

Dear Council Members and Staff,

I'm writing in regard to last Council Meeting. Council should immediately approve the transfer \$40,000 from WCCS to the Sebastopol Police Department for training our officers in how to address the needs of Sebastopol's ever increasing homeless population.

The police station is staffed 24/7, on holidays and are the people who receive THE MOST calls regarding homeless individuals and thus should be trained accordingly. The police have THE MOST contact with Sebastopol's homeless population and thus should be trained accordingly. It is better for homeless people if the Sebastopol Police Department has MORE KNOWLEDGE on how to help them because homeless people have most of their interactions with the police department.

WCCS is not even present 20 hours per week. If they have less than 20 hours, this is an extremely limited amount of contact with Sebastopol's homeless population.

Sebastopol has a huge homeless problem compared with a similar sized city like Cloverdale. Sebastopol has over 100 homeless people Cloverdale has less than 10.

Read this public comment:

https://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Sebastopol-Generous-With-Homeless_High-cost-to-Taxpayers.pdf

In addition, the Council should immediately approve a position in the Police Department. The Police Department has been historically understaffed and is now even more understaffed because of the huge uptick in calls from Elderberry Commons.

Public Safety is Sebastopol residents' number one concern. Police Staffing is based on data and how much the police are needed. Council must staff the Police Department in accordance with data otherwise our Police Department will not have the coverage it needs to responsibly provide public safety. When a Department is understaffed, it leads to burn out and stressed out officers. It makes our Police Department an unattractive place to work. It is bad for our community.

The analysis of our police department by Jerry Threet, the civil rights attorney, indicated the department's sole weakness was understaffing.

Now the Police Department has a significant call increase due to Lynda Hopkin's County Project – Elderberry Commons – which threatens the public safety of our community due to understaffing.

Currently, Sebastopol spends less than 40% of its budget on the Police Department. This is not sustainable. As crime increases, an ever-increasing percentage of the City budget will be taken up by the Police Department by necessity.

Due to extremely poor decision making by previous Councils and their support of HomeKey projects, Sebastopol will see an increase in calls to the police. When Council signed up for Homekey, they also signed up to hire more Police Officers. Homekey and an increase in police service are part of the same package. Citizens pointed out to the Council that Homekey was not a good fit for Sebastopol because of the increased need for services but Council chose to support these projects despite citizen protest. Now, Council has to fund more police officers. The wider community should not be put in jeopardy because Council made bad decisions. If Council wanted Homekey in town, then they need to commit more funding and more position in the Police Department. When Gravenstein Commons opens, the City might need to use 60-70% of the budget on Police Staffing.

Poor and misguided decisions by past Councils have a huge economic impact on our City. Yet, current Council must safeguard public safety and commit to adequately funding our Police Department. Current Council must live with the mistakes of the former Council and must commit to fund the Sebastopol Police Department.

I urge you to give our Police Department more training on how to meet the needs of the homeless and to increase funding for our Police Department using data and best practices for quality police staffing.

Best,
Kate Haug