
Comment Regarding the Proposed Grocery Outlet Project (and some ideas)

From Katherine Maddox [REDACTED]

Date Sun 9/6/2026 7:34 AM

To John Jay <jjay@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Cc Victoria Henkel <vhenkel@cityofsebastopol.gov>; City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I feel compelled to voice my strong objection to a Grocery Outlet in the center of Sebastopol. This move would be a gross mistake. As many have stated, the store is physically hideous; it is a chain; we have more than enough grocery stores already. I appreciate that some people want the cheapest food possible. We already have Luckys right up the road, and it's a very easy drive to other Grocery Outlet locations, Costco, etc.

Please. Enough with the guilt over having too much. Suicidal empathy is killing this country, and will kill our town. Since I moved here 15 years ago, vagrancy has increased at least tenfold, in no small part to the homeless housing you keep greenlighting. My kids have been harassed in the parks, I now see needles on the ground, and I've had to call the police on three separate occasions (when my and other cars were being kicked in the post office parking lot, when a guy in a tent was screaming and acting psychotic in the Laguna, and when a young man assaulted me on the bike path). If I wanted to live in fear and squalor, I would have stayed in New York City.

We had and still have to some degree a beautiful, safe town. We don't have to ruin it just because not everyone is so lucky. We don't need a Grocery Outlet, we don't need a Dollar Tree, or an Old Navy or a Party City or any other chain store that sells cheap garbage. Please be thoughtful. We need beautiful, special, local retailers to keep our town unique and to attract tourists. Local industries are significantly changing and we need those magazine articles about Sebastopol being a must-see on any Sonoma tour. Believe me, it won't be if that store goes in. (The Sebastopol Hotel, for example, is never getting investors if this is going to be the town's new look.)

I know some people hate Healdsburg, but Healdsburg is doing pretty good. It has fantastic shopping and restaurants, a beautiful, central town square for events, and almost no homelessness. It's ok to want these things! We don't have to cater to the lowest common denominator to satisfy a progressive ideal that will ultimately make our town basic and boring.

Here are some ideas I've had.

First, put a new, modern building in the Rite Aid parking lot for a combined town hall, library and senior center. Put a large public parking lot (or even garage) behind it. Yes it will cost a lot, but it's crucial and will be transformative for Sebastopol. Get a grant, ask for donations from locals and businesses (I'd donate) - make it happen!

Second, address the town square. It's too small and not appealing. Take the land across the street (site of stalled Sebastopol Hotel) and make a bigger, better square. Bring in trees that are as tall as possible, lots of them, and lawn areas. This will serve to connect the Barlow to the rest of the town, finally creating the cohesion that's been lacking. The old square then becomes retail shopping. The Sebastopol Hotel can go there if investors' interests get piqued again (they will if you do this). A win on many levels. The new square ties it all together in a way I can't emphasize enough.

IF you can't pull off the modern public building idea at Rite Aid (and you really should), another idea: compel Whole Foods to move over there (bigger parking lot, etc). Old Whole Foods gets turned into a

gourmet food and wine store with outdoor cafe. Not a grocery store - more like an old-school epicurean shop, possibly even with separate counters or stalls, featuring cheeses, wine, breads, charcuterie and coffee. It smells good. You can sit outside, day and evening, and people-watch (which is sorely lacking in Sebastopol and the outdoor space is mostly wasted at Whole Foods). Both locals and tourists would *love it*. Very appealing, very Sonoma County.

Again, please. It's time to step it up a notch, not step it down a notch. For these taxes I expect great schools, few potholes, to feel safe, and to have retailers I want to support. We are moving in the wrong direction on all fronts. Grocery Outlet would be a stake in the heart of this town. It's time to pivot on the future of Sebastopol.

Thank you,

Katherine Maddox

