From: Paul Fritz [redacted]
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 5:27 PM
To: Public Comment Received For City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: 'Rob Toste' [redacted]
Subject: Valentine Housing Project

Dear Council Members,
I did not attend this week's meeting for the review of the proposed Valentine Housing project, but I did read today's summary in the Sebastopol Times and I have to say I am surprised at the vitriol expressed by the council toward this project and the developer. I am under the impression that you do not really understand what it takes to build housing today. I also do not think you understand the how the comments you made at the meeting impact future housing development in Sebastopol. Sebastopol has a reputation for being a difficult place for developers, and with meetings like this it is not difficult to understand that is a well-deserved reputation.

We are in the housing crisis we find ourselves in because your attitude towards this project has been the prevailing attitude of decision-makers across the state for decades. This is exactly why the state has been steadily eroding 'local control' over housing decisions in recent years. The restrictions imposed by local Zoning Ordinances are why it has been VERY difficult to actually build the housing we need.

According to the background documentation of the last Housing Element update, Sebastopol built 1,409 housing units in the years between 1960 and 1979. From 1980 to 1999 we built just under 1,000. Between 2000 and 2020 we have built less than 200 units. Is it surprising that housing is so hard to find, and that it is so expensive? We have not been keeping up with demand. And simple economics tells us when supply does not keep up with demand, the price increases.

This project is proposing to provide 39 new units of housing on a nearly 3 acre site. This amounts to about 14.5 dwelling units per acre (I am **including** the ADUs in that density calculation, which we do not generally include and why this calculation does not agree with what was stated in the staff report in regards to the project density). While it is more dense than the surrounding neighborhood, it is not anywhere near what you could call high-density. And there is precedent for other similarly dense housing developments around the neighborhood.

- Sequoia Village, adjacent to the Catholic Church on Covert – 20 units, 11 du/acre, and all two-story units. One driveway serving the property. Emergency vehicles must turnaround in the parking lot.
- Winding Wood, condos directly to the east of this neighborhood, driveway near Covert/116 intersection – 25 units, 11.8 du/acre, all two-story units, some 10' from a property line shared with the adjacent single family homes. A single driveway requiring emergency vehicles to turnaround on the property.
- Village Green, condos at corner of Covert/Norlee – 39 units, 11 du/acre, all two story units. Two separate parking areas and driveways. I have not ground truthed this but it appears that emergency vehicles would be required to turnaround after pulling into the parking lot.

I believe any outrage over the inappropriateness of this project is misplaced. I understand that this property has been a church since the property was developed and neighbors have gotten used to having a neighboring property that was seldom used. But it is zoned for single-family housing. And single-family housing is what the developer proposed. And this is a good neighborhood for some higher density. The residents of this development are within walking distance of parks, schools and shopping. This is infill

housing. And while I would love to have more housing downtown, that is even more difficult to develop with our current zoning code. At the planning commission meeting one of the residents of Sequoia Village spoke in favor of the project. She spoke of how much she loved the neighborhood and how she loved living in a development like Sequoia Village. I'm glad she spoke of her experience as a resident of a higher-density development.

I understand some of you are upset that the developer is using state density bonus law to circumvent our R4 development standards. And some of you are also upset that the developer is using our recent adoption of AB 1033 to incorporate for-sale ADUs into the development. I guarantee that if the developer had to comply with our development standards on this project, nothing would get built. R4 requires a minimum lot size of 5,000 sf, which is about 8 total units. If that number of units were even attractive to a developer, the sales price of those units would be required to be **substantially** higher. There are many costs of development which are required not matter the number of units. And fewer units means those shared costs are going to be higher for each unit. Things like land cost, utilities, design team fees, plan check fees, etc. all add up. And are generally the same whether there are 5 or 50 units on a given parcel. I think you understand the math.

But rather than get 8 units that would most certainly be priced over $1,000,000 we are going to get 39 units priced between $600,000 and $700,000. While I agree that those are not inexpensive sales prices, I challenge you to find any single-family detached housing in Sebastopol for less. The prices of the homes in the surrounding neighborhood are in the low $800,000s to over $1,000,000 (according to Zillow). So these brand new homes will be more affordable than pretty much anything else in the neighborhood, or anywhere else in Sebastopol for that matter (the condo projects I mentioned above are generally less). There was a time we built starter homes, but not in recent years. These homes will be starter homes for young families. I could imagine a young family buying a 750 sf ADU and possibly moving up into a larger single-family home in the development as their family grows. Then maybe they could downsize again into one of the ADUs as they enter the empty nest phase of life. How great would that be to be able to stay in your community throughout the various phases of your life?

I also want to point out that in 1960 before the homes in the Valentine, Covert, Pleasant Hill neighborhood were constructed, the area consisted of orchards and fields, and an exposed Zimpher Creek. I was not alive at that time, but I guarantee there were people in Sebastopol that did not want these homes to be constructed. They were accustomed to the open space at the western edge of town. And they probably said things like:

'What about the traffic that will be generated by the new residents?'
'What about the utility infrastructure? We certainly don't have enough water or sewer capacity for hundreds (a thousand?) of new homes!'
'What about the trees that are going to be cut down?'
'What about the wildlife that currently populates the land?'
'What about the creek you're going to put into a culvert? How will that impact the drainage in the neighborhood?'
'What about my view?'
'I walk my dog in those fields!'

Sound familiar? But isn't it great that those homes were built, and the residents that were out in force trying to stop this project on Tuesday night have a place to call home? It's such classic NIMBYism it is almost laughable.

And I don't understand Council Member McLewis' grandstanding about her opposition to AB 1033. It's fine that you think we should never have adopted AB 1033, but we did. And as a council member you are required to uphold the Municipal Code, and AB 1033 is now part of our code. If you want to try an repeal the approval of AB 1033, that's fine. But while it is the law of the city, you cannot deny a project because you didn't vote to adopt the original law. I hate to make this comparison, but it is like our current president refusing to enforce laws passed by congress, which he does quite freely. Once the law is passed it is your responsibility to evaluate projects based on the municipal code at the time the application was made. Your opposition to this project, had you been joined by a majority, and it looks like you almost were, would certainly expose the city to a lawsuit. One that we would certainly lose. I don't think council members should be making decisions that expose us to such obvious litigation.

And the vitriol expressed towards the developer is just misplaced. Council member Zollman calling the developer 'really atrocious' and threatening their karma is not productive civil debate. And again, developers are aware of this. It is not surprising that most of the recent housing development projects in town (Canopy, Woodmark and this project) have been by out-of-town developers. Maybe our reputation has not reached where these developers hail from. But local developers are paying attention. And I think it would be great to have local developers, and architects, working on projects here. But it is a tough crowd.

And what about the property taxes generated by this project? And the impact fees. I realize ADUs do not pay fully for impact fees, but even without them, I estimate the city will receive well over $500,000 in impact fees from this one project. I know it's not always about the money, but improving the income of the city's balance sheet is not a bad thing in times of budget crisis like the one we are in. And higher density housing is more able to pay for the public infrastructure that serves it than lower density single-family housing.

This project has about 290' linear feet of street frontage. That's 290' of sewer, water, storm drain and street itself. All of this needs to be maintained. And we're going to have 39 homeowners paying property taxes, every year, which will go to support the city's ability to maintain this infrastructure. That's 7.44 linear feet per unit. Each unit might generate enough property tax revenue to actually support the eventual repair/replacement of the public infrastructure across the property frontage. Imagine that! Contrast that to many of the homes in the neighborhood which have frontages exceeding 70'. That one home certainly does not generate enough property taxes to pay for the upkeep of the infrastructure fronting their property. They are a drain on the city's coffers and the maintenance of the infrastructure serving their property must be subsidized. Likely by their new neighbors. This is the inherent advantage of higher density housing.

I know people don't want to hear all this, but I feel it must be said. I said many of the same things at the planning commission review of this project. I'm sure I didn't make a lot of friends in the neighborhood. But this IS the type of housing we need. Council member Carter is spot on with his comments. This could be housing for family members, or friends who are currently renting and looking to be part of our amazing community. Do I love the design details? No. But the developer has made some concessions based on my comments and those of others. And they do have another design review meeting. I do believe they are trying to make an effort and be a good neighbor. Are they making money while they do it? Yes. But developers do not build homes for free. And it is a fraught process as was evidenced by this meeting. If you live in a home built since 1940, it was likely built by a developer. And aren't you happy that developer took a risk and built your home?

I wish this project much success. I look forward to welcoming these new residents to Sebastopol. The people that live in these homes will be our friends and neighbors. They will attend our schools and churches. We will see them at the grocery store, at the parade and at Peace Town. And over time, this project will be an integral part of our community, just like the surrounding neighborhood. Just like Swain Woods Just like Sequoia Village. Just like Burbank Heights. Just like the new Habitat for Humanity project. Just like all the other housing that has been built in Sebastopol before today. I am truly grateful someone built a place for me to call home here in this great community.

Cheers,
Paul

