

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [info; City Council](#)  
**Subject:** Downtown Core study - Public Comment to Sebastopol City Council  
**Date:** Sunday, February 15, 2026 5:03:39 PM

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**Submitted by:** Gavin Waters, Sebastopol Resident, Citizen Representative to CBPAC

*Note: I prefer to make comments in person but due to travel schedule constraints, I am submitting written comments. I am happy to meet with council members at a mutually agreeable time to discuss my ideas and what I have observed of this process, as I have been intimately involved since the beginning.*

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## Summary: What I Urge the Council to Approve

1. **Approve the street conversion that maximizes pedestrian and bicycle facilities**
2. **Require protected bike lanes with hard barriers, not paint**
3. **Eliminate Town Square parking and activate the space for community use**
4. **Introduce parking pricing downtown**
5. **Adopt a parking maximum ordinance to replace parking minimums**
6. **Design Bodega/Petaluma as a roundabout with crosswalks in all directions**
7. **Limit Main Street south of Burnett to one lane each direction maximum**
8. **Passionately advocate to Caltrans for modernized traffic calming standards**

**Downtown Sebastopol should be a place for people, not a highway for cars.**

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## Addressing the "Nobody Uses the Bike Lanes" Myth

I frequently hear the claim that "no one uses the bike lanes" in Sebastopol. **This is factually incorrect.**

I use the downtown bike lanes regularly—multiple times per week for transportation. I personally know numerous families with children who use these facilities for trips to school, the library, shops, and parks. Parents won't put their children on bikes in mixed traffic, but they will use dedicated facilities.

**The lanes are actually constrained:** On multiple occasions, I've had to form a single-file line because there were three cyclists using the lane simultaneously without sufficient width to ride side-by-side. This isn't underuse—it's a sign that our bike infrastructure is undersized for actual demand.

**Why usage appears low:** Bike lane usage appears low to people in cars because cyclists take up less space than cars, cars observe for only seconds while passing, and bikes don't create congestion so their presence doesn't register the same way.

**What this means:** The "nobody uses them" argument is used to justify not improving bike infrastructure. But the reality is opposite: our current bike lanes are inadequate, uncomfortable, and sometimes dangerous—and people still use them. Imagine how many

more would bike with truly safe, protected facilities.

Protected bike lanes aren't being built for Lycra-clad cyclists willing to ride in paint. They're being built for parents who want to bike with their kids to school, seniors who want to bike to the library without fear, and workers who would gladly bike to their jobs if they felt safe.

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## What I Support in the Caltrans Study

**Infrastructure improvements:** Wider sidewalks, additional green space, elimination of parking (particularly at Town Square), upgraded bicycle facilities, mid-block pedestrian crossings, and bulb-outs at intersections.

**The Depot Street pocket park:** Closing the Depot Street leg to vehicle traffic will recreate the pocket park in front of Screamin' Mimi's—a beloved community gathering space.

**Caltrans' recognition:** Most significantly, Caltrans acknowledges the urgent need to upgrade Sebastopol streets due to our unacceptably high number of traffic fatalities. This validates what residents have been saying for years.

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## Key Recommendations

### 1. Parking: Reduce Supply, Introduce Pricing

Sebastopol has excess parking capacity. Rather than adding spaces, we should reduce parking and introduce pricing.

**The evidence is clear:** Pedestrians and cyclists generate 8-9% higher monthly revenues through repeat visits and impulse purchases compared to car-dependent customers (data from NYC, Portland, Seattle, and UK studies).

If parking is needed as a negotiating tool, formalize informal spaces on Depot Street or add parking on Barnes Avenue. However, parking downtown should not remain free. Pricing generates revenue for active transportation improvements while encouraging turnover.

### 2. Town Square: Eliminate Parking, Activate the Space

Replace Town Square parking with community-serving uses:

- **Preferred:** Expanding the once weekly farm market by building farm stands for local farmers, creating an everyday farmers market for certain growers
- **Alternatives:** Green space, covered bicycle parking, public seating, a play structure for children

The Town Square should be a gathering place for people, not cars.

### 3. Prioritize Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

I support whichever street configuration—one-way or two-way—allows for maximum pedestrian and bicycle facilities. I'm agnostic on traffic flow direction but prefer the design that removes the most car capacity and replaces it with safe, comfortable space for people walking and biking.

#### **4. Require Protected Bike Lanes with Hard Barriers**

Bike lanes must be parking-protected or protected by hardened barriers—not plastic bollards. Protected bike lanes (Class IV) should be the minimum standard. **Paint is not protection. Plastic is not protection.**

#### **5. Main Street South of Burnett: One Lane Each Direction Maximum**

- **If one-way:** ONE travel lane only
- **If two-way:** TWO travel lanes maximum (one each direction)

This section should prioritize pedestrian strolling, bicycle facilities, and traffic calming over vehicle throughput.

#### **6. Caltrans Must Modernize Traffic Calming Standards**

Caltrans needs to update design standards to allow internationally recognized traffic calming measures: chicanes, raised intersections, modal filters, and shared space designs. California's outdated standards prohibit proven safety interventions used worldwide. Sebastopol should advocate loudly for modernization.

#### **7. Bodega/Petaluma Intersection: Roundabout with Crosswalks in All Directions**

Redesign as a roundabout with crosswalks in all four directions—NOT eliminated or moved further away. Crosswalks must be at desired lines where people actually want to cross, not relocated for driver convenience or to funnel walkers.

#### **8. Replace Parking Minimums with Parking Maximums**

Sebastopol should replace its parking minimum ordinance with a parking maximum ordinance.

**Parking minimums:** Force overbuilding, increase development costs, encourage driving, waste downtown land

**Parking maximums:** Prevent overbuilding, support climate goals, make development affordable, free land for housing and businesses

This is critical in our downtown core, where walkability and transit access should determine parking limits—not outdated 1960s formulas.

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## **Context: County CTP Deficiencies**

This study occurs against the backdrop of Sonoma County's draft Comprehensive Transportation Plan, which I've reviewed and commented on as Sebastopol's CBPAC representative.

### **Key CTP failures relevant to Sebastopol:**

- No SMART connection to Sebastopol despite being the 7th largest city
- No timeline or funding for Sebastopol's active transportation projects (\$2.4M bundled line item with zero detail)
- 6:1 funding ratio favoring roads over bike/ped infrastructure countywide
- No commitments to parking maximums, road diets, or mandatory VMT reduction

**Sebastopol has an opportunity to lead where the county plan fails.** By converting downtown streets with focus on walking and biking infrastructure, introducing parking pricing, and adopting parking maximums, we can demonstrate what progressive, people-first planning looks like.

Thanks, Gavin