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Sent: Monday, March 16, 2026 3:35 PM
To: Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: Chamber Statement re BIA funds

Statement from the Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce

Approximately two and a half years ago, the Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce and representatives of the Sebastopol Downtown Association began discussions about a potential merger between the two organizations. The goal of these conversations was to create a more unified approach to supporting the Sebastopol business community and strengthening collaboration between downtown businesses and the Chamber.

At the time these discussions began, representatives from the Downtown Association including Michael Carnacchi, Adam Parks, Adam Bulbulia, and Angelina Aire, were actively involved in exploring what that partnership might look like. Over the course of many meetings and presentations to City Council, both organizations worked toward what we believed could be a constructive and beneficial collaboration.

However, over time the circumstances surrounding the agreement changed significantly. The original Downtown Association representatives who were part of those early discussions were no longer able to continue their involvement, and the structure that had initially been envisioned evolved into something substantially different.

Andrea Caron later stepped in to assist with continuing the process. In working through the details, it was discovered that the Sebastopol Downtown Association had lost its 501(c)(6) nonprofit status due to a lapse in required filings. As a result, the concept of a merger shifted toward a different arrangement in which the Chamber would act as a fiscal sponsor for the Downtown Association and receive Business Improvement Area funds on its behalf, while a downtown committee would develop programming and budgets for City Council consideration.

When a proposed budget was presented by the current downtown committee under this revised structure, it included a projected deficit of approximately \$5,000 against annual revenues of roughly \$8,000–\$9,000. Given the financial risks involved, as well as the significant administrative time required from Chamber leadership, the Chamber's Board of Directors determined that continuing in this role would not be responsible or sustainable. The Chamber Board therefore voted unanimously to withdraw from the agreement and refocus its efforts on its core mission: serving Chamber members and supporting the broader Sebastopol business community.

While we are disappointed that the original vision was not able to move forward as intended, we believe it is important for organizations to recognize when a structure is no

longer workable. The Chamber remains committed to maintaining positive relationships with downtown businesses and looks forward to continuing to support a strong and vibrant downtown Sebastopol in ways that are sustainable for our organization.

Myriah Volk

Executive Director

Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce



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