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(Title for Identification Purposes Only)

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Sebastopol, CA 95472
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June 16, 2025

Re: City Council Meeting of June 17, 2025
Agenda Item # 14
Public Comment

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council Members, and Staff:

Thank you for your public service. I appreciate your efforts as you face a challenging and long agenda on June 17th, including next year's Budget.

Thank you for this opportunity to report to you on the past year's work of the "Library Ad Hoc Committee." The Committee recognizes that its Report is long and remains hopeful that you will nonetheless read it and save it as a resource.

The Committee concludes its term with its focus on our community's needs for improved facilities, shared resources, and economic and cultural vitality. I urge you to adopt the recommendations in the Report and to create a new expanded Committee dedicated to "Building The Commons" to address these needs.

The Commons is at once an intellectual concept and a physical space. It concerns those elements that we often refer to simply as "community," the shared values that connect us and generate a strong sense of belonging [think of our experiences of "Peacetown"]. It refers to the cultural and natural resources that are accessible to all members and are managed for individual and collective benefit [think of contemplating the art at the Sculpture Garden in Ives Park]. It encompasses shared resources and assets, like knowledge and information [think of entering our lively Branch Library or working on a project at Chimera]. It can be a public space [think of Sebastopol's main intersection where citizens regularly express their political views] and a privately held property [think of St. Stephens' Playground with the Playground Cafe where all ages and faiths are welcome to gather]. OR it could be a newly networked area, uniting important buildings through pathways, signage, street fixtures, and more. Maybe it's a new building or buildings that house the Library and Senior Center as anchor tenants.

The community's needs and the accompanying struggles that they present are clear, as evidenced by the Council's and the SCMCA's recent discussions and goal-setting. It has long been recognized that our Branch Library is inadequate for its patronage. The Senior Center has recently asked you for guidance on its space crisis. The revitalized CBO Council, attended by members of this Committee, have discussed the pressures felt in our various non-profits. Our downtown core and northern shopping district have vacancies, some long-term, that downgrade our appearance and success. **Now is the time to get out of the many silos, unite, and work together in a collaborative way to find our mutual strength in solutions.**

Regardless of the current economic scene, **the Committee is excited to continue its investigation of funding sources for the work ahead: from the likely necessary feasibility study to final build-out of the dream.** The sales tax measure and property tax that fund the regional library system bring in an estimated \$43 million/year, per the last Grand Jury Report, with a stockpiling reserve. The Library Administration has discretionary authority up to \$75,000. The Library Foundation, which manages capital campaigns, is looking to Sebastopol as an exemplar. The Senior Center has a strong fund base. Private businesses could be interested, as shown in our Sister City's Library.

The Committee requests additional members: another Council Member to join Mayor Zollman for the next year; representatives from relevant community sectors; and City Staff, as deemed appropriate and available. As Sebastopol's representative on the Citizens' Oversight Committee for Measure Y, I am willing to continue to serve. I believe Sebastopol's Library Commissioner Fred Engbarth is too. **The request is to create a "blue ribbon" committee that will generate community interest and support while re-building trust and confidence in the Council and Staff.**

Two minutes isn't enough time to convey the breadth of the Committee's work and the depth of our interest and passion for our recommendations. **I hope this letter engages you with my key points.**

Respectfully,

Sarah Glade Gurney