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From: BobBeauchamp [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2026 11:28 AM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED] katie@sebastopolseniorcenter.org
Subject: O'Reilly building

Greetings: As a retired architect, general contractor, urban planner and instructor of design and construction, I have resided here for 20 years and long appreciated Sebastopol's unique charm. The current issue that proposes the relocation of our city hall, our library, and our senior center to the O'Reilly bldg. gives me great concern.

Such a proposal, with each facility in similar states of obsolescence, can certainly seem legitimate. The new location is immediately available, relatively affordable, and integrated within a pleasing architectural context. Beyond that, certainly of a high priority, is its "adequate" parking.

Unfortunately, essentially all of this proposal's qualities are superficial. They address issues that are pragmatic, expedient and overlook most considerations that are of a deeper, more subtle level and despite their possibility of having significant purpose and meaning. Issues that support true "community," the "vitality" that we all cherish when it is allowed to exist, the heart-felt ambience that can occur whenever we step out of our vehicles, become pedestrians, and lovingly engage in the fundamentally humane, connected activities that bring the highest levels of meaning to our lives.

Sebastopol's current "vitality," while still meaningful, certainly suffers from historic mishandling of this fragile issue: our community "center," our Youth Annex each has been removed to our outer fringes and denies the rich social contribution that it could bring to our downtown populace. Our oversized Barlow project, despite its promises of community contribution, now reveals a complete detachment and caters exclusively to the inhumane profit and revenue of a completely indifferent tourism.

A truly successful community needs "magnets," those primary facilities that comprise the primary appeal to its populace; secondarily, it needs the supportive services that fill in the blanks of remaining community needs. This quickly transcends the trendy stuff (restaurants, bars, boutiques, etc.) and incorporates the wide variety of household needs (groceries, offices, hardware, etc.)

Losing these three important facilities—all magnets—will clearly bring some degree of harm to our remaining ambience. Secondary shops will struggle to survive, but many, without a primary appeal, will fail. Other magnets (Whole Foods, Safeway perhaps, the Plaza, etc.) will certainly continue, but in a reduced capacity. The risk of community demise will loom ever closer.

I watched San Luis Obispo, CA suffer just such a circumstance, beginning around 1965. Originally a small, agricultural, academic economy, the downtown was the only place for any services, and was an easy, natural place for an abundance of spontaneous social interaction. It was exceptionally delightful.

Over time, however, the well-known lure of profit and revenue from a growing student body (Fall, Winter, Spring) and a tourist one (Summer) saw the common evolution of policy changes that transformed downtown. While the very same buildings, streets etc. exist to this day, they are now occupied by businesses that cater exclusively to these two groups. The locals are no longer welcome and are relegated to shopping in several small shopping malls encircling downtown, each with their own "convenient" parking and the inconvenient "hop" from one mall to the next. Pedestrians no longer exist.

Choosing to remove these important facilities, giving excessive priority to poorly considered, tantalizing superficialities, will be a tragic mistake. The problem here is not simple and its true resolution will call for a patient, multi-faceted, broad-based complex resolution. It may very well become evident that those currently in charge of such decision-making will not be sufficiently qualified to be so; that it may be appropriate to seek and employ specialists in the field. There's so much to lose here; for the sake of our future, surely we can slow down and explore broader, deeper, more creative options.

Robert Beauchamp