

From: Woodmark Tenants United [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, August 31, 2026 10:52 AM

To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Cc: info <info@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>

Subject: Public Comment Submission - Woodmark Tenants United - September 1 City Council Meeting

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

Please find attached a statement submitted as public comment on behalf of Woodmark Tenants United, which has been collectively reviewed and approved by our tenant union.

We respectfully request that the attached statement be included in the public record and considered as part of the City Council's September 1, 2026 meeting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In solidarity,

Woodmark Tenants United

September 1, 2026

Mayor Jill McLewis
Vice Mayor Sandra Maurer
Councilmember Stephen Zollman
Councilmember Neysa Hinton
Councilmember Phill Carter

Sent electronically to: citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov

Letter in Support of Making Sebastopol Municipal Code Chapter 9.36 Permanent

To the Honorable Sebastopol City Council:

We are writing to ask the City Council to make Sebastopol Municipal Code Chapter 9.36, Just Cause Eviction and Tenant Relocation, permanent before January 1, 2027, when it is set to sunset.

For those of us who lived through the Woodmark situation, the importance of these protections is not theoretical. We experienced firsthand what can happen when residents who are paying their rent, following their leases, raising their families, working, and contributing to their community suddenly find themselves facing the possibility of displacement because of circumstances they did not create and could not control.

The Woodmark residents did not create the underlying compliance issues. We did not make the decisions that led to them, and we did not bypass the processes involved. We were simply tenants living in homes that had been represented to us as legitimate places to live.

Yet we were the ones left carrying the uncertainty, financial burden, stress, and disruption.

That experience demonstrated something important about housing policy: when a tenant has done nothing wrong, the consequences of circumstances outside that tenant's control should not fall entirely on the tenant.

Why Just Cause Matters

Sebastopol's Just Cause ordinance provided residents with meaningful, actionable protection during an exceptionally uncertain period. It gave tenants a measure of stability and a voice at a time when the future of our homes was unclear.

More importantly, the ordinance recognized that housing is not simply a transaction between a property owner and a tenant. A home is a community – it decides where children go to school, where families establish routines, where people build relationships, and where residents participate in the broader community.

For Woodmark residents, the ordinance provided an important recognition that those interests matter.

The City now has the benefit of seeing how these protections operate in a real-world situation. The experience at Woodmark has reinforced the reason for having a distinction between circumstances caused by a tenant and circumstances that are outside the tenant's control.

Just Cause eviction laws are tenant protections that prevent evictions and promote housing stability by limiting the causes for which a landlord can evict a tenant or refuse to renew a tenant's lease when the tenant is not at fault or in violation of any law.

Just Cause laws aim to benefit low-income and precariously housed tenants by:

- Protecting renters from evictions for no legitimate reason, and providing further protections for no-fault evictions
- Delivering a sense of stability to tenants.
- Discouraging renters from self-evicting when they receive eviction notices from landlords.
- Empowering tenants experiencing poor living conditions, discrimination, or other illegal landlord behavior to advocate for improvements with landlords or file complaints without fear of retaliation.

That is the basic fairness principle underlying Just Cause protection.

What Woodmark Has Taught Us

The Woodmark experience also illustrates why protections are most valuable before a moment of crisis to ensure long-term stability.

Residents spent months living with uncertainty about whether the homes we had worked hard to establish ourselves in would remain secure. That uncertainty affects much more than where someone sleeps. It affects finances, employment, children's schooling, transportation, family planning, and the ability to make ordinary decisions about the future.

No family should have to live indefinitely wondering whether circumstances beyond its control will result in the loss of its home.

The experience also demonstrated the importance of ensuring that residents are not left to absorb the consequences of decisions or conditions they had no role in creating.

Rather, a permanent Just Cause provides a stable framework for tenants living in affordable housing complexes in your community, and clearly distinguishes between situations where a tenant is responsible for a problem and situations where the tenant is not.

Why Permanence Should Come First

Sebastopol's Just Cause ordinance is currently scheduled to expire on January 1, 2027. We respectfully ask the Council to ensure these protections remain in effect.

The City has already adopted the ordinance. Residents have already relied upon it. The Council now has experience with its operation.

The most important step is therefore straightforward: Preserve the core protections that the City has already determined are necessary by making them permanent.

There may be value in reviewing the ordinance over time and considering whether experience suggests additional improvements. We welcome thoughtful discussion of those issues. However, **future improvements should not become a reason to delay permanence.**

The City can preserve the protections that exist today.

That approach provides stability while still allowing the ordinance to evolve responsibly to emergent needs.

Our Request

We respectfully ask the Sebastopol City Council to:

- Agendize Chapter 9.36 well before its January 1, 2027 sunset.
- Make the ordinance's existing core Just Cause and tenant relocation protections permanent.
- Preserve the protections for qualifying residents who face displacement through circumstances outside their control.

Let's not wait for another crisis before acting.

The City has already seen what can happen when residents are placed in an uncertain housing situation through no fault of their own. Woodmark provides a model for why these protections matter.

The question now is whether the City will allow that experience to remain only a temporary response or use it to establish a lasting policy of fairness and housing stability.

Please Make Just Cause Permanent

We're not just tenants. We are Sebastopol residents, neighbors, parents, workers, volunteers, customers, and members of this community. We contribute to Sebastopol every day, and we want to continue building our lives here.

We are asking the City to recognize that residents should not lose the security of their homes because of circumstances beyond their control.

We are asking you to make permanence the next step—not another temporary measure, another delay, or another period of uncertainty.

Do not wait for the next Woodmark.

Let what happened to our community be a reason to establish lasting protection for residents who may someday find themselves in circumstances they did not create.

Thank you for listening to the residents who have worked so hard to build and be part of this community, and for considering the importance of housing stability in Sebastopol.

Sincerely,

Woodmark Tenants United

Alyssa Aguirre
Brooke Ahearn
Amanda Quillin
Beth Gallock
Gabriela Ortiz
Galina Leslie
Genevieve Perkins
Glenda Barton
Kari Snyder
Katarina Servey
Melissa Page
Paul Pavsidis
Sandie Russell
Trinell Meyer

Lina Blanco, Tenant Organizer
North Bay Organizing Project
Sonoma County Tenants Union