



**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: August 5, 2025**

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**Requestor:** Mayor Stephen Zollman  
**Responsible Department:** Police  
**Subject:** Authorization for Staff Coordination with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU); as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives Regarding Community-Based Emergency Communications Proposal

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Authorize Staff to Continue to Coordinate with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU); as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives Regarding Community-Based Emergency Communications Proposal and to gather necessary information and evaluate the feasibility of a proposed community-based emergency radio communications hub for integration into the City's emergency response planning framework.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In response to a proposal from the Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU), and in light of the City Council's adopted public safety goals, the City's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) update process, and the recent Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury findings, the Mayor is recommending continued evaluation of a potential partnership with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU). The focus would be on emergency radio communication preparedness, including physical infrastructure, policy considerations, and coordination with regional emergency operations systems. This effort would support the City's Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) development process without preempting formal stakeholder engagement or City Council review.

**PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:**

1. If item remains on consent, no presentation of item is required. Item would be approved as a consent calendar item.
2. If item is removed from the consent calendar; item would be placed at the end of the regular agenda items for discussion following the process below:
  - a. Presentation by the Requestor (Mayor) and input from Police Chief
  - b. Questions and discussion from Councilmembers
  - c. Public comment period
  - d. Council deliberation and motion

**BACKGROUND:**

On May 20, 2025, the City Council adopted its Goals and Action Plan, which included public safety and emergency preparedness as key priorities and referenced community proposals such as those from Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU).

In addition, on June 17, 2025, the City Council received an informational item from the Director of Emergency Services (Police Chief) regarding the status of the City's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and an internal



assessment of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). As stated in that report, the full update process, including stakeholder input and final City Council approval, is anticipated to take approximately 4–6 months. A preliminary draft Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for distribution and stakeholder review is expected within 2–4 months.

Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU), a volunteer-led emergency radio network, has submitted a proposal to assist in local emergency communication. Their role focuses on neighborhood-level radio communications support for Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) groups and the general public, especially during power outages and infrastructure failures.

The 2025 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury report identified widespread gaps in emergency evacuation planning, communications infrastructure, and public alert systems—particularly in rural areas. It emphasized the unreliability of cell-based alert systems during power outages and recommended stronger integration of local community radio networks with emergency operations.

This concern is especially relevant in Sebastopol, where fire seasons are beginning earlier, and a significant portion of the population is older and potentially isolated. The City continues to receive feedback from residents about unclear evacuation planning and inconsistent communication during emergencies.

Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) proposal includes:

- Installing two 50-watt General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) base stations. Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) for training purposes and emergency response submitted a proposal to purchase and install two 50-watt General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) base stations inside the Sebastopol Police Department—one for Police Department use, and one to allow Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) net control volunteers to communicate with radios throughout the city.
- Placing a rooftop antenna to receive transmissions from four existing neighborhood base stations.
- Establishing a radio monitoring space within the Police Department under supervision of the police staff.
- Updating and using the SebastopolReady.org website to disseminate public safety information and coordinate communications.
- Providing radio trainings at the Senior Area Senior Center and with other local nonprofit partners to expand community volunteer capacity.

Estimated startup costs:

Two General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) base stations – \$420

Two AC (Alternating Current) and DC (Direct Current) power supplies – \$280

Two rooftop antennas with cabling/fittings – \$2,000

Total: \$2,700 (Preliminary; subject to review)

**DISCUSSION:**

The most recent Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury report finds “the county unprepared for large-scale evacuations during wildfires and floods, citing delayed compliance with state-mandated evacuation planning laws and inadequate road infrastructure. Key evacuation routes remain dangerously narrow or prone to bottlenecks, while communication systems, particularly in rural areas, lack the reliability needed for timely alerts. Although the county has a written emergency plan and active operations center, it has postponed full evacuation route mapping and traffic signal upgrades until 2030. The report urges immediate investment in evacuation planning tools, road improvements, and stronger community alert systems to ensure public safety during future disasters”



The report also states that “cell outages are common, especially during power failures, and alert systems SoCoAlert, Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), and Nixle won’t work in rural areas without cell service. Radio repeaters that would improve public communication during widespread emergencies haven’t been completed. Community radio networks need stronger integration with the County’s Emergency Operations Center.”

Radios are the only communication technology that has a reasonable chance of working for many people in the rural parts of the County when power lines are down, or internet connections aren’t available. With the merger of the Sebastopol volunteer fire department with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District, there has been no clarity or direction regarding the local radio operators and what role they play in emergency response.

The Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) has is a radio communications network to provide back-up radio communications for the MYN Leaders and neighborhoods, training radio operators to use handheld radios to send and receive important messages during an emergency. The Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) has presented a request to the Mayor for consideration by the City Council:

1. Using a part of the allocated budget to place the required antenna on the police staff roof that will be able to receive transmissions from the already established four base stations
2. Creating space within the police station for a radio hub operator to monitor and relay information under the supervision of dispatch supervisor
3. Accessing and updating the city owned SebastopolReady.org domain, currently believed to have been established by a contractor) so that Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) information can be displayed on the site, sent via emails, receive emails requests, etc. City social media posts can also be shared.
4. Radio trainings can be offered at the Senior Area Senior Center and our other nonprofits, etc. This is also a way to recruit new radio volunteers.

#### **STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The City of Sebastopol has an aging population and the Council has routinely heard the concerns of lack of communication to the public, need for clarity on how evacuation routes will be designated as well as how that information is conveyed to the residents such as potential use of neighborhood radio networks. What also needs clarity is the potential for using City-managed platforms, including the SebastopolReady.org website, to share information on emergency preparedness and communications tools.

Each City has the primary responsibility for on-the-ground disaster response in their communities. Each city and county has an emergency organization led by a Director of Emergency Services (for the City of Sebastopol it is the responsibility of the Police Chief) who is statutorily empowered to implement emergency plans and direct resources. It is anticipated that this coordination will not preempt or override the full Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) process, but will help ensure relevant stakeholder input and urgent public-facing questions are not left unaddressed during the development timeline as well as addressing the City Council goals. In light of the grand jury report and urgent need for communications during emergencies, it is recommended that the Director of Emergency Services or his designee work with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) (as established in the June 17<sup>th</sup> presentation to Council); as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives, to evaluate specific areas requested and report back on possible roles, responsibilities, implementation challenges, and consistency with the City’s ongoing Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) update.



In review of the request from Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) as well as questions from Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives, several questions have come up which will require an in-depth analysis from City Departments based upon the Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) proposal which are listed below:

- Budget Coordination: If a formal funding request is submitted, it will require review and approval by the Budget Committee.
- Planning Review: Staff will verify whether a use permit is required under the City's Telecommunications Ordinance, and whether Planning Commission review is necessary.
- Permit Fees: Should a use permit or building permit be required, Council may later consider waiving applicable fees.
- Risk and Security: As this involves City facilities, particularly the secured Police Department, review by CIRA (City's risk authority) will be required to determine insurance, access, and security needs as well as Department of Justice regulations. Under the current CJIS DOJ/FBI policy any city staff member that has been fingerprinted, received security awareness training, signed employee statement form can enter the secured area (pass the lobby) unescorted as well as that we have to comply by October is creation of a visitor log. Anyone that is not a Sebastopol Police Department Staff Member must be logged when entering the secured area, escorted or unescorted. That's even including individuals from other allied police departments. The log will create a database of who was present if a breach or incident occurs.
- Personnel Impact: If additional duties are assigned to police staff, there may be initiation for review of classification and union obligations dependent upon the position assigned
- Digital Communications: Clarification is needed regarding the City-owned domain *sebastopolready.org*, including annual costs and staff responsibilities for managing content.
- Agency Coordination: Coordination with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District and County emergency management will be important to ensure alignment with broader disaster protocols.

#### **MEETINGS CONDUCTED:**

The Police Chief held a meeting with the Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representative at the Sebastopol Police Department on July 15, 2025, to commence initial discussions to meet the goals of the City of Sebastopol's emergency operations review. A recap of the meeting is listed below:

- Discussed SebastopolReady.org domain to be given up to the City of Sebastopol.
- Discussed value of self-help within and among neighborhoods, and how Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) advises radio users to first exhaust the 911 system and direct calls to the Police Department before turning to the radio for life-threatening situations; radio network was bidirectional; and value of professional responders being able to broadcast information and correct rumors.
- Integration of Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies (COPE) with communities' emergency responders
- Discussed role of Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS)
- Discussed Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program
- Discussed role of North Bay Communication Cooperative (NBCC) in assigning frequencies and repeaters in order to coordinate airwave use by the various radio communities.
- Discussed value of real-life-scenario drills.



- Discussed approach would be to pass only important information to the police dispatchers in a way that was not disruptive.
- Discussed how Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) in the past had communicated from the neighborhoods through hubs to a base station in the firehouse and was to have a liaison who would then communicate to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at the Police Department. Their hope is to replicate that. However, as the City of Sebastopol does not own the former Sebastopol Fire Station, a liaison would not be at the Fire Station unless a separate agreement was in place with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. Alternate locations could be discussed.

It was requested that there be one single point of contact with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN). City staff will work with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representative to determine invitees for future meetings.

#### **REGIONAL COLLABORATION:**

Recently, the Sonoma County Mayors' and Councilmembers' Association (SCMCA) has proposed forming an ad hoc committee with the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors to strengthen collaboration on key countywide issues. In a letter sent June 24, 2025, SCMCA Chair Gerard Giudice, Mayor of Rohnert Park, and Vice-Chair Mark Stapp, Mayor of Santa Rosa, outlined recommendations developed through recent meetings of city leaders. The proposal emphasizes the need for coordinated strategies to address challenges impacting communities across the County. As noted below, emergency preparedness is one of the three regional priorities.

Three priorities were identified:

- Mental Health and Homelessness Services—Recognized as inseparable issues requiring a unified approach for lasting solutions.
- **Emergency Preparedness—To improve planning, readiness, and response to increasingly frequent disasters.**
- Shared Facilities and Resources—To expand services and improve efficiency through collaboration. This committee would provide a focused forum to explore shared goals in greater depth, enhance mutual understanding, and identify actionable strategies to address the priorities outlined above.

This follows the City's goal and need for the update of the City's Emergency Operations Plan and Emergency Operations Center Assessment. With the emergence of fire season coming earlier in the year; the concerns expressed in the grand jury report regarding evacuation routes and communications, it is critical that at a minimum radio communication clarity be addressed in concert with the update of the plan.

The request tonight is to have the Council approve further collaboration; inviting the City Council liaison to Map your Neighborhood (MYN) (Vice Mayor McLewis) to the meetings and to obtain answers to the questions listed above and forward budget items to the budget committee for recommendation to the City Council with a regular report to be provided to the City Council as part of the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) agenda items.

#### **CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES/GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:**

This agenda item represents the City Council goals/priorities as follows:

*Goal 2: PUBLIC SAFETY*



*Strengthen the public's safety and improve the quality of life. Includes supporting our first responders (police, fire, public works), responding to emergencies, protecting people, property, and businesses, and engaging in emergency preparedness community outreach, public education and prevention activities.*

**Goal 4: HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATION**

*Restoring public trust*

*Improve Public Communications*

| 5  | Community Emergency Response Team – County free offerings | 5 |             |          |                                     |                        |                                |                 |   |
|--|---|---|-------------|----------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| ACTION PLAN  |   |   | Status      | Timeline | Department Responsible              | Constraints            | Potential Costs to City Budget | Level of Effort | Additional Notes  |
| Communicate with Chief Helfin and Dr. Nancy Brown on Free Trainings Offered for CERT |   |   | Not started | Unknown  | City Manager/Council Liaison/Police | Staff time to dedicate | Staff time                     | Low             | <p>Dr Nancy Brown is leading our county's emergency response department. Her department received a grant and started running CERT trainings, the first being in Petaluma last Fall. Her thoughts are that all cities could encourage folks to become CERTS so that they could be deployed throughout the county when needs arise. This way no one city has to spend time on trainings, managing certifications and incurring perceived liabilities. Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) For training purposes and emergency response: Purchasing and installing two 50-watt GMRS base stations inside the Sebastopol police station, one for use of the police department and the other to allow SNCU net control volunteers to communicate with radios throughout the City. Budget:</p> <p>Two 50-watt GMRS base stations \$210 x 2 \$420<br/> Two AC/DC regulated power supplies \$140 x 2 \$280<br/> Two external mast-mounted antennas, plus cable and fittings, estimated \$2,000<br/> Total \$2,700</p> <p>We will also ask for a working space within the Police Department, perhaps some counter space in the room now used for forensics.</p> |

This agenda item represents consistency with the City General Plan as follows:

*Action CSF 5g: Continue to support and implement community education and training regarding fire prevention and emergency preparedness, including outreach to local schools and maintenance of the CERT program.*

*Goal SA 3: Protect the Safety of Life and Property by Ensuring Emergency Preparedness*

*Policy SA 3-2: Continue to cooperate with Sonoma County's Emergency Preparedness Plan.*

*Policy SA 3-6: Support and encourage community awareness of local and regional disaster planning and emergency response efforts, including the Sebastopol Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) program to provide emergency response training, the Multi-Jurisdictional Local Government Hazard Mitigation Plan for the San Francisco Bay Area, Map Your Neighborhood programs, outreach to business and property owners regarding the Emergency Preparedness Plan, outreach to the community to ensure residents and business owners know where gas and electrical shut-offs are located, and other tools available to neighborhood and community groups to improve disaster preparedness.*

**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 schedule meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items.

As of the writing of this agenda item report, the City has not received public comment. If staff receives public comments following the publication and distribution of this agenda item report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting and will be posted to the city website.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact at this time beyond staff time to coordinate with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU) as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives and conduct internal departmental reviews. Any proposed funding will be reviewed by the Budget Committee and brought forward to the Council for consideration.

**RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Authorize Staff to Continue to Coordinate with Sebastopol Neighborhood Communications Unit (SNCU); as well as Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) Representatives Regarding Community-Based Emergency Communications Proposal and to gather necessary information and evaluate the feasibility of a proposed community-based emergency radio communications hub for integration into the City's emergency response planning framework.

**OPTIONS:**

1. That the City Council remove the item for discussion and provide alternate direction to staff.

**APPROVALS:**

Department Head Approval: Police Chief Approval Date: 7/16/2025

CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: 7-21-2025

The proposed action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial): Approval Date: 7-28-2025

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

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

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: 7/21/2025

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 7/22/2025