

From: Deborah Connors [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 16, 2026 7:59 PM
To: citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov
Subject: RE: Application for conditional use from the Formula Business Grocery Outlet

To the *Planning Department; Planning Commission and City Council,*

This is a plea to unanimously vote "No" when considering the conditional use permit application from Grocery Outlet, (GO). Sebastopol has a unique ability to currently support seven (7) grocery stores, of which four (4) are specially curated from a higher than normal percentage of local suppliers. This is somewhat out of character for such a small population and surely leaves all of the businesses with just an average profit after expenses. This fragile balance could be easily disturbed by introducing a large national formula business into the downtown marketplace. Based on a study conducted at Sonoma State University of 2024 data reported on by Economic Forensics and Analytics in Petaluma, if an average of 32% of goods are sourced locally as opposed to a formula business (FB) sourcing 0% locally, leakages (of income) occur. Leakages are when business and wage incomes, jobs, and tax revenues shift from one location to another, as goods and services are sourced from outside the area. The other location would be to the pockets of the centralized headquarters of a FB, and the headquarters are not in Sonoma County or Sebastopol. This study estimates a loss of overall local income to range from 41% (if the FB sources 15% locally) up to 249% leakage if the formula business purchases 0% locally. Given (GO) sources bargains based on closeouts, excess inventory, and stale product opportunities, the likelihood of the 249% loss of local income is highest.

According to the study, there are four (4) ways to affect the local economy from grocer revenues:

1. Local purchases of goods sold (transforming COGS into local business incomes);
2. Local wages and salaries based on workers living in Sonoma County (creating disposable income for workers to spend in Sonoma County);
3. Local payments and business incomes for operational costs otherwise: vendor payments for services, e.g., legal, accounting, HVAC, etc.;
4. Profits for owners that augment incomes for Sonoma County households beyond wages paid.

It's clear from this study's findings that GO's purchases would not support any of the four (4) above factors. The buyers, and operational staff would all be centralized elsewhere for their national support of all stores to maximize their bottom line. The goods would be sourced from anywhere globally without regard to local farming, manufacturing or distribution. That model not only harms local incomes, it is also counter intuitive to the climate changes the city attempts to minimize through other efforts.

Our local store owners and employees spend decent amounts of time to ensure the food and products offered are locally sourced when possible and of high quality with non toxic

attributes. This is what keeps West County consumers attached to the community . These factors of course can contribute to higher price points, but also to the health and longevity of the citizens. Sebastopol's average lifespan is around 84 years of age, as opposed to Santa Rosa which is around 80 Years, (California Department of Public Health). Research over 20 years by BlueZones.com throughout the world concludes that longevity is directly related to the foods consumed, the amount of daily exercise, and the community socialization people experience. In fact, Petaluma hosts a Blue Zone Project office where the community can locate the healthiest foods, outdoor experiences and other lifestyle engagements that add to longevity. Sebastopol could benefit largely by bringing a Blue Zone Projects office to town. (<https://bluezonesprojectpetaluma.com>)

In addition to the loss of local incomes, formula businesses harm the decades of hard work the owners and employees have dedicated to procuring healthy and environmentally safe foods and household items. They have also built local gathering areas for listening to music, enjoying meals, meeting for coffee, community meetings, etc. A vote to approve GO is a vote to destroy one or more of these dedicated local community stores. As the FB moves revenue and incomes to their space, they cannibalize the existing incomes and revenue. There will be no additional revenue provided from sales/use/payroll tax, and in fact the payroll tax would likely be a deduction from revenue streams as the national headquarters will employ the buyers, accountants, legal counsel, and building maintenance through a national contract. There will be no new trips to shop at GO in Sebastopol since there is already a GO store in Santa Rosa, Windsor, Rohnert Park, and Petaluma ranging from 5 miles drive to 15 mile drive. .

15 mile Drive from Downtown Sebastopol to
6400 Hembree Ln, Suite 100
Windsor, CA 95492

9 mile Drive from Downtown Sebastopol to
GO Santa Rosa
1116 4th St
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

5 Mile Drive from Bloomfield & Hwy 116 to
GO - Rohnert Park
6335 Commerce Blvd

14 Mile Drive from Bloomfield & Hwy 116 to
GO Petaluma
80 E Washington St

There are towns throughout California that provide free transportation to medical appointments and grocery shopping for those that cannot drive. If these few community members are solidly set on shopping at a GO, the city should consider accommodating

them separately, rather than dismantling the existing cohesive community that has been built over many decades.

Grocery Outlet already saturates the local Sonoma County marketplace with non-local food and household goods, harming incomes and revenues county wide. It does not appear to be a good economic fit for the downtown Sebastopol economy and there is not an identified resource/need for this FB to be approved. GO claims their goods are a lower price point as their main reason to be approved. The current local community grocers have programs in place such as:

- Provide large quantities of food and goods to the Sebastopol Senior Center free of charge
- Provide excess/unsold foods to the unhoused, free of charge
- Provide weekly discount days for Seniors
- Provide daily promotional prices on specified products and weekly fliers
- Accept SNAP EBT cards to support lower income individual buying power (Keep in mind that SNAP benefits also reduce sales tax revenues from city revenues)

According to the Sebastopol Municipal Code 17.340.070, the Planning Commission would need to determine that a proposed FB

- **Complements existing businesses** (GO would be a detriment to existing businesses, local employees, farmers, manufacturers, incomes and overall health of the community)
- **Promotes diversity and variety** (The 7 existing grocery stores already promote diversity in goods and hiring practices and significant variety in goods offered)
- **Does not harm Sebastopol's unique character** (GO would harm the unique character of Sebastopol by cannibalizing revenue from the local grocers)
- **Promotes economic vitality** (GO would reduce/harm economic vitality by causing an existing local market to close due to lost revenue.)
- **Provides needed goods or services** (No such need exists at this time. There are currently 7 stores providing the same goods as GO, and the existing grocers provide higher quality and locally sourced goods. All 7 stores accept SNAP/EBT cards from and therefore no low income needs are going unmet)
- **Is compatible with surrounding uses** (GO would be harmful to existing grocers, is not unique, and therefore is not compatible with surrounding uses)

GO became publicly traded in 2019 with over 400 stores under the ticker symbol GO on the NASDAQ stock exchange. If anyone wants to invest in GO they can buy their stock. Sebastopol as a city would harm the local community if they invest in GO by allowing them into the community just to add to the GO investors' bottom line. That is not aligned with Sebastopol's core values or uniqueness. The city planners and council members have the opportunity to positively affect Sebastopol's citizens and tourists by supporting the current group of local community minded grocery stores and denying the application from the

national formula business that will not contribute positively to any economic or social impacts of this community .

Thank you for voting "No" when asked to consider the conditional use permit for GO,

Deborah Connors
Sebastopol Community member