
Public Comment: Opposition to Grocery Outlet - Protecting Sebastopol's Small-Scale Downtown Character

From Nicole Letaw [REDACTED]

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To City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Victoria Henkel <vhenkel@cityofsebastopol.gov>; John Jay <jjay@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Dear Members of the Planning Commission and City Council,

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed Grocery Outlet project in downtown Sebastopol.

While I appreciate the importance of accessible food options, I have concerns that this project does not align with Sebastopol's General Plan goals or the long-term vision for a vibrant, diverse, and locally-oriented downtown core.

Sebastopol has intentionally maintained a small-scale, locally-focused identity, and is notably not a big-box retail town. This has been a key factor in preserving the city's charm, walkability, and appeal as a destination for both residents and visitors. Introducing a formula discount retailer of this scale risks shifting that balance and setting a precedent that may be difficult to reverse.

Additionally, Sebastopol already has a high concentration of grocery and food retail options relative to its size. Adding another store in this category risks oversaturating the market while limiting opportunities for more diverse, locally-serving businesses that contribute to the unique character and economic resilience of our downtown.

In particular, I encourage the Commission and Council to consider:

- **Land Use Balance:** Whether this project supports a healthy mix of retail, dining, and community-serving uses, rather than further concentrating a single category of business.
- **Downtown Vitality:** The extent to which a formula retailer contributes to (or detracts from) a distinctive, walkable downtown experience that supports small businesses and local entrepreneurship.
- **Economic Sustainability:** The potential long-term impact on existing local markets and independent retailers, many of which are integral to Sebastopol's identity and economic ecosystem.
- **Consistency with the General Plan:** Whether the project aligns with adopted policies around maintaining a unique, small-scale, and locally-focused downtown.

Sebastopol's character is one of its greatest assets. Land use decisions in the downtown core should reinforce that identity, not dilute it. I respectfully ask that you carefully evaluate whether this proposal advances the community's long-term goals and prosperity.

Sincerely,
Nicole Letaw