CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: November 17, 2026
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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Councilmember Hinton
Department: Public Works
Subject: Request to Direct Staff to Develop a Policy for the Waiver of Special Event Permit Fees
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RECOMMENDATIONS:
That the City Council, by motion, direct staff to develop a draft City policy establishing eligibility criteria, a consistent application and review process, and approval authority for the waiver or reduction of Special Event Permit fees, and return the draft policy to the City Council for consideration at a future meeting.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:
If the item remains on the Consent Calendar, no presentation is required and the item will be approved as part of the Consent Calendar. If the item is removed from the Consent Calendar, it will be heard as a regular agenda item, at the time determined by the Mayor, and will proceed as follows:

- Presentation of the item by the Requestor or responsible staff
- Council questions and discussion
- Public comment
- Council deliberation and action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
Councilmember Hinton has requested that the City Council direct staff to develop a written policy governing the waiver or reduction of Special Event Permit fees. Currently, requests for fee waivers must be reviewed and approved by the Budget Committee and then brought before the full City Council for approval as an action item. There is interest in streamlining this process, particularly for smaller community events, while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability. At present, the City does not have an adopted policy establishing which events or organizations may qualify for a fee waiver, which fees may be waived, or who has the authority to approve a waiver. A written policy would provide consistent, transparent criteria for applicants and staff, establish clear approval authority, and allow the Council to set limits on the amount of fee revenue the City forgoes each year. This item asks only for direction to staff; it does not waive any fee.

BACKGROUND:
The City requires a Special Event Permit for organized events held on City property, in City parks, or in the public right-of-way, such as street closures, parades, festivals, races, and community gatherings. Permit fees and related charges are set in the City's Master Fee Schedule and are intended to recover the City's costs of reviewing applications and providing services such as police staffing, public works support, barricades, and cleanup.

Many of the events held in Sebastopol each year are organized by local nonprofit and community groups that provide a public benefit and are free and open to the public. These organizations periodically ask the City to waive or reduce permit fees. Without an adopted policy, these requests are evaluated individually, which can lead to inconsistent outcomes and makes it difficult for applicants to know in advance whether they qualify. Councilmember Hinton brought forward a request that the Council consider directing staff to develop a fee waiver policy for Special Event Permits.

DISCUSSION:
Councilmember Hinton is requesting that the Council direct staff to develop a Special Event Permit fee waiver policy for the following reasons:

- All applicants would be evaluated under the same published criteria, rather than on a case-by-case basis.

- A policy would support nonprofit and community organizations whose events are free and open to the public and benefit Sebastopol residents and businesses.
- A policy would provide a clear public record of the criteria used, the fees waived, and the cost to the City of each waiver.
- Clear criteria and delegated approval authority would reduce the number of individual waiver requests that require staff analysis and Council action.

STAFF ANALYSIS:
Developing a draft policy would require a moderate amount of staff time from the City Manager's Office, with input from Administrative Services, the Police Department, and Public Works, which provide services for special events. The City Attorney would review the draft policy before it is brought back to Council, including for consistency with the constitutional prohibition on gifts of public funds, which requires that any waiver serve a public purpose.

As part of this work, staff would survey the fee waiver policies of other Sonoma County cities, such as Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Healdsburg, Cotati, Rohnert Park, and Windsor, and would review the City's Special Event Permit history to estimate the number and value of waiver requests in a typical year.

For history, the Council has waived the fees noted below:

In Fiscal Years 24/25, 25/26, and 26/27, several community events were granted fee waivers by the City Council. A summary of those waivers is provided below.

Fiscal Year	Number of Events with Fee Waivers	Total Fees Waived
FY 2024–2025	Chamber Tree Lighting	$450
	Apple Blossom Parade/Fair	$14,620
	Rotary Centennial Celebration	$500
	Kiwanis Easter Egg Hunt	$400
	Peacetown Summer Concerts	$1,550
	Many Moons	$1,200
	July 3rd Fireworks	$6,930

	Total	**$25,650**
FY 2025–2026	Living Peace Wall Induction Ceremony	$450
	Porch Fest	$500
	Kiwanis Easter Egg Hunt	$400
	Apple Blossom Festival	$13,320
	Micah's Hugs	$275
	Kiwanis July 3rd Firework Event	$6,263
	Total	$27,006
FY 2026–2027	Peacetown Concert Series	$5,000
	Many Moons Festival	$750
	Total	**$5,750**

Staff anticipates returning to the Council with a draft policy within two months of Council direction, depending on other Council priorities and workload.

Staff has reached out to other local cities and fee waiver permit policies are attached as reference.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES AND GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:
This agenda item represents the City Council goals/priorities as follows:

- Goal 1 - Community Vitality: Enhance Sebastopol as a great place to live that values community health and well-being. Preserve Sebastopol's unique character.
  - Priority 5: Festive Activities/Holiday Events

PUBLIC COMMENT:
As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, if staff receives public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of the agenda item.

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

FISCAL IMPACT:
There is no direct fiscal impact associated with directing staff to develop a draft policy. The staff time needed to prepare the policy would be absorbed within existing departmental staff time. If a policy is later adopted, waived fees would reduce Special Event Permit fee revenue, and the costs of City services provided for those events would be paid from the General Fund. Staff will provide an estimate when the draft policy is brought back for Council consideration.

City of Sebastopol

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:
That the City Council, by motion, direct staff to develop a draft City policy establishing eligibility criteria, a consistent application and review process, and approval authority for the waiver or reduction of Special Event Permit fees, and return the draft policy to the City Council for consideration at a future meeting.

CITY COUNCIL OPTIONS:
1. Take no action, and Special Event Permit fee waiver requests will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis and taken to Budget Committee prior to City Council for review/recommendation.

ATTACHMENTS:
1 – City of Sebastopol Special Event Permit Fees

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval:	Approval Date: 11/10/26
CEQA Determination (Planning):	Approval Date: NA
The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)	
General Plan Goal (Planning):	Approval Date: N/A
Administrative Services (Financial)	Approval Date: 11/10/26
Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: ☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ N/A	
Account Code (f applicable)	_____
City Attorney Approval:	Approval Date: N/A
City Manager Approval:	Approval Date: 11/10/26

Schedule of User and Regulatory Fees
Parks, Special Events & Facility Use

Activity Description	Community Group Fee	Resident Fee	Non-Resident Fee
Application Fee			
Up to 50 people	$0	$0	$0
51-200 people	$100	$150	$200
More than 200 people	$150	$250	$350
Security Deposit*			
Up to 50 people	$150	$150	$150
51-200 people	$500	$500	$500
More than 200 people	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000
Daily Use Fee			
Up to 50 people	$50	$75	$100
51-200 people	$125	$250	$500
More than 200 people	$250	$500	$1,000
Amplified Sound/Stage/Bouncehouse			
Amplified Sound Use	$50	$75	$100
Stage Use	$50	$75	$100
Bouncehouse Use	$30	$40	$50

* 25% discount available for park use of less than 3 hours

Other Fees	Fee
Parking Space Fee**	
Residential Area	$10
Non-Residential Area	$15
Classes with Instructors Utilizing Park Area (per week)***	
Small Group (1-15 persons)	$25
Medium Group (16-30 persons)	$50
Large Group (31+ persons)	$75
City Hall Meeting Room	$15

** Daily per space fee for use of City parking spaces (proof of parking required for events of more than 200 persons)

*** Per week fee for classes with monetary component (e.g. charge for classes)