

Letter to City Council – 8100 Valentine Avenue

October 11, 2026

Mayor and Members of the Sebastopol City Council
cc: Planning Commission; Sebastopol Times

Re: 8100 Valentine Avenue (Grupe Investment Company) – How our neighborhood was left out of the process, and what we are asking for

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

I live in the neighborhood surrounding 8100 Valentine Avenue. This letter is not about a single design detail. It is about process. By the time most of my neighbors understood what was proposed behind our homes, the Planning Commission had already approved it. That should not happen in a city that values community the way Sebastopol says it does.

I want to be fair: I am not accusing anyone of bad faith. But from where we sit, the result looks the same as if this project had been deliberately kept quiet. Residents should not have to wonder about that. I am asking the Council to answer the questions below on the record.

1. This project was underway for a year before the neighborhood knew

Based on the City's own project page and Grupe's application documents:

- **Early 2025:** According to Grupe, the LDS Church began looking for a residential builder in the first quarter of 2025 and selected Grupe, citing a longstanding relationship. Grupe describes several months of detailed analysis and coordination before applying.
- **December 2025:** The Planning Department's monthly report lists a pre-application and an application for 8100 Valentine, plus "continued meetings with Rob Toste from Grupe Company." "Continued" means those meetings were already underway before December.
- **December 23, 2025:** Grupe filed a full application, including a density bonus request, a vesting tentative map, an SB 330 preliminary application and a request to remove heritage trees. Together, the vesting map and SB 330 filing largely lock in the City's rules for this site, so the ground rules were set months before most neighbors had heard of the project.
- **January 22, 2026:** The City sent Grupe its first incompleteness letter. Revised submittals followed in March, April and May, and the application was deemed complete by June.
- **March 17, 2026:** A special joint Planning Commission and Design Review/Tree Board meeting reviewed the project at 3:00 on a weekday afternoon, when most working residents could not attend.
- **Too early for the public:** Around this same period, neighbors who asked about the property were told it was "too early to discuss," even though the full application had been on file since December 2025. After the Sebastopol Times listed the March 17 meeting, one of my neighbors called City Hall to ask whether the public could attend. She was told it was too early, and that neighbors should wait for the Planning Commission hearing, where we would be able to ask questions and get involved. In fact, the March 17 meeting was open to the public, with in-person

and Zoom attendance and written public comments in the record. The Planning Commission hearing we were told to wait for was the meeting where the project was approved.

Questions: When did City staff first meet with Grupe or the Church about this site, and who attended those meetings? Why was no one in the neighborhood contacted at any point during those months?

2. The ADU-sale ordinance and this project moved in lockstep

The Planning Commission considered the City's AB 1033 ordinance, which allows ADUs to be sold separately from the main house, on December 9, 2025. Grupe filed its application two weeks later. The Council adopted the ordinance on a 4–1 vote in January 2026. State law does not require cities to opt in; Sebastopol chose to and was the first city in Sonoma County to do so.

Grupe's own project description says the City's approval of that ordinance made this project feasible, and that without it the project would likely not have worked. Grupe also explains that it deliberately searches for cities that promote ADU construction, and that Sebastopol fit its criteria.

What City Hall already knew: Grupe's project description, dated December 18, was built around selling the ADUs separately under an ordinance the Council had not yet adopted. The City's own records show this was no secret. The Planning and Building Departments' December 2025 activity reports were both in the Council's packet for January 20, the same meeting at which AB 1033 came back for final adoption. The Planning report listed Grupe's pre-application and "continued meetings" with Grupe's Rob Toste. The Building report described ongoing meetings with developers about both vacant sites on Valentine Avenue: "twenty homes with 19 ADU's on the old LDS site," which "intends to sell the homes and ADU's separately under a new law approved by the state this past year," and a second project of "60-75 units on the Valentine side of the Catholic Church, across the street from Libby Park." A resident quoted that report in written public comment and asked the Council to hold off on AB 1033.

The City's staff reports on AB 1033 said nothing about the two large Valentine Avenue projects already being planned around it, even though Grupe's application had been on file since December 23. Even at the time, residents objected to the rushed timeline and lack of public process, and one councilmember called the item hastily assembled.

Questions: The Council had this information in its own meeting packet when it adopted AB 1033. Why was it never shared with the people who live next to these two sites? Why did no one from the City reach out to our neighborhood then, nine months before the Planning Commission vote?

3. "Homes" or "condominiums"?

The project has been described to the public as single-family homes. Only recently have we seen it called condominiums. Here is why: under AB 1033, each ADU can only be sold separately through a condominium plan recorded on each lot after construction. The whole site will be a private community run by a homeowners association, with private streets, shared parking lots instead of garages, and a central trash enclosure.

To be clear, "condominium" describes how the units are owned, not what they look like. Every unit is still a detached house. On 19 of the 20 lots, a condominium plan will split the lot into two separately owned

units: the main home and its ADU. The one lot without an ADU stays a regular home lot. In total, that is 38 condominium units and one house, all inside one HOA community.

That is a very different thing from 20 houses on a street, and neighbors deserved to hear it plainly from the start.

4. What “affordable” actually means here

Until we got outside help, none of us understood how the affordable housing piece worked, and we suspect most residents still don’t. Here are the facts from the application:

- Only **3 of the 39 units** are deed-restricted as affordable, and they are priced for households earning up to **120% of area median income**. That is moderate income, not low income. For a family of four in Sonoma County, that is roughly \$160,000 a year.
- The other 36 units are market rate.
- Those 3 units are what qualified the project under state density bonus law for a concession and unlimited waivers: smaller lots, narrower lots, greater height, reduced setbacks, higher lot coverage, off-lot parking, and the right to remove heritage trees despite the City’s tree ordinance. Grupe estimated the cost savings from the tree concession at about \$1,125.
- Grupe describes the project as “attainable” homeownership for the “missing middle,” but its application gives **no sale prices** for the market-rate homes, the ADUs or the 3 affordable homes.

This should not take a neighborhood weeks of research to understand. A one-page, plain-language summary should be standard for any project like this.

5. Notice and participation were close to nil

- No neighborhood meeting was held before the design was largely set.
- **The only written notice was too little, too late.** Neighbors’ first and only mailed notice was a postcard for the September 22 Planning Commission hearing. It arrived on September 14, eight days before the hearing and nine months after Grupe filed its application. It described “20 single family homes and up to 19 detached Accessory Dwelling Units,” with no mention of condominiums, an HOA, or that only 3 homes would be affordable. At that hearing, the one we had been told to wait for, we were told it was too late to make changes.
- **The same pattern for the City Council hearing.** The mailed notice for October 20 arrived on October 9, eleven days before the hearing. As of October 10, the sign on the property still announces only the September 22 Planning Commission hearing, so nothing on site tells passersby that the project goes to the Council on October 20.
- The project page posts dozens of technical documents but no summary a resident could read in five minutes.

Speaking up still mattered: a secondary evacuation route was added after early public comments, and some setbacks were widened even at the September hearing. Imagine what real input from the start could have accomplished.

6. Is this the first of many?

The Catholic Church property down the street has already had a lot split approved. The same December 2025 Building Department report described a developer proposing 60–75 units on the Valentine side of that property, across from Libby Park. That is nearly twice the size of this project, on the same block. By its own account, Grupe looks for cities like ours that actively promote ADUs, and it has also asked the City to approve a public bond financing program for its impact fees.

Questions: What is the status of the proposal for the Catholic Church site? What other applications, pending or expected, rely on AB 1033 or state density bonus waivers? Will neighbors near those sites be told earlier than we were?

What I am asking the Council to do

1. Before the October 20 vote, publish a written timeline of all City contacts with Grupe and the Church about this site, including any pre-application meetings.
2. Explain on the record why the information in the December 2025 staff reports about both Valentine Avenue sites was not shared with nearby residents when AB 1033 was adopted.
3. Publish a list of pending or anticipated projects that rely on AB 1033 or density bonus waivers, including the Catholic Church parcel.
4. Before the vote, state the expected sale prices for the market-rate homes, the ADUs and the 3 affordable homes, and confirm in the conditions of approval that the 3 affordable units are primary homes on named lots, so ADUs cannot be substituted later.
5. Going forward, require for projects like this:
 - o an applicant-hosted neighborhood meeting before the application is deemed complete,
 - o mailed notice to nearby residents when an application is filed, not only days before a hearing,
 - o an updated sign on the site for every hearing, including City Council hearings,
 - o a one-page plain-language summary, including how many units are truly affordable and at what income level,
 - o staff reports on any new ordinance that disclose pending projects that would depend on it, and
 - o evening hearings, including study sessions and joint board meetings.

Our neighborhood is not against housing. We are against being the last to know. Please make sure the next neighborhood doesn't have to learn this the way we did.

Sincerely,

Janet Lundgren

Janet Lundgren

Resident, Valentine Avenue neighborhood, Sebastopol