

Ten years ago, Sebastopol had a functioning library, and only about **5 miles of poor and very poor streets**. Residents recognize this as a major issue and the proof is in repeated survey where streets have been one of the top priorities. No overwhelming need for a new library and no one mentioned a health care crisis that needed to be addressed.

Today, we have a functioning library with a new roof, new solar panels, and a new staff office. **5 miles turned into 10 miles of streets in poor or very poor condition**, with many “fair” streets now nearing the end of their useful life. Based on the remaining useful life in the 2025 pavement report this Council received in April of last year, in just **five more years**, roughly **17 of our 21 miles of streets** will be in poor or very poor condition.

Five years is not long in civic governance time. We recently learned that grant-seeking for the Calder Creek project has already taken nearly six years and may take another five. Given the scope expansion now occurring with the Sebastopol Commons Project, it is reasonable to expect a similar timeline — **during which our streets will continue to fail with no comparable urgency or plan.**

This project began as a proposal for a new or expanded library. It has since evolved into a “centralized hub blending civic, economic, cultural, and social resources.” Yet only **one-tenth of this report discusses the library**, while the vast majority focuses on community health frameworks, social services, and funding mechanisms far beyond library expansion.

The library discussion itself is conceptual rather than analytical. There is **no demand analysis**, no historical or projected usage data, and no square-footage justification. References cited do not, on cursory review, support the scale or function being proposed.

The newer focus on **community health** is particularly important to examine. Appendix 1 shows that Sebastopol and West County are predominantly white, higher-income, well-educated, and healthier than Sonoma County and California overall.

Poverty rates are lower than state averages, life expectancy is higher, insurance coverage is strong, and maternal and infant health outcomes are excellent. While targeted needs certainly exist, the data presented does **not describe a population experiencing broad-based health distress**, nor does it, on its own, justify spending tax dollars to gather a community health score nor a large capital project framed as a community health intervention

The funding sources listed reinforce this concern. Most are designed for communities facing significant health or economic distress and require serving vulnerable populations through ongoing services. These funding structures strongly suggest the Commons is being shaped as a **community services facility**, not a traditional library expansion. None are aimed at funding a well-resourced town simply by building a larger library.

Finally, I am concerned about the proposed survey methodology. Interviewing approximately 30 individuals through targeted outreach conducted by committee members or interested parties is a valid **advocacy and program-design tool**, but it is not a statistically valid way to measure prevalence, estimate demand, rank priorities, or test public support for a multimillion-dollar capital project which may require giving up parking or parking. Without random sampling, trained moderators, or baseline comparisons, the results cannot be generalized to the community.

Appendix 5 appears to reflect aspirational interview responses about what constitutes a healthy community. Many of those aspirations already exist locally, including services provided by West County Community Health in Sebastopol. Nothing in those responses clearly points to the need for a new centralized building.

My concern is not with libraries, health, or community well-being. It is with **process, prioritization, and opportunity cost**. While this well-crafted proposal searches for a problem that fits available grants, our streets continue to deteriorate — visibly, predictably, and without a comparable level of coordinated action.

**I urge the Council to require clearer purpose, firmer boundaries, and a realistic assessment of alternatives before allowing this project to advance further.**