

From: Catherine Huntington [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, August 13, 2026 9:10 PM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: Tyler Olson [REDACTED]
Subject: Please support Grocery Outlet in Sebastopol

Dear Mayor, City Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners,

I'm writing as a Sebastopol resident to strongly support the proposed Grocery Outlet at the former Rite Aid site, and to ask the City to stop putting unnecessary barriers in the way of bringing an affordable grocery store to our community.

My husband and I moved to Sebastopol last year from the UK. We are a dual-income household with no children, and yet by Sonoma County standards we are relatively low-income and find grocery shopping in Sebastopol prohibitively expensive. I was genuinely shocked after moving here by the lack of affordable options for basic groceries.

As a result, we regularly drive out of town to shop at Grocery Outlet in Santa Rosa or Windsor, and sometimes Trader Joe's. A grocery shop that should be an ordinary local errand can eat up several hours of our limited free time simply because there isn't an affordable option where we live.

I understand that Sebastopol already has a number of grocery stores. But the number of stores is not the issue. Six expensive grocery stores do not provide the same service as one genuinely affordable grocery store.

Sebastopol should be a community where younger people, renters, working people and people on lower and middle incomes can actually afford to live — not just a community designed around the preferences and purchasing power of its wealthiest residents.

I value independent businesses and understand the desire to preserve Sebastopol's character. But existing businesses should not be protected from competition at the expense of residents' access to affordable food. If the arrival of a lower-cost supermarket changes the local grocery market, that is a normal consequence of giving consumers more choice. Residents should not be required to subsidize an existing retail landscape through higher grocery bills.

There is also an environmental argument for Grocery Outlet. Its business model provides a market for surplus, closeout and short-dated inventory that might otherwise go to waste. At the moment, residents like us are additionally driving to Santa Rosa or Windsor simply to access affordable groceries. Allowing us to shop locally would reduce unnecessary car journeys as well as support a retail model that helps find buyers for surplus food.

I appreciate Sebastopol's desire to support local businesses and retain its distinctive character. Those are worthwhile goals. But affordability, economic diversity and the everyday needs of residents matter too.

Please listen to the people who actually need a lower-cost grocery option in Sebastopol, not only those who already have the means to comfortably shop at the existing stores. We live here. We want to spend our money here. Please let us have an affordable place to do it.

I strongly urge you to approve the Grocery Outlet proposal.

Best,
Catherine Huntington and Tyler Olson

A black rectangular redaction box covering the names of the signatories, Catherine Huntington and Tyler Olson.