From: Ellen Golla [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2026 11:00 AM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: Comments in support of the neighbors of A&M BBQ

Dear Sebastopol City Council,

Please see the attached letter for our comments supporting the neighbors of A&M BBQ.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Ellen Golla

Outreach Director

Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution (DSAWSP)

www.dsawsp.org

DOCTORS SCIENTISTS
Against Wood Smoke Pollution

June 2, 2026

Dear Sebastopol City Council:

Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution is an international coalition whose mission is to help educate the public and policymakers on the toxicity, public health consequences, and climate impacts of wood burning. We formed in 2016 to address a critical lack of public awareness of the scientific evidence showing that wood smoke is a serious health hazard. Over the last decade, the peer-reviewed research on this topic has only grown.

We felt compelled to submit a comment in support of the neighbors of A&M BBQ after seeing media coverage of this situation and viewing online videos of the smoker, which is clearly in close proximity to a populated residential area.

Unless someone has been personally subjected to it, it is almost impossible to convey what being in a situation like this does to the neighbors who are being smoked out. It causes sickness and genuine despair. Aside from physical symptoms, it is common for the neighbors to develop significant emotional distress.

We feel it is important to point out some key facts about air pollution, and wood smoke pollution in particular. Medical research through the years has firmly established some defining attributes of air pollution that include:

1. In the same way as there is no safe number of cigarettes a person can smoke, there is no safe level of air pollution a person can breathe. Even low concentrations, well below EPA regulations, have been proven to be hazardous to public health.

2. The youngest and oldest members of the population are the most sensitive, and there are important genetic differences among people in their susceptibility to pollution. But everyone is harmed to some degree, even those that don't have symptoms.

3. Even short-term episodes have consequences, especially if they occur during critical windows of fetal development. Within half an hour, air pollution can increase anyone's blood pressure, even in children. In adults with atherosclerotic disease, which can be asymptomatic, exposure to any type of air pollution is associated with increased rates of heart attacks and strokes within a matter of hours.

4. Air pollution does not disperse equally throughout a community. The pollution in your own microenvironment is much more relevant to your health than what is measured in the broader community. Air pollution measured downwind from a wood burner can be up to 100 times greater than what is picked up even a mile away. Homes downwind of a wood burner have been shown to have indoor pollution levels as much as 88% as high as those outside the house, creating real pollution hotspots and real pollution victims.

5. Not all types of pollution are equally toxic, even if they are not differentiated by regulatory agencies. Wood smoke is probably the most toxic type of pollution that the average person ever inhales, due to the size of the particles and the chemical compounds that are attached to those particles. These include dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), benzene, acrolein, formaldehyde, and metals such as lead and mercury.

   Acrolein is a prominent toxic chemical in wood smoke, and is even used as a pesticide. Recently, the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment found that acrolein is likely much more carcinogenic than previously understood. Among the advice offered, the state told the public to "try to avoid breathing smoke from fires."

   The most dangerous particles are the subset of $PM_{2.5}$ called ultrafines, 0.1 microns in size and smaller, which characterize wood smoke. Once inhaled, these ultrafine particles are easily picked up by the bloodstream and delivered to virtually any organ in the body.

   Furthermore, the smaller the particle, the more easily it penetrates nearby homes no matter how tightly sealed, which is an additional reason why indoor concentrations of wood smoke in nearby homes can be almost as high as outside.

   The smaller the particle, the longer it stays suspended in the atmosphere, prolonging the opportunity to seep indoors and the likelihood of being inhaled by the occupants.

   Once inside a home, the particles are not dissipated by wind, eventually landing on indoor surfaces, allowing additional and prolonged opportunity for exposure of the occupants, especially children, when they touch floors, carpets, walls, and counter tops. Pediatricians now refer to this as "thirdhand" smoke in the case of cigarettes, and the concept is just as applicable with wood smoke.

Because of the high concentrations of ultrafines that escape filter capture, even under ideal circumstances, with the driest possible wood and with an exhaust filter and scrubbing system that works as designed and installed, burning wood still emits considerably more toxic pollution than other cooking methods.

The pollution in this situation isn't even coming from rooftop level, which would be harmful enough. The smoke is being emitted low to the ground, increasing the exposure even more.

The issue here isn't about the popularity of this restaurant. This is a public health matter, and public health protection must come first. No one's culinary preferences should involuntarily endanger other people's health.

Sincerely,

Brian Moench, MD
Board chair, Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution (DSAWSP)
www.dsawsp.org