

From: Erin Hillmer [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 14, 2026 1:45 PM
To: Jill McLewis <jmclewis@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Sandra Maurer <smaurer@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Phill Carter <pcarter@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Neysa Hinton <NHinton@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Stephen Zollman <szollman@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: Sebastopol Commons Concerns

Dear Mayor, City Councilmembers, and City Staff,

I'm writing to share my concerns about the Sebastopol Commons proposal and the plan to move several important public services to the former O'Reilly Media property.

I wasn't able to attend the recent public meetings because they were held at difficult times for me as a working parent. My understanding is based on the articles and public communications I've been able to find, so I apologize if I have misunderstood any of the details. I'm open to clarification.

To start, I'm concerned that this plan already feels fairly far along. From the outside, it feels a little like a done deal rather than a proposal the community is being meaningfully invited to help shape.

Moving this many services outside the downtown core will affect downtown businesses. Families, seniors, and other residents who visit the library, the Senior Center, and, to a lesser extent, City Hall all contribute to the everyday foot traffic that keeps Main Street active. They stop for coffee, shop, eat lunch, and take care of other errands while they are downtown. If these services move somewhere most people will need to drive to, that activity is pulled away from downtown.

I'm also concerned about accessibility. As a parent of two teenagers at Analy High School, I don't think it's realistic to assume that students will regularly use the trail to reach the O'Reilly property. It is approximately 0.8 miles from the school. Something can look accessible on a map without being realistically accessible in people's daily lives, particularly for teenagers, seniors, and residents without reliable transportation.

I have seen the phrase "the narrative of abandoning downtown" used multiple times in discussions about this proposal. This language frames a legitimate public concern as though it were merely a story or misconception, and feels dismissive. Moving the library, the Senior Center, and other public services at City Hall away from the downtown core **will** pull people and activity away from downtown. It removes regular community activity from the center of town and makes accessing these services more dependent on a car.

I also have serious concerns about the financial risk. The city would be purchasing and managing a large commercial property while relying on rental income to cover the costs.

The O'Reilly building has already been vacant for a long time. There are also empty storefronts in the Lucky shopping center across the street, along with the former Rite Aid building. This doesn't make me confident that finding and keeping enough tenants will be easy.

At the same time, the move would leave the current library, Senior Center, and City Hall buildings vacant downtown. The general message I've been hearing is that Sebastopol is already facing serious financial challenges. I'm concerned that this project could add to those problems rather than solve them.

Before the city moves forward, I want to understand the actual financial risk. What happens if the city cannot find enough tenants or collect enough rent to cover the purchase, maintenance, and management of the property? What will happen to the buildings left vacant downtown? And what will the long-term effect be on the businesses that remain there?

As a downtown business owner, a resident, and a parent raising teenagers in Sebastopol's downtown core, I am not in favor of this plan. I hope the city will seriously explore other options that keep essential public services accessible and connected to the heart of our community.

Thanks for your time and all of your service to our community.

Sincerely,

--

Erin Hillmer
Gather Sebastopol

