

From: Pat Burns [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2026 1:04 PM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Letter of Support for A&M BBQ

Dear Mayor McLewis, City Council and Staff,

Attached please find my letter in support of A&M BBQ.

Thank you for your time in this matter,

Pat Burns

To the Sebastopol City Council and City Staff,

I am writing to express my strong support for A&M BBQ and my deep concern over the City's apparent willingness to jeopardize the future of a successful local business because of a small number of complaints and what now appears to be a disputed interpretation of a permit that has been in place for years.

Sebastopol has long promoted itself as a community that values local businesses, entrepreneurship, and a vibrant downtown. Residents have repeatedly voiced opposition to large chain stores and restaurants, arguing that locally owned businesses are what make Sebastopol unique. If that is truly the City's philosophy, then A&M BBQ should be viewed as a success story, not a problem to be eliminated.

A&M is exactly the type of business communities should be fighting to keep. It is family-owned, locally operated, creates jobs, generates tax revenue, attracts visitors, and brings customers into town who often spend money at other local businesses before or after their meal. At a time when many downtowns are struggling with vacancies, declining foot traffic, and economic uncertainty, businesses that draw people into the community should be valued and supported.

Instead, it appears the City is considering actions that could ultimately force this business to close or relocate.

What is particularly troubling is that A&M has reportedly operated for two years before the City determined that its use permit may not allow the very activities that have made the business successful. If there was a permit issue, why was it not identified from the beginning? Why was the business allowed to invest substantial resources, hire employees, establish a customer base, and become a recognized part of the community before this concern was raised?

Small business owners already face enormous challenges. They navigate regulations, rising costs, labor shortages, inflation, and countless other obstacles. The last thing they should have to worry about is whether years after opening, a city will suddenly reinterpret a permit in a way that threatens their livelihood.

No one is suggesting that neighboring residents should be ignored. Legitimate concerns deserve to be heard and addressed. But local government has a responsibility to seek solutions rather than create casualties. If there are concerns regarding smoke or odors, then the focus should be on mitigation, collaboration, and problem-solving. The goal should be finding a way for the business and its neighbors to coexist, not creating conditions that drive a successful business out of town.

The message this situation sends extends far beyond A&M BBQ.

Every current and future business owner is watching. They are asking themselves whether Sebastopol is truly a place that supports local business investment or whether success can be undermined years later by changing interpretations and regulatory uncertainty. Communities do not strengthen their local economies by creating an environment where entrepreneurs feel they are one complaint away from losing everything they have built.

A&M has demonstrated that there is demand for its product. Customers continue to show up. The business contributes to the local economy. It supports jobs. It generates tax revenue. It helps create the kind of active, thriving downtown that city leaders frequently say they want.

The City should be doing everything reasonably possible to keep that business operating while addressing legitimate concerns through practical solutions. Driving out a successful family-owned business should be the absolute last option considered, not the first.

Sebastopol has a choice to make. It can stand behind the small businesses that invest in the community and contribute to its economic vitality, or it can send a message that even successful local businesses are never truly secure.

I strongly urge the City Council and staff to work with A&M BBQ to find a reasonable path forward that preserves both the business and the character of the community. Supporting local business should mean more than words. This is an opportunity to prove it.

Sincerely,
Pat Burns
Healdsburg, CA