

Public Comment to Sebastopol City Council: The Need for a Data-Driven, Long-Term Street Repair Plan

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to urge the Council to adopt a comprehensive, transparent, and data-driven approach to repair Sebastopol's streets. The 2025 Sebastopol Street Study provides clear evidence of the urgent need for action and offers guidance on how to prioritize our investments for the greatest long-term benefit.

Although the Staff report states you approved this plan at the April 2025 meeting, it was just included on the consent calendar. You were told it needed to be accepted so the city could qualify for grant money. The study and the plan have not been discussed. The council did not discuss or approve of the alternative strategies presented. The idea of investing \$500,000 in dig outs and pot hole repairs was not included in the study.

Key Findings from the 2025 Street Study

- **Out of 24 miles of city streets, only 1.2 miles are considered in good condition. Thirteen miles are rated as fair, while 10 miles—over 40%—are classified as poor or very poor. This is the worst condition of any city in the county.**
- A letter from the city to the Bay Area MTD included in the April 2025 staff report confirms that the city has spent \$0 on street repairs in the last five years. It is probably much longer than that.
- It takes 15-20 years of neglect for streets to deteriorate to poor or very poor condition. It takes 10 -15 to go from good to fair conditions This means **that multiple city councils have failed to provide adequate maintenance for decades, leaving you something like a \$19MM problem.**
- The cost of repairs increases dramatically as streets deteriorate maintaining a street in fair condition costs about \$7 per square yard, but this rises to \$35 per square yard for poor streets and over \$200 per square yard for full reconstruction of very poor streets.
- According to the study, Sebastopol's current plan assumes the city can repair the worst streets for \$45 per square yard using a 2-inch overlay and fabric. If this were so there could be dramatic improvement in city streets in the next 5 years within the current budget spend. But the study's consultant warns this method will not last as long as full reconstruction. This plan and these tradeoffs have not been discussed with the Council or the Public.

Analysis of the Current Proposal

- The city proposes to spend \$500,000 on “dig outs” and pothole repairs. These are not at all described in the Staff report but typically are considered emergency measures typically lasting only 2-3 years and do not improve the overall road condition index (PCI). The 2025 Street Study does not recommend dig outs or even discuss them as a viable strategy for long-term improvement.
- The cost estimate for these repairs is inconsistent: the city estimates \$45 per square yard for full-width repairs but the proposal before you is budgeting \$100 per square yard for partial-width and pothole repairs. This raises questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of the proposed spending.
- It is great that the city is finally spending some money on the streets. It is important to understand the overall strategy and how spending \$500,000 for dig outs and repairs will lead to reducing the number of poor and very poor streets and arresting the deterioration of 15 miles of fair streets. It appears that all streets will continue to deteriorate structurally, even as you spend \$500,000 of taxpayers’ money for essentially pot hole repairs.
- Spending most or all of the money allocated to streets each year to make repairs will only start a graveyard spiral where roads continue to deteriorate and worker scramble to fix the “potholes”.
- The city has tentatively identified \$500,000 per year for streets. Given the poor condition and accelerated deterioration, the Street study determined that \$500,000 per year spent wisely would result in continued 10% decline in the conditions of our streets over 5 years. The street study did not consider the \$500,000 would be spent only on dig outs and potholes.
- According to the plan and using the city’s own estimate of \$45 per square yard to restore poor and very poor roads would increase our overall PCI while spending \$700,000 per year. It may take closer to \$1MM to actually begin to see improvement if the study assumptions are correct and the city’s estimates are unrealistic.

A Path Forward

- The passage of Measure U provides \$1.125 million in new revenue, with 40% committed to infrastructure. This, combined with previous revenues from the street fund, could provide up to \$700,000 annually for street rehabilitation. According to the 2025 Street Study, this would arrest the decline in our streets if the money were spent wisely. Investing \$1 million per year would increase the city's PCI by 5 points annually.
- Historically, the city has seen grant money as the only option to fix streets. Unfortunately, as Councilmember Hinton disclosed the county really does not feel it is appropriate to fund fixing streets. One might assume they think that it is the responsibility of the city.
- There are other ways to fund streets. The city could use the measure U money to borrow and fix lots of roads all at once. A parcel tax could be levied specifically to direct money to a street fund in amounts sufficient to improve the streets or pay off a bond. A bond could be "temporary" and set to expire when the city's streets are in the majority good with only a few still in fair condition. The goal would be to get them into condition that the necessary repairs to maintain the system could realistically be funded by general revenue.
- The city must set a clear goal to improve the PCI each year, prioritize long-term repairs over short-term fixes, and involve citizens and experts in oversight of Measure U funds. Only by developing a formal long-term plan can you reverse decades of neglect and ensure that Sebastopol's streets are safe, functional, and a source of community pride.
- The City Council is historically not very good at addressing complex items such as maintaining our city streets. It requires knowledge and expertise that the council does not have. The good news is we have people in the city with knowledge and expertise to help solve this problem. **It is time to reconsider establishing the Measure U oversight Committee. It could include members of the public who are interested, have contracting backgrounds and understand municipal finance.**
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Conclusion

The 2025 Street Study provides the beginning of a roadmap to improving the quality of City streets. The city must set a clear goal to improve the PCI each year, prioritize long term repairs over short term fixes and involve experts from the community to help finalize a plan.

The council should be evaluating the plan options presented and challenging the staff to consider others. This cannot be done at a council meeting in a couple of hours.

A Measure U oversight committee with a primary focus to optimize spending money on improving city streets is required.