

Kati Aho



**September 19, 2026
Planning Commission
City of Sebastopol**

Subject: Public Hearing Opposition to Development Proposal re: 8100 Valentine Ave. (Toste/The Grupe Company)

Planning Commission Meeting – September 22, 2026

Dear Chair and Planning Commission Members,

My name is Kati Aho, and I am a Sebastopol resident living near 8100 Valentine Avenue, the site of the proposed subdivision and density bonus project by Rob Toste / The Grupe Company, LLC. I am writing regarding this proposal, which I understand has changed significantly from what was originally contemplated for this site.

1. A Proposal That No Longer Reflects the Surrounding Neighborhood

This 2.69-acre property was zoned for 14 homes, a scale and character consistent with our surrounding neighborhood of single-family homes, most 2 to 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, with attached 2-car garages, and predominantly one story. The current proposal is for 20 homes plus 19 accessory dwelling units, up to 39 total units, made possible through a legal lot split and a density bonus request under Government Code Section 65915. That statute is being used here to seek waivers for reduced setbacks, increased lot coverage, and greater building height. In effect, the applicant is asking the City to set aside its own zoning standards to fit a scale of development this site, and this neighborhood, were never planned to absorb.

2. A Design That Doesn't Function for the People Who Would Live There, or Their Neighbors

The proposal includes roughly 83 parking spaces, but the homes themselves have no driveways and no garages. Nor is there any real provision for the kind of storage every household actually needs, bicycles, kayaks, yard equipment, in part because these homes appear to have little to no yard space at all. A development this dense, without basic storage or private parking for its own residents, does not just affect the people who would live there; it pushes overflow parking and activity onto Valentine Avenue and surrounding streets that were never designed for it.

3. Tree Removal, Wildlife, and the Need for an Independent Review

The proposal includes removal of protected native trees under the City's Tree Protection Ordinance (SMC Chapter 8.12), including mature redwoods. I understand the tree assessment supporting this request was prepared by an arborist retained by the applicant. Given how much of this project's feasibility depends on that report's conclusions, I would ask the Commission to require the City's own independent tree and biological assessment before any removal permit is considered. This property is also home to red-tailed hawks, owls, and other wildlife. Birds of prey and their active nests are protected under California Fish and Game Code Section 3503.5, and any independent review should include a qualified biologist's nesting survey before tree removal or grading is approved.

4. A CEQA Exemption Claim That Doesn't Fit the Facts on This Site

I understand the applicant is asserting that this project qualifies for a CEQA exemption under Section 15183 as consistent with an existing community plan. I would ask the Commission to scrutinize that claim closely. A project seeking multiple zoning waivers, removing protected mature trees, and affecting documented wildlife habitat is not a routine, previously-analyzed scenario, it is exactly the kind of site-specific impact CEQA review exists to catch. Relying on a streamlined exemption here would mean approving significant, irreversible impacts without the environmental review the site actually warrants.

5. Traffic, Sewer, and Emergency Access on Infrastructure That Is Already Strained

Our neighborhood streets have increasingly become cut-through routes for drivers avoiding our main roads, with speeding already a regular concern, and our four-way stop near Brook Haven School at Valentine Ave. and N. Pleasant Hill has become a genuinely dangerous intersection. Valentine Avenue itself is a busy street year-round. Adding up to 39 units at this location, without a current traffic and pedestrian safety study, also raises real questions about capacity on the area's aging sewer system and adequate emergency and evacuation access, none of which should be assumed adequate without direct analysis of this project's actual density.

6. Density Is Not a Minor Concern to This Neighborhood

At a recent meeting, one Commissioner stated, "I am not concerned about the density." I would respectfully ask the Commission to understand that this entire neighborhood is concerned about the density. Compatibility with the character of the surrounding area is one of the core considerations the Commission is asked to weigh, and a proposal that nearly triples the originally planned number of homes, on a site already straining local infrastructure, is squarely a density question.

I understand the City faces real budget pressures, and that additional housing brings additional revenue. I don't believe that need should come at the cost of neighborhood compatibility, environmental protection, and basic infrastructure and traffic safety, all of which the City's own ordinances and state law require it to weigh, not waive.

I would appreciate the Commission's response to the following:

- How does a proposal for up to 39 units on a site zoned for 14, achieved through Government Code 65915 waivers, satisfy the neighborhood compatibility findings the Commission is required to apply?
- Will the City commission its own independent tree and biological assessment, including a qualified raptor and nesting-bird survey consistent with Fish and Game Code Section 3503.5, rather than relying solely on the applicant's own consultant?
- What is the basis for treating this project as exempt from further CEQA review under Section 15183, given the scope of waivers requested and the protected trees and habitat affected?
- What traffic, sewer capacity, and emergency evacuation analysis will be required, specific to our existing cut-through traffic and the four-way stop, before this density is approved?
- How will the Commission weigh neighborhood character and density concerns that residents throughout this area have raised, consistent with its own findings requirements?

Thank you for your time, and for your service to our community.

Sincerely,

Kati Aho

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Sebastopol Resident