



City of Sebastopol

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: May 19, 2026**

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
Requestor: Councilmember Zollman
From: City Attorney Alex Mog
City Manager Mary Gourley
Department: City Administration
Subject: Salaries – Modification of City Council Compensation

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RECOMMENDATION(S): Staff recommends that the City Council receive this report and provide direction to City Staff on a City Council compensation increase allowable under State Law (SB 329). SB 329 (effective January 1, 2024) updated Government Code §36516 to raise the maximum salary cap to \$950 per month for cities with populations up to 35,000.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:

- a. Introduction of agenda item by City staff
- b. Questions and discussion from Councilmembers
- c. Open for Public Comment
- d. Council Discussion
- e. Direction to Staff

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In February 2024, Councilmember Zollman presented an agenda item request for the City Council to consider City Council salary compensation based upon SB 329 and with respect to equity.

Prior to SB 329, the maximum monthly salary for councilmembers in cities with populations of 35,000 or less was \$300 per month. The law also allowed annual increases in compensation by up to 5% per year (not compounded). Because of the requirements in the law, cities who increased their compensation by the maximum amount every year had significantly greater maximum compensation than those cities who only increased compensation occasionally. The bill's intent was to address stagnant pay, which can deter candidates from lower-income backgrounds, single parents, younger people, and people of color due to the significant time commitment of council service.

Currently, Sebastopol City Councilmembers are estimated to spend 8 hours per month attending regular City Council meetings. This estimate does not include special meetings such as closed sessions, workshops, conferences, nor does it include the additional hours required to review agenda reports and backup materials, meet with staff, review and respond to communications from community members, attend community or regional events and meetings, or serve on City, County, Regional, and State agencies or committees. These uncompensated responsibilities significantly increase the overall time commitment of public service.

BACKGROUND: In July 2023, in an effort to increase equitable representation at city government levels, the State of California passed legislation (SB 329), which increases the salary that may be paid by ordinance to City Councilmembers in general law cities. SB 329 does not apply to charter cities.

According to the League of California Cities, SB 329 was adopted because lengthy time commitments and limited pay discourage many, especially low-income residents, single parents, people of color, and young

people, from running for public office. SB 329 requires any ordinance increasing city council compensation to include findings demonstrating the need for increased compensation.

Existing law authorizes a City Council to enact an ordinance to provide each City Councilmember with a salary based on the population of the city. Increasing City Council compensation makes serving on a City Council viable for individuals from across different income levels.

SB 329 allows future salary increases for City Councilmembers beyond the amount provided in Government Code §36516(a) by an ordinance or by an amendment to an ordinance, as long as the amount of the increase does not exceed the greater of either of the following:

1. An amount equal to 5% for each calendar year from the operative date of the last adjustment of the salary in effect when the ordinance or amendment is enacted. (For Sebastopol, there has been no adjustment since inception: 1984).
2. An amount equal to inflation since January 1, 2024, based upon the California Consumer Price Index (CPI), which shall not exceed 10% for each calendar year.

In addition to their salaries, the City provides some benefits to elected officials. These benefits are not included for purposes of determining City Council salaries under SB 329.

DISCUSSION: City Council salary can be changed by ordinance or ballot measure. The legislation authorizes an increase in salary by ordinance based on the population of the city. In cities with populations up to and including 35,000, the maximum salary is \$950 per month.

If the Council directs staff to return with an ordinance, the ordinance must be presented in two regular meetings of the City Council. At the first meeting, the proposed ordinance would be presented with findings demonstrating the need for the increased compensation. At the second meeting, the ordinance would be considered for adoption.

Pursuant to Government Code §36516.5, any City Council salary increase may take effect only when at least one member of the City Council commences a new term of office following the November 2026 Municipal Election. This protects sitting members from mid-term raises. If an ordinance is adopted approving a salary increase, it will take effect for all councilmembers following the November 2026 election.

A potential ordinance could increase City Council compensation from \$300 per month per City Councilmember to a maximum of \$950 per month per City Councilmember. If the City Council would like to consider an amount greater than \$950, the question of salary can be submitted to the voters in any municipal election.

The Council could also consider a lower amount than the legislation allows.

STAFF ANALYSIS: Staff has researched compensation (but not other benefits) in Sonoma County cities. The results are listed below:

City	Population (approx.)	Monthly Salary (Base)
Sebastopol	7,350	\$300 per month/per individual Councilmember
Cloverdale	8,700	\$950 per month/per individual Councilmember

City	Population (approx.)	Monthly Salary (Base)
Cotati	7,403	\$300 per month/per individual Councilmember
Sonoma (city)	10,600	\$300 per month/per individual Councilmember
Healdsburg	11,200	Healdsburg is \$950.00 a month per individual Councilmember
Windsor	25,600	<p>\$300 per Councilmember. In addition, each Councilmember received \$85 per meeting, out of which \$10 is taken and put into a benevolent fund (to be used for non-profit donations, etc.). Annual average compensation of the stipend for each Councilmember is \$6,160, for attending regular and special meetings.</p> <p>The benevolent fund will obtain an estimate of \$1,200-1,400, dependent on Councilmember attendance.</p>

Staff also reached out Statewide and received the following responses:

City	Approx. Population	Current/Recent Council Pay (per member)
Grass Valley	14,000	\$550/month
Larkspur	13,000	\$950/month
Mill Valley	13,800	\$950/month (2026 Election)
American Canyon	21,000	\$950
Imperial Beach	26,000	\$950/month
Los Altos	31,000	\$950/month
Menlo Park	32,000	\$950/month
Chowchilla	19,000	\$900/month
Ukiah	16,304	\$850/month
Calistoga	5,200	\$950/month per Councilmember; \$1500 per month for Mayor
Winters	7,500	\$300/month per Councilmember
Fort Bragg	7,032	\$950/month
Sausalito	7,141	\$300/month
Fairfax	7,516	\$300/month
St Helena	5,300	\$950/month per Councilmember; \$1500 per month for Mayor

Since 1984, state law set City Councilmember compensation at a maximum of \$300 per month for cities under 35,000 population. Historically, compensation could be increased by a maximum of 5% per year since the last adjustment. The City of Sebastopol has never adjusted its City Council compensation. Therefore, compensation has not kept pace with inflation for nearly 40 years.

This, combined with the substantial time commitment required of Sebastopol City Councilmembers — far exceeding the estimated 8 hours per month spent in regular meetings — supports the need for increased compensation to attract and retain qualified candidates from diverse economic backgrounds.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS / PRIORITIES / GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:

This action directly supports the City Council’s goals and priorities including:

- High Performance Organization
- Restoring public trust through transparent governance and improved community engagement.

PUBLIC COMMENT: As of the preparation of this staff report, no public comments have been received on this item. Any comments received after distribution of the report will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials. Public comment will also be accepted during the meeting.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: This item has been noticed and made available for public review in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act, at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT: Staff time to prepare this report is covered within existing budgeted salaries. The fiscal impact of any compensation increase is dependent upon the decision of the City Council.

If the Council maintains the current stipend of \$300 per month, there will be no fiscal impact to the FY 2026–27 budget. If the Council approves the proposed increase to \$950 per month, the estimated fiscal impact to the FY 2026–27 budget would be \$39,000.

BUDGET COMMITTEE:

The Budget Committee reviewed this item at their May 11, 2026 Meeting. The Recommendation was to support the increase to \$950.00 per month.

If the Council chooses the full allowable increase, the change from \$300 per month (\$18,000 total annually for the full Council) to \$950 per month would increase the total annual amount for the full City Council by \$39,000, for a new total of \$57,000 annually.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council receive this report and provide direction to City Staff on City Council compensation increase allowable under State Law (SB 329).

Options for direction to staff could be one of the following:

1. Direct staff to prepare an ordinance raising pay to the full \$950 per month with appropriate findings; or
2. Direct a lower amount and specify what amount; or
3. No action/defer item for future consideration

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval:

Approval Date: 5-11-2026

CEQA Determination (Planning):

JR

Approval Date: 5/11/2026

Environmental Review: This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Administrative Services (Financial)

Approval Date:

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: Yes No N/A Account Code (if applicable)

City Attorney Approval:
City Manager Approval:

Approval Date:
Approval Date: