



BALLETTO

April 23, 2026

Subject: Protecting Sebastopol's Local Economy: Opposition to Grocery Outlet Proposal

Dear Members of the Sebastopol City Council,

I am writing to you today as a longtime local business owner and the founder of Balletto Vineyards and as a community resident who was raised here. I deeply love our community, and I want to see Sebastopol continue to thrive. I must express my strong opposition to the proposed Grocery Outlet at the former Rite Aid location on Main Street.

We already have seven wonderful grocery options serving our town. Adding an eighth store into this highly saturated market will not create new demand. Instead, it will cause direct cannibalization of the independent grocers who have supported our local schools, events, and neighborhoods for decades.

As a vintner, I see a specific threat to our agricultural community. Grocery Outlet devotes significant space to deep-discounted alcohol. Pushing national closeout wines at drastically reduced prices directly undercuts local wineries like mine. When a national chain shifts sales away from local producers, it harms the agricultural backbone of Sonoma County. We also cannot ignore the loss of our local economic multiplier. When we shop at independent markets, our dollars stay in town to support local roads, parks, and services. Grocery Outlet operates on a profit split with its national headquarters. This model siphons half of every profit dollar directly out of Sebastopol. Furthermore, we risk trading community-sustaining jobs with competitive wages for lower-tier retail roles that offer fewer benefits to our neighbors.

This proposal contradicts the vision outlined in our General Plan and the protective spirit of our Formula Business Ordinance. The developer's traffic study also raises serious concerns. It relies on generic reference material from different markets rather than actual, site-specific data that accounts for our upcoming downtown traffic changes. A high-volume discount store relies on shoppers looking for a quick bargain. This model will simply increase downtown congestion without bringing any foot traffic or synergy to our neighboring boutiques and cafes.

True affordability comes from a strong, resilient local economy. We must not trade away the local businesses, the quality jobs, and the unique character that makes Sebastopol such a special place to live.

I respectfully urge you to reject this proposal.

Sincerely,



John Balletto
Owner and Founder, Balletto Vineyards