XXXX-2025**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL ACKNOWLEDGING THE ANCESTRAL
LANDS OF THE SOUTHERN POMO AND COAST MIWOK PEOPLES**

WHEREAS, the City of Sebastopol is located on the ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples, who have been the stewards and caretakers of these lands since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria represent descendants of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples and continue to uphold cultural, spiritual, and environmental stewardship of their ancestral territories; and

WHEREAS, acknowledging Indigenous lands is a meaningful step toward honoring the history, presence, and ongoing contributions of Native peoples; and

WHEREAS, the City of Sebastopol recognizes the importance of educating the public and promoting awareness of Indigenous history, culture, and rights; and

WHEREAS, other local governments, educational institutions, and organizations in Sonoma County have adopted land acknowledgments as a formal practice to demonstrate respect and recognition of Indigenous peoples; and

WHEREAS, this acknowledgment does not replace authentic relationships with Indigenous communities but serves as a gesture of respect and a commitment to awareness, education, and reconciliation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Sebastopol hereby:

- Acknowledges that the City of Sebastopol is situated on the unceded ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples;
- Commits to recognizing and honoring the past, present, and future generations of these Indigenous peoples, including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria;
- Directs that a land acknowledgment statement be incorporated into City Council meetings by being printed on Council agendas or read aloud by the Mayor,
- Encourages consideration of including this practice in the City's subsidiary bodies, such as standing committees, ad hoc committees, boards, commissions, and other future committees or bodies;
- Directs staff to post the long version of the land acknowledgment statement on the City's website under the "History of Sebastopol" section; and
- Affirms that this action aligns with the City Council's commitment to community vitality, inclusion, cultural awareness, and respect for the Indigenous peoples of Sonoma County.

The above and foregoing Resolution was duly passed, approved and adopted at a meeting by the City Council on the 2nd day of September, 2025.

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was duly adopted by the City of Sebastopol City Council by the following vote:

VOTE:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Abstain:

APPROVED: _____
Mayor Stephen Zollman

ATTEST: _____
Mary Gourley, Interim City Manager/City Clerk, MMC

Approved as to Form: _____
Alex Mog, City Attorney