

Dear Mr Nolan and team, council and city staff,

I appreciate Mr Nolan visiting the City of Sebastopol council meeting to present your ideas for redesigning and updating the structure of the Sonoma County Homelessness Services Division.

I have followed the county continuum of care meetings and your county predecessors efforts (Dave Kiff et al) closely along with state policies and decision making since 2018, when many in the city were alarmed by the prospect of losing our only downtown hotel to a then lavishly funded 'Homekey' project in happier economic times.

(The county subsequently paid massively over market rate for the Patel's two hotel properties in Santa Rosa and city of Sebastopol, presumably they are now living a luxurious lifestyle).

You probably are aware of the dismal subsequent history of the former Sebastopol Inn at Gravenstein Commons: the DEMA fraud, Barbie Robinson's lucky escape from federal charges thanks to politically friendly Texas DA's, the 'at risk' covid era cohort of initial unhoused inhabitants thrown out so the hotel could have kitchenettes fitted and a fence installed, the subsequent county coordinated entry picks for repopulation with 'those most deserving of housing in the county' which has resulted in a massive increase in prostitution, drug dealing and crime with no former city of Sebastopol homeless housed. (I'd love to know what choice parameters were in place from your HMIS there!)

The city police, fire and public works departments currently expand around 50% of their time on 'unhoused' activities and clean up. One of the major issue our tiny city has to deal with is the large numbers of transients dwelling in unincorporated Sebastopol and the Laguna. We have seen a large increase this summer.

There are two point I would like you to digest in your role:

1: Historically the City of Sebastopol was the economic flywheel for west county until the internet era. The '*sphere of influence*' continues to be seen as the 40k or so people who live in greater (unincorporated) Sebastopol. In the past these and other locals would visit the city hub for banking/insurance, to buy food, booze, eat in restaurants etc.

That 'sphere of influence' is now inverted with the county (who consume most of our property tax) taking advantage of the city in multiple ways, most notably homeless issues, but also our senior center, swimming pool and other amenities. We now have large numbers of people visiting the city to enjoy these resources which are funded by CoS tax payers.

CoS police and emergency services deal with very busy through traffic, our roads are in terrible shape we have various drive through petty crime (because the council doesn't allow city police cameras, although they have 'wildlife' cameras around city hall, we are low hanging fruit for local villains). The city has the highest crime rate in the county.

This directly relates for your planning around Public Health Preparedness and Response and 'Collaboration with Local Jurisdictions' – opportunities for improved data sharing, service integration, and joint planning. Collaborative funding is urgently needed to cope with the various county projects exploiting CoS resources.

2: The political and funding climate has changed markedly around ways to deal with homelessness and transiency. Slide 15 in your deck states

All CoC-dedicated funds must follow a Housing First approach mandated by the State and Federal government, and all housing projects under the CoC must use Coordinated Entry for referrals.

While California still has this legal approach, the federal national approach has shifted significantly. The 'steps' model, the predecessor to the nationally adopted Tsemberis/ 'Pathways to Housing' non profit concepts that became 'HomeKey' appears to be considered to have failed.

This is significant because the City of Sebastopol council foolishly approved a second homekey project with SVdP, initiated last year in a different economic and philosophical climate. This on top of the layers of non profits the city has in place for homeless housing and outreach, vastly more than any other California city of this size.

This latest burden on the city taxpayers is extremely serious and could be the hair that breaks the camel's back financially and bankrupts the city.

Because the council chose to make the city the co signers of a SVdP project that is based on promises of various grant funds, this means is that should any of that funding not be delivered due to changing political and economic times the city is on the hook for a ruinously expensive construction project.

I therefore urge the county to refocus on what the future legal state for homeless projects look like based on changing ideologies and budget constraints.

My feeling is that the county owns an enormous amount of land and this should be used to create triaged tiny home villages for the various needs of the unhoused, which as we know run the gamut from violent predatory criminals to cognitive impaired but harmless introverts.

Wrap around services should mean people being housed in groups best suited to their needs, not least to avoid the massive problems of drug dealing, petty crime, bullying etc.

County tax payers own the former Glen Ellen mental hospital, these types of resources are desperately needed today.

Thank you for your efforts to communicate with CoS citizens and I look forward to hearing your thoughts at the council meeting.

Oliver Marks
Downtown City of Sebastopol