

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: January 6, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Councilmember Stephen Zollman
Subject: City Sponsorship of Sebastopol Walks 2026

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council Consider Approval of City Sponsorship for the Sebastopol Walks Program 2026 (for its 18th Year) and Request for Assistance with publicity/social media.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

For 12 of the last 17 years, local volunteers have organized and conducted once-monthly, docent-led walks around town. More than 3,000 people have participated in more than 140 walk events. These statistics are best estimates only.

The program, known as Sebastopol Walks, has introduced people to the fun of exploring town on foot, learning about the social/cultural/political history of the community, and discovering what makes Sebastopol a great place to live and visit. Locals, locals with out-of-town guests, residents from other Sonoma County cities, out-of-county and international visitors have enjoyed the walks. Intended as a community-building experience, the walks became a tourist attraction.

The inspiration for the walks was a booklet called Sebastopol Walks written by local activist Richard Nichols, its first edition funded by the City. For the second edition, then Mayor and Former City Councilmember Sarah Gurney organized three progressive dinner walks, featuring local restaurants, and raised enough money for the booklet's second printing. Funding for the third edition came from the sales of the book, including at Copperfields Books. The local store has sold over 1000 copies. The booklet has been the number one holiday best seller for several years. It has served inexpensive gift and/or souvenir and has been presented to many Sister City/other visitors to City Hall.

Originally, a four-member core group of volunteers assumed leadership for all of the walks. Soon community leaders were recruited to share the responsibilities, expanding the core group. Later, the current Mayor and Former Council Members were invited to create and lead new routes, often highlighting City governance, service delivery, and opportunities for the future.

The WALKS Program has emphasized the value of exercise for good health. Already in existence when Sonoma County Health Action started the iWALK campaign (in 2013), Sebastopol WALKS was highlighted as the demonstration program. It has inspired several other local walking programs: for example, one at the Senior Center; iMOSEY through an earlier Health Action Chapter; at least one private women's group; and a sister program in Novato. It is the only Health Action iWALK activity still in existence.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:

1. If item remains on consent, no presentation of item is required. Item would be approved as a consent calendar item.
2. If item is removed from the consent calendar; item would be placed at the end of the regular agenda items or as otherwise determined by the Mayor for discussion following the process below:
 - a. Presentation of agenda item by the Requestor or Responsible Department

- b. Questions and discussion from Councilmembers
- c. Public comment period
- d. Council deliberation and motion

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The year a new group of dedicated volunteers will be organizing this years Walks. Mindy Chase, Geoffrey Skinner and Councilmember Zollman have been instrumental in working with the former volunteers (Sarah Glade Gurney, Simon Lowings, Richard and Brenda Nichols, and Gary Morgret) to continue this wonderful and valued program of this community.

The group proposes XXXX walks, February through November. As before, Walk events will be held on the last Saturday of each month, meeting at The Plaza at 9 AM, departing at 9:15 AM, and returning around noon. Each walk will have a leader and a sweep. Participants will sign a Release of Liability. Visitors and residents alike are welcome at these guided and themed walks. Walks are easy and mostly flat on good surfaces, with a few mild climbs. Please consult with your doctor before starting a new exercise regimen. Walking or hiking shoes are recommended. Dress in layers. Bring water, snacks (or lunch if noted), sunscreen and a hat. Walks may be modified by the leader. Walkers may leave the group after notifying the walk leader.

The anticipated 2026 calendar of events is listed below (but not yet finalized). Once the schedule has been finalized, the City will promote the schedule through the City's social media platforms.

Tentative Walk Schedule for 2026

1. February - Sarah Gurney/Sandra Maurer - "Field Trip" - History of Land Use.
2. March - Paul Fritz - What makes a place walkable
3. April - Geoffrey Skinner/Joan Schwan - Urban Forestry
4. May - TBD
5. June - TBD
6. July – Peter Schurch – Civil Engineering Walk
7. August - Donna Pittman - History Walk - Queen Anne Homes of NW Sebastopol
8. September - Richard - Alley and Hidden Paths Walk
9. October - TBD
10. November - Stephen Zollman - Nonprofit Walk``

A Laguna Walk is also being proposed with a date not yet determined.

The events will vary in focus, length, and difficulty, based upon the routes chosen by the morning's leaders.

Some walks will be mainly for exercise to show participants how to connect places in town and others will be informational. Some are new routes and new subject matter; others are updated versions of favorites.

The WALKS will build interest in Sebastopol as a health-oriented community and help people experience the connectivity of our network of streets, sidewalks, paths, trails and alleys. Participants will learn that they can get around town without driving their car and that they can enjoy the outdoors on foot. They will learn about Sebastopol's social, cultural, and political history as well as its municipal functions.

The group seeks City sponsorship, in part in order to secure insurance coverage as well as to help with social media.

The City has served as sponsor for each prior year. The group requests minimal help with publicity: posting on the City's Facebook page, website and community newsletter; placing flyers in the lobby at City Hall; installing the banner on the Gazebo at The Plaza one week in advance; etc.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with the approval of this item.

RESTATEMENT RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council Consider Approval of City Sponsorship for the Sebastopol Walks Program 2026 and Request for Assistance with publicity/social media.

OPTION:

The Council could deny the request for City sponsorship.

ATTACHMENTS:

None