

From: Kate Haug [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, July 19, 2026 1:34 PM
To: Zulema Higgins <zhiggins@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: City Puts Water System at Risk - Grand Jury Response - Public Comment July 21 - Please post

Dear Council Member and City Staff,

The City's response to the Grand Jury report does not address the Grand Jury's main concern and main finding which is lack of money for critical water infrastructure.

This is serious and if the City does not act responsibly, it puts the entire community at risk for Water System failure.

Grand Jury report pages 15- 18 outline the infrastructure conditions and their needs. Pages 17-18 show the particular dangers of the existing system:

"The recently completed Master Plan does a good job of documenting and estimating the repair/replacement costs to the systems. Sebastopol citizens and rate payers need to be aware of the condition, challenges and potential costs of failures of the systems. The list below is not a complete list of planned repair and capital projects, but a sampling of the types of projects and some of the costs and risks involved. Many of these should have been dealt with years ago.

1 – Pleasant Hill Loop (Estimate \$900,000 +): This is a critical safety element lacking in the water system. Redundancy is common to any well-engineered system, particularly for health or safety related systems. In good practice, fire/potable waters system main lines are loops so that an individual break or leak can be isolated and water is still available to users, fire hydrants etc. *Currently there is a section of the water system that is not looped and a rupture in this line, be it a leak or a rupture caused by a seismic event, could leave more than half of the city without water pressure to fight a fire for as long as it takes to repair the rupture. This could be catastrophic.* (For example, although the City's 2005 Master Water Plan recommended that the Pleasant Hill looping project be completed, the City has yet to fund and complete the project.)

2 – Well 4 Replacement (Estimate \$3 million): *Well 4 is the workhorse of the City's water system. This is a multi-year, multi-faceted program which needs reliable, consistent funding to ensure the entire project is completed in a timely matter.*

3 – There are significant water main and branch projects in the Master Plan. These are projects that need to be engaged and completed to avoid costly and disruptive water outages. It is much less expensive and inconvenient to replace mains as planned projects rather than on emergency basis."

<https://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/system/files/grand-jury/05-12-2026-sebast-water-posting.pdf>

Rather than putting money back into the Water Fund, the Council's recent decision to freeze rates and remove tiers radically reduces income to water fund, driving into a deficit, and severely impacts the ability to invest in critical infrastructure and thus puts the whole City at risk for Water System failure. This is documented in the recent analysis submitted to the City by myself, Mary Meihaus and Lee Mathias. All the Council Members have seen this document and it is in public record.

The City needs to act in good faith to the Ratepayer and repair the infrastructure. The City is in breach of its obligation to the health and safety of the community if it does not move forward with resolving the financial obligations of the Grand Jury findings. As has been presented on several occasions, the EFOC has made recommendations which would keep Water Fund levels viable for the necessary capital repairs.

It is a complete breach of public safety and fiduciary duty for Council to not ensure that critical water structure is repaired.

The EFOC has not recommended a new Cost Allocation Plan until time tracking has been implemented for at least 6 months nor has it recommended a new Rate Study until the Sewer Master Plan is received.

The EFOC does not recommend freezing rates and removing tiers until the current Cost Allocation plan is reduced, the attorney's fees are reimbursed, and Syserco Loan is shifted to the General Fund.

The City's RFP for a new Cost Allocation Plan should be geared toward Prop. 218 compliance and not Federal Government rules.

I ask you to follow the EFOC's Grand Jury recommendations to keep our water supply safe and secure.

Thank you,
Kate Haug