

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Date: 13 June 2025

Dear Mayor and Members of the Sebastopol City Council

I submit this letter, in my personal capacity in support of the *2nd Annual Report of the City of Sebastopol's Ad Hoc New Library Building (FY 2024-2025)* and the recommendations submitted as a part of Agenda Item

### **BUILDING THE COMMONS**

#### **Introduction:**

A key community planning goal is to foster healthy communities by creating environments that support well-being, equity, and sustainability. This involves integrating health considerations into all planning processes, prioritizing the needs of residents, and promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities.

A healthy community is characterized by several key elements, including access to quality healthcare, safe and healthy environments, opportunities for education and employment, and strong social connections. These elements contribute to the overall well-being of residents and foster a sense of community, belonging, and social trust

Public spaces, *by themselves*, do not make a healthy community.

Physical infrastructures by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, social trust, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework. .<sup>1</sup>

In essence, buildings are tools that can facilitate positive change within a community, but they must be supported by broader strategies and initiatives to address the root causes of problems and promote genuine well-being.

**A. Social Trust:** One element of a healthy community social trust which refers to the belief that most people can be trusted and will act with honesty, integrity, and reliability.

It's a general expectation of good behavior from others, even strangers, and is often contrasted with particularized trust which is specific to individual relationships.

Social trust is a cornerstone of functioning societies, contributing to cooperation, social order, and various societal benefits

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<sup>1</sup> See, The Charter for the New Urbanism (2024) at <https://www.cnu.org/who-we-are/charter-new-urbanism>

The Aspen Institute, as part of its Weave: *Weave: The Social Fabric Project* <sup>2</sup> developed a trust index which rates communities the elements needed to achieve social trust:

**Trusting Behavior** - whether people take action to support the community. Annual surveys and census data ask if people are involved in local groups and clubs, from religious to civic to social. A neighborhood's score includes whether people volunteer or donate to local causes, attend community events, and vote in local elections. The brighter the color, the stronger the trusting behaviors in that place.

**Trusting Intentions** - whether people feel good about the community. Annual surveys and social media data indicate if people feel trusted and are following organizations, news, and events where they live. A neighborhood's score also captures how often social posts in the area express care for others and the community. The brighter the color, the stronger the trusting intentions in that place.

**Trusting Spaces** - whether people have places to connect. A neighborhood is rated on the number of places that allow people to engage with others, from public parks and gardens to houses of faith, barbershops and salons. From coffee shops and bars to rec centers and libraries. The brighter the color, the more trusting spaces are available in that community. A neighborhood is rated on the number of places that allow people to engage with others, from public parks and gardens to houses of faith, barbershops and salons. From coffee shops and bars to rec centers and libraries. The brighter the color, the more trusting spaces are available in that community.

How does Sebastopol rate **Trusting Behaviors: 33 out of 100**; **Trusting Intentions: 60 out of 100**; and **Trusting Spaces: 98 out of 100**

Our public spaces are not having as much of an impact on our community's perception of social trust as they may be capable of.

An approach to planning which considers broader strategies and initiatives to address the root causes of the problems our community faces and promotes genuine community well-being may improve our ratings.

**B. Meaningful Community Engagement:** Community planning cannot be all things for all people. It's a complex field that aims to address a wide range of needs and priorities, but it's impossible to perfectly satisfy everyone's interests.

A successful community planning process seeks to create a balanced and equitable system that benefits the community as a whole, while acknowledging and addressing the needs of diverse groups

Effective, meaningful, community planning requires directly addressing social, economic, and environmental factors in an integrated way.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://weavers.org>

Buildings are merely a component of a larger framework which supports the planning process.

I believe that a broad-based community approach, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals, is essential to reestablishing the relationship between our public spaces and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.

Successful community planning citizen participation and collaborative decision-making, strives to ensure that the needs and perspectives of residents are reflected in the development process for a new library locatin.

A holistic approach to community planning considers the interconnectedness of different aspects of a community and their impact on each other. It involves working with various stakeholders, including community members, government agencies, and private organizations, to create a shared vision and set goals for the future of the community.

Such an approach aims to address challenges and opportunities in a comprehensive manner, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.

Effective community planning is an inherently interdisciplinary and iterative process. The City of Sebastopol must continually work with practitioners and stakeholders to determine how to develop their community in a manner that reconciles ecological, socio-cultural, and economic objectives. The consideration, or attainment, of these three objectives in concert is often referred to as 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development'.

**C. Platforms for Social Trust:** By way of example, one of the potential anchors identified in the Sebastopol Commons network is the Sebastopol Regional Library.

Our local library is uniquely well-positioned to generate social capital within tour community.

As meeting places, community hub, and site of learning and exchange, it exists as platform for social cooperation and integration, bringing the community together in a time of increased polarization and division

By paying attention to the social relationships and networks of the community members who visit the library we can develop, within library settings and its environs, a building where programs, interactions, and partnerships lay a foundation for an expanded radius of trust.

Integrating the planning of a new library building into tour community assets and needs can help the council fulfill the city's goals and build confidence and trust into our community.

The same could be said for our other community anchors in their use of our public spaces.

**Conclusion:** Siloed planning and silo mentality, where agencies and people work in isolation without sharing information or coordinating, can result in significantly harm to the community.

It leads to inefficiencies, increased costs, and a fragmented organizational structure, hindering collaboration, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

Poor community planning can have a wide range of negative impacts, affecting residents' quality of life, environment, health, and overall well-being.

Addressing these issues requires careful planning, sustainable development practices, and a commitment to creating communities that are inclusive, resilient, and environmentally responsible.

I believe that by weaving the city's infrastructure assets, both hard and soft, together through the meaningful engagement of our community, its service providers, and its stakeholders into a plan for the collective use and sharing of our community's assets.

In turn, we can increase the levels of our community's level of satisfaction and lead to the experience of Sebastopol as a healthy and trusting community.

I urge your vote in favor of the recommendations set forth in Agenda Item: 14.

You may reach me at [fendbarth@outlook.com](mailto:fendbarth@outlook.com) if you have any questions or comments.

Thank you for your service.

Yours sincerely,

Fred Engbarth