

## Reimagine Downtown - Going back 40 years to 2-way traffic

Below is an analysis of the proposals to Reimagine Downtown. There are at least three slide decks floating around and we have no idea which one is going to be presented to the Council. Sections of each are copied below as a framework for analyzing the alternatives.

There is also a fifth alternative which was created by the Planning Commission. I was hopeful it would be fully explained in the document for this meeting, but it is not. If you read any of this look at the Hybrid proposal at the end. It is the only written explanation available and is largely thanks to the Sebastopol Times.

This focus is to help assess the individual options. There are many issues with the study that need to be addressed. There is a claim that Sebastopol is not safe for residents. This is false and irresponsible. There are many objectives of the study that were included in the proposal that have not been met. In particular, the study was supposed to incorporate ongoing initiatives by the county to reduce traffic through Sebastopol. If traffic is reduced the alternatives here become more acceptable. There are many other issues as well. I raise them all in other public comments.

One key argument is that this is restoring the traffic flow to what it was 40 years ago. The problem is that no one has actually asked what the traffic flow was back then. The photo below shows that in 1926 there was two way traffic but in at least one direction there were 2 lanes of traffic.



## STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENT: THE PLAZA

Sebastopol's central park, referred to as "the Plaza", sits right in the heart of downtown Sebastopol and serves as our community's living room - a place where neighbors gather for concerts, festivals, farmers markets, and simply enjoying a beautiful day outdoors. This green space connects directly to our downtown shops and restaurants, making it a natural hub for both locals and visitors.

As we reimagine downtown mobility, there are opportunities to make the Plaza even more accessible and inviting. The parking area can be converted to a shared street that could be programmed with expanded

seating, lounging areas, dining, and food truck accommodations to bring more activity to the area.

Adjacent improvements could include safer, more visible crosswalks and pedestrian pathways leading to the park, better bike parking facilities, enhanced lighting for evening events, and upgraded park amenities that encourage people to linger longer. Creating seamless, comfortable connections between the park and surrounding businesses would help the Plaza truly anchor our downtown as a destination where people want to spend time, not just pass through.



## General Observations

Improvements to this area would likely be welcomed by both businesses and residents. However, exactly what those changes might be are unclear. Currently, the space is primarily used on Sundays for the farmers' market. It is important to note that Sunday morning traffic entering town is comparable to school-hour congestion, and these vehicles require adequate parking.

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## Key Questions and Concerns

### Parking Impacts

Where will displaced parking be relocated? The plan removes approximately 55 parking spaces within the green areas and an additional 25 spaces designated for food trucks. During events, it is unclear where vehicles will park

Reduced parking directly impacts downtown businesses by discouraging visitors and decreasing sales tax revenue, while simultaneously increasing maintenance and cleaning costs. This approach does not align with stated sustainability goals.

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### Shared Streets Concept

The concept of “shared streets” is unclear in areas currently designated for parking. If parking is eliminated, it is unclear why slow-moving vehicles would continue to travel through the square and what functional purpose this serves.

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### Impact on Farmer’s market

Where would the booths be placed? Where would vendors park? From the drawing it is unclear that the market was a consideration in the “plan”.

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### Incomplete Plan

This is a concept not a plan. As with the entire plan, this section fails to consider and address the **limitations** of the space.

- First is it relatively small to host “festivals” and concerts of any significant size.
- Second, the space is rather sparsely landscaped due to the city’s prioritization of reduced water use for landscaping. There are also very limited money and staff to clean and maintain the current plaza. What is the ongoing cost of proposed amenities?
- Third, this area surrounding the current plaza contains 50 parking spaces. These spaces are well used every day by visitors shopping or using local restaurants. These spaces are critical to the downtown businesses and the economy that generates sales tax revenue to pay for all these amenities.

## **What is New for the Plaza?**

This proposal seeks to *“make the plaza “a place where neighbors gather for concerts, festivals and farmers market, and simply enjoying a beautiful day outdoors. Green space connects directly to our downtown shops and restaurants, making it a natural hub for both locals and visitors. “*

Since it already is utilized for all these purposes, there are concerts, farmers market and occasionally a very small festival as it is a very small event space. Without a proposal to expand it, stay on the Piazza property across the street its limitations remain.

There are currently lights, seating, lounging areas, dining and food truck accommodations. The crosswalk at Whole foods has a light. The crosswalk from Barlow probably needs work, particularly if the street is made into a two-way street.

A connection with the Barlow has long been a goal of the city and is not addressed in this plan for the Plaza.

Essentially there is no new information here. For \$260,000 the best of the suggestions is to add more green landscaping and buy more benches for seating. It suggested adding more amenities to encourage people to linger longer, but there was no discussion of what those might be.

## STREETScape IMPROVEMENT: JOE RODOTA TRAIL

The Joe Rodota Trail is an 8.5-mile paved pathway that connects Sebastopol to Santa Rosa, following what was once the Northwestern Pacific Railroad corridor. This beloved trail has become one of our region's most important car-free routes, used daily by commuters, recreational cyclists, families out for a walk, and runners enjoying the scenery. For many residents, it is the safest and most pleasant way to travel between the two cities without getting in a car. To maximize the trail's potential as a true alternative transportation route, improvements could focus on better connections between the trail and downtown Sebastopol, making it easier and more intuitive to transition from the trail to Main Street businesses.

This might include:

- clearer wayfinding signage
- increased landscaping for shade and ecological benefits
- dedicated bike lanes connecting the trail to downtown destinations
- improved trail surface maintenance
- better lighting in key areas
- additional access points that reduce barriers for people entering or leaving the trail

By strengthening these connections, the Joe Rodota Trail could play a large role in reducing vehicle trips and supporting our vision of a more walkable, bikeable community.



Existing terminus of the Joe Rodota Trail, looking west

### Homeless Encampments and Public Safety

What is the plan to address homeless encampments along this trail segment? Their presence discourages use by seniors, women, and families and raises concerns about safety and accessibility.

## SAFETY IMPROVEMENT: SEPARATED PROTECTED BIKEWAYS

A Class IV bikeway (separated bikeway) is a bike lane that includes a physical separation between the separated bikeway and the throughvehicular traffic. The separation may include, but is not limited to grade separation, flexible

posts, barriers, curb, or on-street parking. Caltrans provides design standards and guidelines, such as Design Information Bulletins (DIB) 89 and 94, for Class IV bikeways.

### One-Way Lanes

One-way separated bike lanes are located on either side of the street alongside the direction of vehicle travel. One-way protected bike lanes can connect to shared lanes, standard bike lanes, or protected intersections. In areas where cars merge across the bike lane, drivers must yield to people biking. Green paint, dashed lane markings, and signs help make this clearer.



### Two-Way Lanes

Two-way separated bike lanes have both directions of bike travel located on either side of the street. Two-way protected bike lanes also use physical barriers. Because bikes travel in both directions, intersections and driveways require extra care. Improving sight lines, slowing turning vehicles, and using clear markings all help increase safety.



## Bicycle Usage and Cost Effectiveness

Only 1% (approximately 70 residents) are classified as “strong and fearless” cyclists. Another 7% (approximately 490 residents) are “enthused and confident” and are most likely to be found on the northern extension of the Joe Rodota Trail. These groups represent the core potential users of protected bike lanes downtown.

While improved infrastructure may encourage additional cycling, the city has already invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in bike lanes with limited observed usage. As

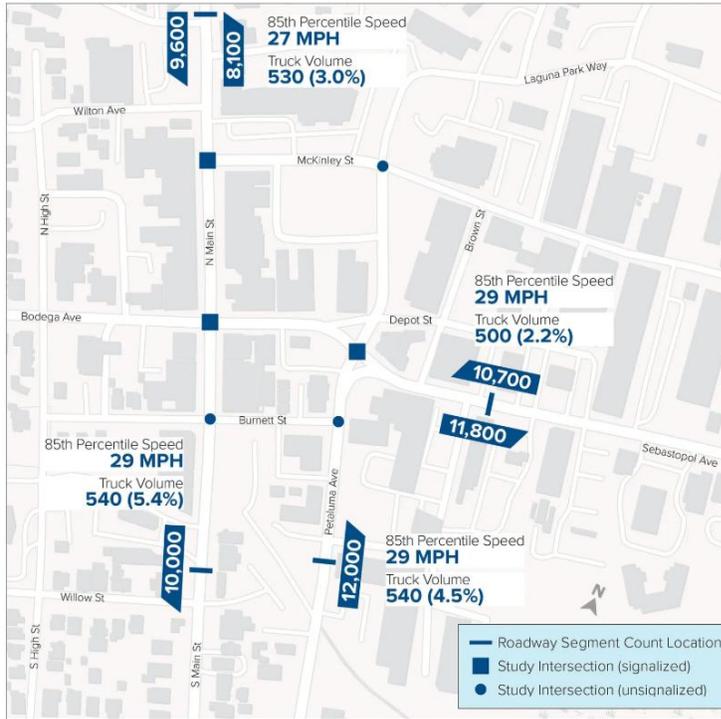
noted by a survey respondent, existing bike lanes on Petaluma Avenue see minimal daily use.

More than half of residents would still need to ride on unprotected bike lanes to reach the proposed protected segments. Without an integrated trail network that safely connects neighborhoods downtown, the overall benefit of the project appears limited relative to its likely very high cost and detrimental impact on traffic.

## Design Standards Bicycle Facilities



## Accommodating Traffic Flows:



Traffic counts map from Fehr & Peers, 2025.

Courtesy of the Sebastopol Times we have a little bit of data regarding the current traffic flows in Sebastopol.

With no data provided in the slides for the Planning Commission we have to turn to what we have to understand if traffic is really going to be a mess if the streets are shifted back to two ways.

1. We have historical evidence that congestion was a problem 20 years ago and improved with the shift to one way. The explanation was largely the reduction in the number of left-hand turns permitted by the one-way traffic.
2. When this change was made the city had 14,000 vehicles per day. Today it is well over 30,000 vehicles per day. No provisions in this plan make today's two-way flow better than 20 years ago. In fact, there is no discussion of left-hand turns, delays for parking vehicles and accommodation for delivery trucks.

## Alternative 1 Fine Tune Today

- One way car and bike circulation remains unchanged
- Parking reduction of ~10-15 spaces (2%)
- Bikeways to be protected/separated\*
- Narrower lanes and shorter turn pockets
- Shortens crossing distance at intersections
- Adds midblock crosswalks on long blocks
- Traffic signal timing adjustments for reduced speeds, traffic calming, and ped/bike safety

\* The side of the street for the bikeway is subject to change as design is refined

Reimagining the Core: A Vision for Mobility and Vitality in Downtown Sebastopol

### ALT 1: FINE-TUNE TODAY

Enhances the Plaza and formalizes the Joe Rodota Trail extension to Main Street as part of its streetscape improvements. It maintains the existing one-way circulation pattern downtown while reducing the number of travel lanes in each direction. Safety is improved through fully protected bicycle facilities and other targeted measures, including shorter turn pockets. Traffic operations and overall flow are refined through optimized signal timing and adjustments designed to minimize motorist delay.

#### 🛡️ Safety and Comfort

🍏🍏🍏🍏 2.5 / 4

#### 🚲 Access and Mobility

🍏🍏🍏🍏 2.5 / 4

#### 🏙️ Downtown Vitality & Sense of Place

🍏🍏🍏 2 / 4

#### 🏠 Feasibility & Cost

🍏🍏🍏 2 / 4

#### 👥 Community Support

🍏🍏🍏 2 / 4

**TOTAL**

**11**

#### Key

🚗 Parking

🚲 Separated Bike Lanes

🚦 Signal

🚶 Pedestrian

🚗 Regular Lane

🚗 Right Turn

🚗 Beacon (RRF)

🚗 Beacon (PHB)

🚗 Pedestrian

🚗 Activated

🚗 Flashing Beacon

🚗 Beacon (proposed)

🚗 New Pedestrian Spaces

🚗 Joe Rodota Trail Enhancements

🚗 Joe Rodota Trail



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There are two versions describing each project. One fails to mention that there are reduced numbers of lanes in each direction in the fine tune option.

Reducing parking by 10-13 spaces seems like a small thing but recall there may be up to 75 fewer parking spaces in the plaza as well. It appears the parking is being reduced primarily on the northbound side of Main nearest to 12. Perhaps for a sidewalk extension? Has there been consideration for large fire trucks and freight trucks to make the left turn onto 12?

## Alternative 2 Test the Two Way

- Converts Main Street to two-way for cars
- Bikeways in both directions on Petaluma Avenue
- Parking reduction of ~5-10 spaces (1%)
- Bikeways to be protected/separated\*
- Narrower lanes and shorter turn pockets
- Shortens crossing distance at intersections
- Adds midblock crosswalks on long blocks
- Traffic signal timing adjustments for reduced speeds, traffic calming, and ped/bike safety

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### ALT 2: TEST THE TWO-WAY

Enhances the Plaza and formalizes the Joe Rodota Trail extension to Main Street as part of its streetscape improvements. It converts Main Street to two-way circulation with turn pockets provided only where turns are permitted, and the design is envisioned to function with minimal changes should the City choose to revert to the existing one-way couplet in the future. Safety is improved through fully protected bicycle facilities and other targeted measures, including shorter turn pockets. Traffic operations and overall flow are refined through signal timing optimized to the extent feasible to support efficient traffic movement.

#### ✓ Safety and Comfort

3 / 4

#### 🚲 Access and Mobility

3.5 / 4

#### 🏙️ Downtown Vitality & Sense of Place

2.5 / 4

#### 💰 Feasibility & Cost

2 / 4

#### 👥 Community Support

3 / 4

**TOTAL**

**14**

**Key**

- 🚶 New Pedestrian Spaces
- 🚲 Separated Bike Lanes
- 🚗 Parking
- 🚦 Signal
- 🚏 Bus Stop
- 🚊 Blue Station
- 🚦 Stop Sign
- 🚦 Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB)
- 🚦 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB)
- 🚦 Pedestrian-Activated Flashing Beacon
- 🚦 (proposed) use

Note: Scale and for illustrative purposes only. Additional engineering analysis and coordination will be required to determine final design.



### Just a test what can go wrong.

First the proposed test is to convert main to two ways. The “experiment” means instead of 2 lanes going south toward Petaluma there will only be one lane. Typically, during peak hours traffic through downtown backs up to at least Fandees, sometimes to ACE. This is with 2 through lanes and a lengthy left turn lane as highway 12. This proposal has two lanes of opposing traffic with what looks like a left turn lane for highway 12 traffic.

The downside of this proposal is that some parking spaces are reduced to accommodate a midblock pedestrian crossing.

Southbound traffic will have a single lane with no space to pull around parking cars. The right turn delay for pedestrians will further delay traffic. If the pedestrian light is triggered separately from the autos, then there will be delays on both Bodega and Main street that are not there now.

## Alternative 3 Walkable One Way

- One way car circulation remains unchanged
- Bikeways in both directions on Petaluma Avenue
- Parking reduction of ~10-15 spaces (2%)
- Bikeways to be protected/separated\*
- Narrower lanes and shorter turn pockets
- Shortens crossing distance at intersections
- Adds midblock crosswalks on long blocks
- Traffic signal timing adjustments for reduced speeds, traffic calming, and ped/bike safety

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### ALT 3: WALKABLE ONE-WAY

Enhances the Plaza and formalizes the Joe Rodota Trail extension to Main Street as part of its streetscape improvements. It maintains the existing one-way circulation pattern downtown while reducing the number of travel lanes in each direction. Safety is improved through fully protected bicycle facilities shifted entirely to Petaluma Avenue, maximizing opportunities for wider sidewalks and more robust streetscape amenities in the core of downtown. Traffic operations and overall flow are refined through optimized signal timing and adjustments designed to minimize motorist delay.

✓ Safety and Comfort	3.5 / 4
🚲 Access and Mobility	3.5 / 4
🏙️ Downtown Vitality & Sense of Place	3 / 4
💰 Feasibility & Cost	1.5 / 4
👥 Community Support	3 / 4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14.5</b>

<b>Key</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🚗 Parking</li> <li>🚦 Signal</li> <li>🚶 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB)</li> <li>🚶 Pedestrian Activator</li> <li>🚶 Flashing Beacon</li> <li>🚲 New Pedestrian Spaces</li> <li>🚲 Separated Bike Lanes</li> <li>🚰 Bus Stop</li> <li>🚰 Blue Station</li> <li>🚰 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB)</li> <li>🚰 (proposed)</li> </ul>
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### ALT 3: WALKABLE ONE-WAY

Enhances the Plaza and formalizes the Joe Rodota Trail extension to Main Street as part of its streetscape improvements. It maintains the existing one-way circulation pattern downtown while reducing the number of travel lanes in each direction. Safety is improved through fully protected bicycle facilities shifted entirely to Petaluma Avenue, maximizing opportunities for wider sidewalks and more robust streetscape amenities in the core of downtown. Traffic operations and overall flow are refined through optimized signal timing and adjustments designed to minimize motorist delay.

This option appears to make the city more walkable and keep the one-way flow. Sounds great. I'm not sure everyone understands the details.

Again, we lose more parking spaces. It says 10-15 spaces. The diagram shows lost parking at the center of Main to accommodate a new pedestrian crosswalk.

They are reducing the traffic to two lanes in the same direction on main street. The lane reduced is the left turn lane to highway 12. We all know this left turn can be a slow process when traffic is heavy on Bodega towards Santa Rosa (like summer beach days).

The right lane is also going to be used for both through traffic and right turns on Bodega which are currently challenging on green lights due to pedestrians crossing.

The traffic on Petaluma Ave is still one lane. The primary impact will be adding another pedestrian crosswalk and the opposing traffic at Laguna and McKinley that may be trying to turn left on Laguna or continue straight into the Barlow. It is unclear in this plan how that will be handled safely.

## Alternative 4 Totally Two Way

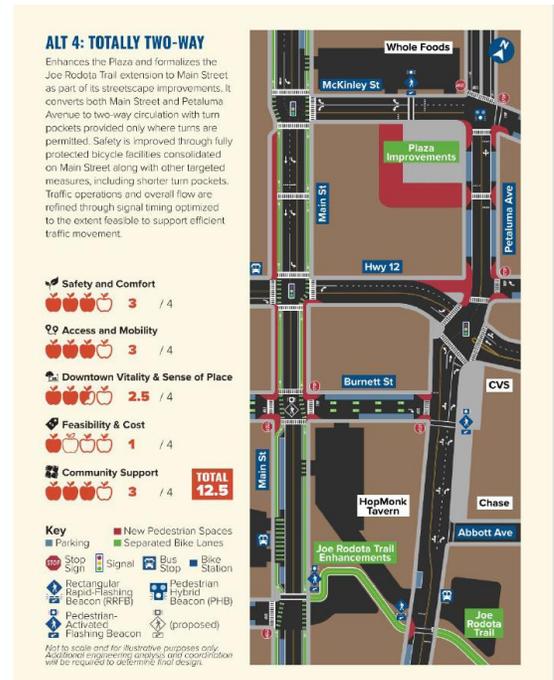
- Converts both Main Street and Petaluma Avenue to two-way for cars
- Bikeways in both directions on Main Street
- Parking reduction of ~50 spaces (8%)
- Bikeways to be protected/separated\*
- Narrower lanes and shorter turn pockets
- Shortens crossing distance at intersections
- Adds midblock crosswalks on long blocks
- Traffic signal timing adjustments for reduced speeds, traffic calming, and ped/bike safety

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### ALT 4: TOTALLY TWO-WAY

Enhances the Plaza and formalizes the Joe Rodota Trail extension to Main Street as part of its streetscape improvements. It converts both Main Street and Petaluma Avenue to two-way circulation with turn pockets provided only where turns are permitted. Safety is improved through fully protected bicycle facilities consolidated on Main Street along with other targeted measures, including shorter turn pockets. Traffic operations and overall flow are refined through signal timing optimized to the extent feasible to support efficient traffic movement.



First parking. This removes 50 more parking spaces (100 total) or 20% of the total available parking spaces in the city. Parking on Main Street is eliminated in favor of bike lanes on each side of the street.

How will that impact downtown businesses? What is the impact of people driving around the city looking for parking spaces on climate? Some in the city want residents to pay thousands of dollars for electric kitchens, there is a ban on drive through lanes, but the city doesn't care if people drive round looking for parking.

With Bike lanes on both sides there will be less problem with traffic slowing for cars trying to park. What provision is being made for delivery trucks to the businesses downtown?

Again, descriptions and public comments in ST and these maps all have problems. The descriptions we have seen in the ST and from informed commenters is that there will be two lanes in downtown with traffic flowing in both directions. Southbound 116 traffic bound for highway 12 traffic would turn left at McKinley and then left on highway 12 to Santa Rosa.

One map (above) shows Main after McKinley as three lanes of traffic with the center lane labeled for a left turn onto highway 12. The stated goal of this was to turn cars going to Santa Rosa into McKinley and then left onto 12. This map does not show an arrow for the northbound lane; assume it is the blank lane.

Petaluma Ave is reduced to one lane in each direction in front of Whole Foods. There will be choke points that will slow the considerable volume of traffic that flows through there. Reducing one lane means traffic that wants to turn left on main will block the flow of traffic wanting to turn right. There are plans for at least one additional pedestrian crossing. Also there will be some traffic control at the corner of Laguna and McKinley to permit crossing traffic to get to the Barlow and residential neighborhoods behind Whole Foods.

This is a critical constraint that is not addressed in any of the plans.

## Hybrid:

Alternative 4's two-way streets with Alternative 3's amenities, including two-sided parking on Main Street and a two-way bikeway on Petaluma Avenue.



*Not to scale and for illustrative purposes only. Additional engineering analysis and coordination will be required to determine final design.*



The Planning Commission created another option that blends Option 3 Walkable 1 way with two-way streets. We don't have a written description of the proposal but can get some highlights from the diagram (created by Sebastopol Times).

Parking improved over the Totally two way and walkable one way. Most parking is maintained on both sides of main except the crosswalk. Bike lanes are moved to Petaluma avenue. Petaluma avenue is reduced to one lane in each direction once past Mimi's heading toward Whole Foods. The issues with the intersection at Laguna and McKinley need to be addressed as well as the choke created by traffic turning left on Main from McKinley.

Although the stated plan was to move all traffic that wants to go toward Santa Rosa onto McKinley, this diagram show left turns at highway 12 and main. This may be a mistake by ST in creating the diagram.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Traffic impact:**

- All options reduce traffic on Main from 2 through lanes and a left turn lane to one through lane.
  - Fine Tuning and Test the two ways maintain a left turn lane at highway 12.
  - Walkable one way maintains two lanes of through traffic by has not right or left turn lanes at highway 12 which would create significant delays or the need for lane changes to the lane that is moving.
  - Totally two way shows a left turn lane to highway 12 and one thru lane with no right turn lane.
  - It is uncertain how the flow would be for the Hybrid. The ST reports simply two opposing lanes and no turn lanes.
- One-way options may have a slight advantage due to left turns not crossing oncoming traffic. However, all options see a reduction in lanes of thru traffic. This effectively lowers the number of cars that can be handled at peak traffic times.

### **Parking Impact:**

- The Plaza proposal appears to eliminate 50 current parking spaces to expand the plaza. An additional 25 would be eliminated for food truck events.
- All options reduce parking by 10-15 spaces on main due to the addition of a crosswalk.
- Alternative 4 all two ways have the largest impact on parking, losing 50 downtown parking spaces
- It appears the Hybrid option also eliminates 10-15 spaces, perhaps more on Petaluma Avenue to accommodate the bike lanes.

### **Attractiveness Downtown:**

- It appears that land scaping and gardens along main street might be in the plan. Uncertain if the Hybrid has plantings. Uncertain at this point if there is access to water for irrigation, who is going to manage the plantings (weeds, feeding etc.) The city currently does not maintain any city owned landscaping due to shortages of money and PW staffing.
- Although the main selling point is fewer lanes and less traffic the reality is quite different. All of the current southbound traffic will continue to go through a single southbound lane. Traffic currently on Petaluma Ave will likely re-route onto main and add to the volume of traffic northbound. Essentially the number of cars passing through town will increase, potentially double. With delays for lights, pedestrian

crossing and parking vehicle much of this traffic will be stopped creating emissions that may make the sidewalks downtown impossible to sit and enjoy a meal.

## **SAFETY**

- Data from the last switch showed a 20% decrease in the number of accidents after the switch to one way. Reasons cited included being less complicated. With 30% of Sebastopol's elderly population, it may not be a good thing.
- The mid-block pedestrian crosswalks create another opportunity for cars and pedestrians to do bad things together. Most of our pedestrian accidents occur at crosswalks.
- Potential for anger and frustration causes drivers to make poor decisions.
- Opposing traffic creates opportunities for head-on collisions which we don't have now.
- The accident statistics for Sebastopol show more than half the accidents on Petaluma and Main cars hitting "obstacles" rather than pedestrians or other cars. Keep in mind that cars hit obstacles and sidewalks can be unsafe.
- Planners know it as "Ghost Traffic". It was there when you studied the traffic and gone after the changes. Everyone knows that the choice if you are stuck in traffic is to head into the residential areas. This study does not identify those streets affected and assesses the risk to residents, children playing or bicycle riders trying to avoid the big roads.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Traffic congestion and noise downtown is a constant complaint. Shuffling the same cars from one street to another still leaves you with the same traffic congestion, noise and pollution. This is true even if the city chooses to spend tens of millions of dollars on the proposed changes.

The next opportunity to spend ¼ million dollars should focus on the County initiatives to help divert through traffic in Sebastopol. With this done, downtown has fewer cars and less noise and pollution. People will want to sit on the street.

