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Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2026 12:52 PM
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Cc: Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Oriana Hart <ohart@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Subject: SEB CC Sept. 15 The COMMONS #14 - Public Comment

September 15, 2026

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members,

I'm sending you a quick note to share my experiences on your Building The Commons Committee.

But first, **the thank you's**. Thank you for the opportunity to serve with this stellar group of citizens and "honorary citizens," those who live outside our borders and belong to our community. Thank you to Council Members Zollman and Carter for their leadership, patience, and perseverance. Thank you to Staff for their professional support.

(1) **The COMMONS Committee is your brain trust**, with representatives from downtown business, the Senior Center, the non-profit collaborative, the Library, a watchdog group, a fund-raiser, and a grantor. The group brought diverse experiences and perspectives. The work took 2-4 meetings per month and 10-20 hours per month per person (likely more). The work is all wrapped up in the Final Report and very accessible in tonight's slide show.

(2) **I am a known advocate for the downtown core and for our small town character**. Look at my years of service and the record of my votes. Keep this in mind as you read on.

(3) **I was a skeptic for a long time**. I didn't support the O'Reilly location for a long time. You might imagine, from my history, that I made sure the site researchers considered several other downtown locations in addition to those that received more in-depth review, as stated in the quarterly Reports. I argued for continued consideration and analysis of the City-owned "block" at the LIB/SASC/CH, including the demolition and rebuild option.

(4) **I came around to voting in favor of O'Reilly as the better of the three final choices**. All it took, after much deliberation, was an on-site tour. After the discovery of the mold and the closure of our Library, being inside the building ("it's move-in ready!") was such a convincing experience that I proposed we hold an Open House so that our community could also see it.

(5) **I was more convinced when I weighed my preference for the downtown core against the possibility of an immediate solution that would enhance and advance our community's potential. Which did I want: a 10-15 year idea that was more expensive or**

a possible 2-year challenge that would move the needle? The O'Reilly campus presents a solution to the space crisis of several major organizations. It alleviates the parking issue. It eases downtown congestion. It gives these organizations room to breathe. People, those employed and those who are patrons or clients, have already waited for years, tolerating inadequate situations.

(6) Sebastopol is the Capital City of the West County: embrace the role! The Committee wrestled with the insider-outsider tension for quite a while, despite knowing that Sebastopol depends on the business and good will of our "honorary citizens." Sebastopol wouldn't survive without this "outside" help. The heat maps from the Senior Center and the Library illustrate this reality. Yes, people nearby walk to the Library: I do! But, being self-aware and honest, I have to tell you that I spend my money at the south end of town (Fircrest and the restaurants) and the north end (Pacific and Sebastopol Hardware), not on Main Street or in The Barlow, in the downtown core.

(7) Take the 80,000 foot view, well maybe 30,000 foot view. It's remarkably easy - and the public is expert at this - to "armchair" the assumptions, points, and conclusions in the Final Report. I mean, in ten minutes, anyone could think up other ideas and lots of challenging questions, including ones that don't relate to the Committee's "ask" tonight. The proposed Feasibility Study will vet the assumptions and the volume of work backing them up. It will also address the valuable questions from the Council and the public. It will provide professional advice about how to proceed.

(8) A "no" vote tonight leaves our community with no sense of our future and no understanding of how to get there. There will be the taste of defeat, the loss of hope, the return of isolation. Where can our four bigger organizations expand? Where do they move to, on their own in their small silos? Do they want to live with the current limitations for "x" number of additional years? Do they want to wait for the next idea to arise and be shot down?

(9) A 'no' vote tonight leaves the Council with a future of who-knows-what maintenance. Take the Library as an example: first the mold discovery, then a leaky roof, solar panels that aren't attached to the leaky roof, etc. The Library situation has put the City Hall building under question. Take the SCCC in the flood plain.

(10) Be bold on behalf of your community! Help us. You have a legacy opportunity before you.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Gurney
Member, Building The Commons Committee