

## **PRIORITIES: IT IS ALL IMPORTANT!**

1. The Home key Award from HUD to the city of Sebastopol to establish Permanent Supportive Housing needs to be placed on the legal/contractual obligations list.
  - All other awards were given to larger cities or counties with a fully staffed Housing Authority.
  - It is clear from statements made by our city manager that we don't have staff or expertise to oversee this project, and the city cannot defer its accountability to a consultant.
  - The city needs to have a solid plan for how it is going to address these shortcomings. The consequences of mismanaging these projects are substantial legal costs and a public relations nightmare.
2. Resolving the homelessness issues was top of mind for citizens responding to the survey even though it was not included as a survey question regarding priority.
  - We now have a growing population that has established permanent residence in our parks, on our streets and surrounding our public spaces.
  - We have human waste in our parks. We have waste discharged into our sewers and into the Laguna.
  - We have citizens that are afraid to walk into town. Students are increasingly being driven to school to ensure safety.
  - Reopening Elderberry Commons means 30 more recently homeless individuals entering into a treatment options living situation. Recent articles in the PD document rampant drug use in these homekey facilities. What is the city's plan and staffing resources to make sure there are no negative impacts on the community. How is the city going to address increases in drug sales and associated crime? Elderberry was originally promised to be elderly that were vulnerable to COVID. Now it is not. What is the plan?
  - There needs to be a combined task force that includes representatives from Sebastopol, the County and several agencies in the County that make decisions on who gets what services and resources.
  - Homelessness is not an issue that Sebastopol can solve; the county needs to take an active role in developing solutions that address our problems. This was promised by Barbie Robinson and Supervisor Hopkins during the Elderberry commons call in response to public comments about our homeless crisis. Both claimed they were unaware Sebastopol had homeless people but would provide resources to assist. None have been forthcoming. It is not clear anyone ever followed up and asked for help. Let's ask for help. This city cannot host the highest concentration of homeless in the county and

grow tourism, attract new retail businesses to fill vacancies and be an attractive destination for visitors.

3. Water and Wastewater infrastructure needs to be on the immediate priority list.
  - Water and Wastewater Enterprises need to be addressed separately from all the other city business by the council. You collect revenue from rate payers to cover the cost of providing oversight, yet little oversight is provided.
  - It was stated repeatedly that the justification for raising rates was to address our neglected and aging infrastructure yet there will be no water plan until the end of 2025 and the sewer plan is just an idea.
  - Both need to be immediate priorities. The city is collecting \$1.7MM from rate payers to pay for city staff time.
  - There are literally no objectives in the department budgets related to water and sewer. There are no immediate priorities listed here.
  - 1/3 of the current rate increase is to pay back loans that became necessary because the prior city manager did not prioritize water and sewer, and the council let him get away with this.
  - If rate payers are paying for staff time, then that time should be sacred and reflected in immediate goals and objectives. If it is not a priority, then give back the money to the rate payers.
4. Economic Development needs to be on the top of the list.
  - You can't continue to kick this issue down the road as you have for more than two years. The situation is not getting better. Sales tax revenues are not fixing themselves. Raising taxes on a declining revenue base is a losing strategy. Putting off prioritizing this for 2 more years is unacceptable.
  - The city council needs to reach out to the Chamber, local commercial landlords and business owners and nonprofits such as the Senior Center, Community Center and Rotary to initiate a volunteer effort, perhaps led by a Council member with the goal of initiating both simple projects like holiday lighting competitions or cleaning the streets, to bigger issues like making the cities more attractive to new businesses.
5. Final resolution of the litigation regarding the parking ordinance also needs to be a high priority for the city council and the city staff.
  - It has wasted taxpayer money.
  - Any Appeal will continue to bleed our resources needed to resolve the financial crisis and start rebuilding our infrastructure.

- We should not be fighting this alone; the county and the league of cities should be aligned with us and offer deep pockets to balance the threat of the ACLU.
6. Compensation and Classification Study needs to be scoped to get to the question of why Sebastopol pays more per citizen for government than other similar cities nearby.
- In 2021-22 and FY 22-23 we had double digit increases in Salaries and Benefits. This was the beginning of our increasing budget deficits.
  - If we gave substantial raises or benefit increases after COVID then why are salary negotiations still ongoing? I suspect the union representative attending our meetings and praising our council members has something to do with it.
  - We really need a solid study of the work that is being done, needs to be done and potentially does not need to be done in an attempt to get the cost of government back in line with tax revenues.
  - Recently a trend has developed to use consultants to do heavy lifting. We are fully staffed and pay pretty good salaries, are we not hiring experienced people who can handle projects like transitioning to a new waste provider?
7. Fire Consolidation is also a high priority. This is a really big deal for the citizens of Sebastopol.
- First it has to go well. We should be tracking and reporting response times and issues with the new organization as it rolls out.
  - Second, there needs to be a careful study of the proposed costs to city residents.
  - Citizens are already paying for fire service with local taxes. More will come from the fire sales tax.
  - Property owners are then going to have to accept a \$260 parcel tax.
  - All good except the county residents literally across the street with the same fire protection will not have to pay the city cost contribution to the consolidated fire service. Why should Sebastopol pay more for the same service?
  - Colantuono, Highsmith and Whately, PC stated it was their role to advocate for small cities with the County and the State when certain requirements made no sense. Is Redwood devising a plan to advocate for the city on the mandates for the city to maintain certain spending levels to get measure M funds?

- Transparency. This issue has not come before even the limited public that attends each council meeting. There has been no recent attempt to reach or to the city.
8. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN – Four years ago we experienced what could have been a catastrophic situation when the County announced fire evacuations orders for Sebastopol and much of the West County.
- PG&E power outages took out the traffic lights and cell service. The gridlock was extreme, and it took hours to get out of the city.
  - Police from outside areas blocked off popular ways to bypass Sebastopol such as Occidental Road.
  - All this was unnecessary.
  - CALTRANS has been offering backup batteries for traffic lights for 10 years. I guess no one in Sebastopol asked.
  - We have many alternative routes out of West County that don't involve Sebastopol, but someone needs to designate the routes, inform residents of the plan and make sure when intersections are manned by Police from out of the area, that they have been informed of the evacuation plan as well.
  - This is basic stuff. I have been asking for it for four years and it never gets to be a priority.
9. Many of the priorities and the initiatives that are on hold are focused on improving the operation of the city. This is laudable but they need to be balanced by tangible improvements to the services the citizens prioritized in the recent survey.
- Where are roads and traffic, city response to floods, wildfires and natural disasters, addressing city finances (beyond the hope for a tax increase), maintaining parks, trails, bike lanes, city pool, youth recreation projects?
10. It is probably time to look at actual serious crimes in the city and do something about it.
- First crime data reported to the FBI by the Sebastopol Police show violent crime and property crime increases for each of the last three years. Currently we have the highest rates of any city in the county. A realistic analysis of the source of these crimes needs to be completed and a plan prepared to reduce these levels. The city claims to be the safest in the state. Lets try and at least be the safest in the county.
  - The ST article about a policewoman checking on the homeless daily seems inefficient. But I suspect a fair amount of crime in the city is directly related to the homeless. A police officer can assess the risk each homeless person is to the community and keeping track of what they are doing sends a message. It also offers opportunities to head off potential issues. These people are not

criminal masterminds. I would guess they telegraph their criminal intentions pretty often.

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11. SAFE looks like an idea but it needs to be determined if we are using the already existing County resources effectively. I don't favor less funding for police to pay for SAFE. There are millions of dollars of unclaimed money for mental health services to the homeless and we should be using those moneys if the city council want Sebastopol to be a destination for homeless, with drug addiction and mental illness.

- The Sonoma County Mobile Response Team is already available to us. How many times were they called in the last 6 months? Did they respond and did they help with the situation? Is there a demand for a full-time SAFE presence? Is that demand primarily driven by homeless people?
- Will SAFE assess criminal risks and address them or do they just enable drug users with clean needles? If the homeless refuse treatment and medication, then what is the role of SAFE?

12. A management review of administrative services needs to address the issues leading to \$1MM being stolen from the city.

- How have hundreds of thousands of dollars of Flood money sit unused?
- How can we lose track of over a million dollars in COVID relief money without spending it in a timely fashion.
- We have a financial crisis in part because of the mismanagement of the money we received.

#### **NOT A PRIORITY**

1. RFP for Public Communications Contract – the problem is not lack of communications it is the city council that is deaf to the voices in the community.

2. Library video surveillance is a can of worms.

- Is it necessary to use city time to debate this? It is a county issue. Why is the library always on our lists and agenda.
- The library is a county issue!

3. The ABAG Priority Development Grant needs to be discussed publicly before the city spends time on an RFP.

- It is not clear that residential development along 116 is a solution to any of our city's financial problems and will contribute to traffic, noise and crowding. Without some plan to mitigate those effects there should be no grant application.
- Sustainable transportation grant should similarly be discussed publicly.

- The sudden CALTRANS project to create new bike lanes that eliminated traffic lanes and parking along 116 has had terrible impacts on residents sitting in traffic and restaurants like FLAVORS staying in business without street parking. It is literally against the law to make turns onto Ellis and Dufanc given the new lane markings.
- No public input leads to consequences. This initiative was apparently discussed behind closed doors.

## **SOME ITEMS THAT SHOULD JUST BE DONE AND NOT ANGUISHED ABOUT**

1. EIFD – should take limited staff time, my recollection is that the ad-hoc committed to carrying the load until the plan is further fleshed out.
2. Put together a plan to keep downtown clean and attractive to visitors and new businesses. If Public works can not maintain it then organize volunteers. Maybe convert a Public Works FTE to a volunteer coordinator position in Community Development.
  - There are citizens in the city with power washers, and contractors that might volunteer some time on a couple of weekends.
  - Downtown is about 3 blocks long. Not a big project if you get some volunteers.
  - Look to Community Center, Senior Center and the Chamber of Commerce and ROTARY and Kiwanis to lead the effort and get their members involved.
  - We have a Master Gardeners Chapter that could take on the landscaping in the square and perhaps some planters on the main streets.
3. Dante either collects for commercial water distribution to trucking companies or he does not.
  - He has said both at different times.
  - He is leaving and we need to figure out how to collect dollars.
4. Police foot presence downtown.
  - It might be enough to just have officers park in a visible location like in front of the SMOG check station while they do paperwork or walk over to get some coffee.
  - Even parking one of the half a dozen unused police vehicles around town daily might help.
  - Doesn't need a big meeting to discuss, just do it.
5. Plan to make Sebastopol festive for the holidays at the end of 2025
  - The Chamber can coordinate with businesses.
  - Rotary to set up a holiday light competition.
  - Senior and Community Centers could host events.
  - Occidental Choir usually comes to town without any fanfare.
  - Now is the time to get started. Doesn't require city staff time. Enlist our non-profits to help.

6. Quarterly reports on water and sewer infrastructure.
  - Reports should include revenues and expenditure per plan, any issues with infrastructure requiring immediate repair, status of ongoing capital improvement projects, a report on water quality and any issues with the wells and a report on how much staff time has been devoted to the water and sewer operation.
7. Ask Climate Action Committee to propose a new alignment with the city where they are independent and can bring issues to the City Council when they are relevant to the city. They can have freedom to pursue influence wherever else they want.
8. Task DRB and Planning Commission to develop a plan to streamline the planning process and reduce the cost to the city and to developers while encouraging more development that is appropriate for the city.
  - They should bring the proposal to city council and staff with limited staff time in the interim. If a council member wants to participate, so much the better!