

Sebastopol Department of Health Services Q and A

Sonoma County Department of Health Services Director – Nolan Sullivan has been asked to come speak with the Sebastopol City Council on August 5, 2025. In advance of that meeting the council received several comments and questions from community members they requested Director Sullivan address.

- **How can the County and the city work together to reduce the burden of the homeless on Sebastopol's budget and quality of life.**

This is a great question and the reason we are attending the council meeting. Homelessness, as we'll hear in the presentation, is a complicated issue to address when no *one* entity is ultimately responsible. If you think about services like police, fire or ambulance response, there are very clear lines of responsibility, contracts or jurisdictions that guide who does what. With homelessness, the city, county, state and even federal government all have a part to play. The goal today is to start discussions on partnerships, shared resources and ways we can work together to address Sebastopol and the entire county's homeless problem.

- **How do you think about Sebastopol and the homeless in West County. Is it one population and the County should shoulder responsibility for Sebastopol or do you feel Sebastopol has to fund its own homeless workers.**

There is no specific mandate or law for the city or County to hold responsibility for homelessness. Generally, past practice has been the County has addressed homelessness in the unincorporated areas and the cities (with some partnerships periodically from the County) were responsible for the incorporated. I think partnerships comprising the city, County and non-profit community always work best, and we are very open to building those new partnerships and sharing resources. Ultimately, whatever partnerships or resource sharing is proposed, the City Council and Board of Supervisors, depending on the issue, will have final approval.

- **Who is spending Sebastopol's Measure O money and on what?**

Measure O, in most cases to date, is used for direct services or contracts, not direct contributions to cities. The measure, passed in 2020 by statute, has very rigid restrictions on how the money can be spent, what categories it can be spent on and percentages of contributions. Voters approved that the funding is spent as follows:

1. Behavioral Health Facilities 22%
2. Emergency Psychiatric and Crisis Services 44%
3. Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Outpatient Services 18%
4. Behavioral Health Homeless and Care Coordination 14%
5. Transitional and Permanent Supportive Housing 2%

Proceeds from Measure O are spent annually on a variety of services, facilities contracts and employees that benefit the entire county. A full annual report of all expenditures is published every year. Expenditures are also reviewed by an independent oversight committee whose meetings are open to the public.

You can find the 23/24 Annual Report here:

<https://sonomacounty.gov/health-and-human-services/health-services/divisions/behavioral-health/about-us/measure-o/reports>

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- **Can you provide more details? How many of these calls were for the homeless vs other residents. What is the range of response times to Sebastopol. Were there really 278 calls? Who called? MST is the best kept secret in Sebastopol.**

Including MST in the council presentation is intentional as we'd like MST to be widely known and utilized. We are also in the process of overhauling the county's three separate Mobile Crisis systems (InRESPONSE, SAFE and MST) into one more collaborative and better coordinated system. This includes reviewing response times, service standards and better coordination with local law enforcement and first responders. There is a full presentation coming to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on August 26, 2025 that will detail many of the responses requested in your question above. We'd be happy to come do this same presentation for the Sebastopol City Council at a later date if requested by council.

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- **How can the county take that role in the city of Sebastopol. We have been paying a single outreach coordinator who has not gotten anyone into housing.**

One of the reasons we are here today is to discuss future collaboration and potential resource sharing. Getting unhoused residents into permanent housing can be very difficult as there is a severe shortage of affordable housing, permanent supportive housing and even market-rate housing across the county (a nationwide issue).

As a collaborative group, with the county, cities and local nonprofits, we have been making progress. Sonoma County's Homeless Point in Time Count back in 2011 was just under 4,600. As of today, the count is just over 1,900. That reflects a more than 50% reduction in homelessness over the last 15 years. This was accomplished primarily through the creation of housing units — like Elderberry, and others that are affordable, voucher-based or supportive. Last year, the COC was able to produce 402 new units of housing inventory. We get more people into housing when we produce more units.

- **How can the County help get the unhoused in Sebastopol prioritized with the continuum of care?**

The primary referral mechanism is the Coordinated Entry System and individuals are prioritized based on vulnerability. The operator of Coordinated Entry is Home First. For permanent supportive housing, folks are referred to housing sites based on vulnerability to any PSH site in the county when an opening occurs. That means homeless residents across the county are ranked in order of their personal vulnerability, i.e., the most vulnerable — medically fragile, mentally ill, elderly, disabled, victims of crimes or domestic violence, etc. — get housing first. Unfortunately, there is far less housing inventory available than there are homeless residents needing shelter. This also results in a lot of residents with less vulnerability having to wait longer for units.

***Some housing projects are not required to use Coordinated Entry (such as HUD-VASH vouchers and low-income affordable housing projects).*

- **What criteria are used to place individuals in Permanent Supportive Housing?**

Generally, funding entry into permanent supportive housing in Sonoma County has been done through Coordinated Entry, with the most vulnerable residents being placed further up the list. See above response. This is / was a requirement of the funding to procure these

housing units by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and, in some cases, the State of California. All individuals placed into permanent supportive housing must have a verified disability as well as at least one year of having experienced homelessness.

- **Does the county consider drug and alcohol-free sites for parents with children?**

Under current state and federal housing guidelines and the practice commonly known as “housing first,” sobriety and drug testing generally cannot be barriers to housing. This is and was a general requirement to receive state and federal funding to build, procure and rent housing sites. Sites can place restrictions on residents in terms of usage, smoking indoors, public intoxication and other items you would find in common residential leases. This can make designing sites that are entirely alcohol and drug free very complicated. However, this is something we’d like to start exploring as the latest PIT count shows a significant need for family housing.

- **Parents at Elderberry have reported that they were told this would be a family friendly spot. Obviously with a working prostitute placed between two families with a child there is not a lot of forethought. What is the County doing about this?**

The County is working with the city, property manager and non-profit partners to support individual tenants in the various units. In some cases, that means providing mental health or substance use support; in other cases, that may be domestic violence or human trafficking support through law enforcement; in yet other cases, that may be helping the property manager hold residents accountable to the rules of their lease. The County has been actively partnering and working on individual resident issues for the last two months. Please feel free to refer any parents or residents with needs to the County.

- **What is the County thinking about putting recovering addicts somewhere where their recovery can be successful?**

The County is looking to develop new pathways into sober living environments as part of the shift from Proposition 1 to BHSA and some overhauling of the County’s homeless programs. This can be difficult with legacy “housing first” requirements for funding, but the County has some ideas for County-owned shelters in this respect.

- **What is your policy on putting parents with children in a family-friendly environment.**

It’s important to understand that no one is “put” into any unit or environment. They are offered a choice to accept what is available. Ideally, we would have enough resources and

housing to provide safe, stable and high-quality options for all, but that is unfortunately not the case. In the future, counties and cities can and should be more intentional about public supportive housing projects and there are strategies and ways to work through existing “housing first” guidelines to build more intentional projects. We are working through the COC on policy guides for cities, best practices and new partnerships with public housing providers to do a better job in Sonoma County.

- **With the closing of nearly all Group Homes in Sonoma County, many older foster children are now homeless. What is the county policy on putting unaccompanied youth in a safe permanent supportive home environment.**

Unaccompanied youth (children under 18 without guardians) are typically not eligible for permanent housing due to not being adults. Transition-age youth ages 18–24 are eligible and are referred through Coordinated Entry. The Human Services Department offers services for youth under 18.

- **Your presentation shows \$208.7MM in dollars received by the county to fund homeless services. This is \$110,000 per homeless person in the county in a single year. Fundamentally here are 1,100 unhoused homeless according to the 2024 Point in Time Count and about 800 who are housed.**

This is not the total received, but an estimate of the combined total amount spent by the County, cities, Santa Rosa Housing Authority, Sonoma County Housing Authority and Continuum of Care in FY23/24.

This study and slide produced last month by the group - HomeFirst is trying to answer that exact question. Because no one agency oversees housing, homelessness or rental support, it can be very difficult to look at everything holistically.

- **How many places do you have for the homeless and why don't you have enough to house the population we have?**

Sonoma County's rental vacancy rate is very low, with some reports indicating rates below 1.5%. This low vacancy rate contributes to the county's high rental costs and housing instability, especially for lower-income families. This makes permanently housing homeless residents very difficult as there is essentially nowhere to place them.

- **Why is it so hard to provide sufficient housing for this relatively small population. Where does the money actually go if not for the homeless?**

See several responses above.

See slide 10 for where funding goes.

- **What is the county's definition of "permanent".?**

The County and cities generally must abide by the definitions of the funders that build or procure the projects. In most cases, that is HUD. To receive HUD funding, we have to follow their rules and their definitions. In some cases, the State of California also has its own definitions for items in the housing space. Elderberry, which had some HUD funding (federal) and some Project Homekey funding (state), had to abide by both.

You can find information on HUD's definitions here:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-program-components/permanent-housing/permanent-supportive-housing/>

You can find information on Project HomeKey here:

<https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/homekey>

- **What are you doing to streamline the COE process. What is the County standard for waiting times in the COE process?**

The issue really is a housing supply issue. We do not have adequate low-income or voucher-based housing inventory in Sonoma County (nationwide issue) and, unfortunately, that leads to significant wait times. As stated above, the County, through partnerships with cities, the COC and local non-profits, was able to add a record 401 units of various low-income housing types last year. This was an anomaly and much of this was produced because of pandemic-related one-time funding. It is a supply and demand issue.

- **Why not create a safe camping area with wrap-around services and security to minimize the risk of wildfire and potentially help more people?**

That is a good suggestion and one that could be considered by local city and County officials. Unfortunately, one major constraint is budget. Safe Camp sites can be expensive when you factor in waste removal, restrooms, maintenance, legal liability and security. But maybe worth exploring.

- **Why not expand the efforts there with tiny homes, at a much lower cost than buying Hotels?**

The County is actively considering an expansion or at least upgrade to the current Eliza's Village Shelter at this site. We are currently housing 50 individuals with the capacity to expand to 100. We'd like to double that capacity and add more substance use, mental health and life skill services.

- **Letter #1**

Pulled from letter. Items the author would like to see:

- 1) A HEART team member stationed at the Sebastopol Police Station paid for by the County which has over \$208,700,000 in funding.**

This is a possibility, and something being considered. Would require council and board approval.

- 2) A mobile response team dedicated to Sebastopol 24/7.**

Mobile Crisis Response is being rolled out across the county 24/7. We are happy to work with the city and police department on refining and bettering this service to meet the city's needs as this rollout continues.

- 3) Measure O money that matches our homeless population. Why did Windsor receive \$1,500,000 in 2024 Measure O money when they only have 26 homeless people and Sebastopol only receive \$446,900 when Sebastopol has 108 homeless people (4x the amount in Windsor)?**

Measure O is not just for homelessness; in fact, most of it is for Mental Health and Substance Use. For context, see some of the earlier questions on Measure O and how it is spent. It may be beneficial for a larger Measure O study session to be presented at the council at a later date.

There is a \$10,000,000 Measure O Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) that will be released in the next several weeks that the city, non-profits that serve the city or others could apply for as long as they meet the criteria of what Measure O is required to be spent on. We will make sure the city is notified when the NOFA launches.

- 4) Measure O money in the Sebastopol budget to help train our Police Officers and provide assistance to Sebastopol's Police Officers as they have the most consistent contact with the homeless population.**

See above response about the upcoming Measure O NOFA. This could potentially also be done for low- to no-cost through partnerships with SPD and Homeless or Behavioral Health County teams on approval of council, board or both.

5) I would like to see the County assign \$700,000 to Sebastopol to our general fund to pay for additional Police Staffing.

This is most likely not possible under current Measure O guidelines. We are open to exploring other partnerships or ways to support SPD.

- **6) I would like to know how Homekey projects will be funded with the 2026 Federal Budget. It appears that Trump is eliminating Project Based Vouchers, which fund Homekey rooms. How will Homekey be funded if there is no Federal money. If the County loses Project Based Vouchers, what will happen to residents in Homekey Hotels and is the County prepared economically to continue providing housing indefinitely regardless of Federal Funding?**

This is unknown and cuts or adjustments could be minor to far reaching. Housing and homelessness are not just the County's responsibility; it is also incumbent on the state and cities to provide these services. The state budget is also currently under significant duress and much of HomeKey was state funded not federal. We are keeping a close eye on reductions at both the state and federal level. What is clear is that resources will be reduced, and we need to work together more than ever to preserve many of the positive gains we have made as a community around housing, homelessness and mental health.

- **Letter #2**

Pulled from letter. Items the author would like to see:

Issue 1. – How many homeless are in Sebastopol?

Overall, the count between 2024 to 2025 appears to have been reduced by almost 600 countywide. It is the lowest point in time count in the county in close to a decade. It is over half the countywide PIT count from 2011. This is great progress.

This doesn't mean that progress is felt universally, and we still have 1,900 too many people living on our streets and in emergency shelters. We have a lot of work to do still. While the unofficial count for the City of Sebastopol in 2025 was overall 16, homelessness is migratory, and we saw growth in West County unincorporated. As PIT

count technology begins to use advanced mapping, homeless residents who are regularly visible in a city, or are camping just outside city limits, will not show up in that city's count. We would suspect that, like many of Sonoma County cities, numbers in the incorporated areas can appear lower because of counts in the unincorporated areas just outside city limits, on special easements or in areas that are not considered incorporated.

Issue 2: Measure O spending directed into Sebastopol.

County View: According to the presentation the city is receiving hundreds of thousands in measure O dollars each year.

By statute, Measure O cannot be passed onto another entity's general fund unless it is to support programming explicitly created to meet the voter-approved requirements of Measure O. For example, the City of Santa Rosa runs its own Mobile Crisis Team – InRESPONSE. The county has paid matching funds to the City of Santa Rosa in the millions of dollars to support their city team that is embedded in their police department. These dollars can only go to mental health staffing, systems and materials that provide those services, not the general police budget.

In most cases, you would not see Measure O in city budgets unless they met programming in that city that contained:

- Behavioral Health Facilities (22% spending requirement)
- Emergency Psychiatric and Crisis Services (44% spending requirement)
- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Outpatient Services 18% spending requirement)
- Behavioral Health Homeless and Care Coordination (14% spending requirement)
- Transitional and Permanent Supportive Housing (2% spending requirement)

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Issue 3: 278 MST calls in Sebastopol this year.

County view: The highly successful MST program has provided 278 service calls in Sebastopol. Seems like a significant number of calls to the smallest town in the County.

The program was significantly overhauled in January of last year to meet Medi-Cal Mobile Crisis Benefits and Mandates. It is extremely complicated to create or recreate, staff and fund a 24/7 mobile crisis program — think of an ambulance service that runs 24/7 across the county, but for mental health or substance use calls. As the system comes online, we are seeing a significant increase in calls and visibility. There is still a lot of room for improvement. This includes reviewing response times, service standards and better coordination with local law enforcement and first responders. There is a full presentation coming to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on August 26, 2025, that details many of the responses requested in your question above. We'd be happy to come do this same presentation for the Sebastopol City Council at a later date if requested by the council.

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- **Letter #3**

Pulled from letter. Items the author would like to see:

Nolan Sullivan's chart states the following concerning Measure O money given to Sebastopol:

FY 2021-2022 \$261,748

FY 2022-2023 \$324,105

FY 2023-2024 \$446,900

Where is the money or where did it go?

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on how the money can be spent, what categories it can be spent on and percentages of contributions. The voters approved that funding must be spent as follows:

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- **Letter #4**

No questions, commentary and two key points that Mr. Marks wanted considered. Thank you for your comments.