



## City of Sebastopol Planning Department

Date: August 11, 2026  
To: Sebastopol Planning Commission  
From: John Jay, Contract Associate Planner  
Subject: ABAG Webinar Resource: Mixed-Use Development When Ground-Floor Retail Works, and When It Doesn't

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### **Purpose**

This memo summarizes a technical assistance webinar and resource package recently published by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) addressing when ground-floor retail requirements in mixed-use zoning succeed and when they create long-term vacancies. The materials are relevant to the Commission's ongoing consideration of mixed-use and corridor zoning standards, and staff recommends the Commission review the linked resources as background for future discussions.

### **Background**

On March 11, 2026, ABAG hosted a webinar titled "Mixed-Use Development Webinar: When Ground-Floor Retail Works and When It Doesn't." The session was developed to help member cities align zoning and design standards with realistic retail market demand, rather than defaulting to blanket ground-floor commercial mandates in mixed-use districts.

The webinar featured the following speakers:

- Christine Firstenberg, President, Metrovation Retail Resources
- Ryan Call, Partner, Urban Field Studio
- Nanci Klein, former Director of Economic Development / Director of Real Estate, Office of Economic Development, City of San José

### **Key Topics Covered**

- The market and financial realities behind mixed-use development
- Why certain ground-floor retail formats struggle to succeed when paired with residential construction
- Strategies for cities to better align zoning, design standards, and corridor planning with actual, current retail demand

## **Relevance to Sebastopol**

Sebastopol's mixed-use and downtown corridor zones require ground-floor commercial space as a matter of course. Where that space sits vacant, it can undercut the walkability and economic goals the requirement was meant to serve. The resources below offer both the market rationale for reconsidering blanket requirements and concrete tools, including a waivers-and-concessions framework and a peer city's design guidelines, that the Commission could draw on if it chooses to revisit local ground-floor retail standards.

## **Supporting Resources**

ABAG has posted the following materials alongside the webinar recording:

- [Webinar recording](#)
- [Presentation slides \(PDF\)](#)
- [Retail Design Standards \(PDF\)](#)
- [City of Chicago Ground Floor Retail Design Guidelines \(PDF\)](#)
- [Ground Floor Retail Requirements: Waivers and Concessions \(PDF\)](#)
- [Full ABAG webinar page](#)