

From: [REDACTED]
To: [City Council](#)
Cc: [Mary Gourley](#); [Oriana Hart](#)
Subject: Public Comment: Sebastopol as Hub of West County, 7/7 Council Meeting, Agenda Items 7 & 12
Date: Saturday, July 4, 2026 2:31:52 PM

Dear Sebastopol City Council,

Two Agenda items, #7 Building the Commons Update and #12 Library Remediation, make sense to be considered together.

Sebastopol is a hub and a gateway for West County, yet we don't currently have an open library in our City this summer. Patrons and staff have to travel to Forestville, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, and even Petaluma to get the materials and services they need. Hours are being extended in some branches, and I understand service volumes have gone up 10-30% in each of the closest locations.

We have lost a valuable "third place" for our out-of-school kids and a cooling site for the hot days to come. All those features and benefits that used to be a walk, a bike ride, or a short drive away are now a 15 to 30 minute drive for most Sebastopol Area residents.

As the Senior Center representative on the City's Building the Commons Committee, I'm in a position to see the data on just how big the service radius is for both the Senior Center and the Library. While both institutions are centered in Sebastopol, a city of 7,500 people, they actively serve tens of thousands of area residents. Simply transferring basic functions to facilities outside of Sebastopol is neither a long term solution nor a good short term accommodation.

The Building the Commons Committee has been rapidly forming and testing a long term solution for both the Library's and Senior Center's widely known need for more space. Both institutions need to double their size just to keep up with current needs. Demographic trends have also changed the exact center of where in Sebastopol the majority of their needs are.

You will be asked in the 7/7 meeting to approve over a quarter of a million dollars for the library building to cover some emergency remediation and further investigation into what "fixing" the mold problem will actually take and cost. This all makes sense if the current library building is our long term solution for library needs. But, that building can't be the long term solution. It's simply too small to serve our region. In recent history, the City looked at what it would take to remodel and double the size of the existing building. In today's dollars that would cost more than \$30 million, which is simply beyond the City's financial capacity in any near future.

Just like selling a house, it rarely makes sense to remodel and bring it up to perfect condition for how you used to use it. The new occupant will have their own ideas and purposes. Yes, it probably makes sense to fully understand the extent of the environmental problem in the old library building. Anyone wanting to repurpose that site will need to know if the structure is sound. Beyond that, it makes little sense spending a lot of money to return the library to its old performing condition. For over a decade now, the City and related parties have been trying to figure out how to have something other than the library that we now have. We need a bigger

space.

What does the Library's temporary needs have to do with The Commons? In our informational report, Agenda Item #7, the Building The Commons Committee is sharing our narrowed focus on two viable options for The Commons concept in Sebastopol: A new construction campus or an available existing campus.

Our available campus option affords an additional opportunity to provide an interim location for the Sebastopol Library. Even if the Council ultimately decides on a new construction Commons, the library and our other institutions will need temporary spaces during that construction process. I could imagine how switching funds from an uncertain rebuild of the existing library to occupying an available building in Sebastopol would solve a lot of problems. It would better position Sebastopol for however we proceed with making The Commons a reality.

Interestingly, in formal and informal surveys, both Senior Center and Library patrons identify parking as a primary concern. Meaning, the majority of facility attendees drive (or are driven), and it is the convenience and duration of that drive that affects their user experience. A library in Forestville means a much longer drive. A library within the City of Sebastopol brings back to town that local third place and a cooling site.

Thank you in advance for considering how two of your agenda items can work together.

- Kent Jenkins
Sebastopol Area Senior Center Representative
Sebastopol Commons: Building the Commons Committee