A.   OVERVIEW

The Building the Sebastopol Commons ("Committee") has devoted its time and effort on the work needed to build a solid foundation for this very important project.

The Committee believes that it is crucial for the project's lasting success, stability, and growth, to emphasize strong basics (community participation and support, education...) to enable resilience against challenges, allowing for significant future development, much like deep roots to enable bamboo to grow tall.

Its sub-committees have taken initial steps towards developing, among other items, (a) community needs and assets survey plan including "one-on-one" interviews with community leaders in areas within the City's zone of influence; (b) explore potential locations; (c) develop an effective communication system; and (d) engage the community in a meaningful manner.

B.   STAGES OF DEVELOPEMENT

The building of the "Sebastopol Commons" involves a structured process that moves from initial planning and engagement through action and ongoing evaluation.

The specific steps can be categorized into three main stages the first of which is **Initiation, Implementation, and Sustaining**.

This stage focuses on understanding the community's needs and establishing a core group to lead the initiative.

- **Define Purpose and Vision:** Clearly articulate the "why" — the common need, mission, and core values that will bring people together.
- **Research and Assessment:** Learn about the community's existing resources, assets, needs, and potential issues through surveys, focus groups, and informal conversations.
- **Identify and Engage Core Members:** Bring together a core group of committed stakeholders and potential leaders whose involvement is essential for success. Quality of engagement is more important than volume at this point.
- **Establish a "Vehicle for Change":** Form a steering committee or core organization to formalize the initiative, set governance policies, and begin the process of securing necessary resources and funding.

- **Develop a Shared Plan:** Work with the core group and the broader community to develop a strategic action plan with clear, attainable, and measurable goals and objectives.

For the purposes of this project, the general community development process can be synthesized into the following 10 basic steps. (**ATTACHMENT 1**)

However, community development is an organic process, so that while the "steps" are presented in a logical order, in reality they may not follow sequentially, and some steps may either be skipped or carried out simultaneously with other steps. Please click on the title of the step to learn more about each step.

C.   ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

Commons Community Needs Assessment Monthly
Quartey Update
01-13-2026

Community Needs an Assets Assessment : The Sub-Committee has discussed data collection methods for understanding community needs, noting that while some library usage data is available, broader community surveys are still in progress and won't be completed immediately.

We explored working using the data currently existing survey/reports.

We explored what might be the right approach for conducting an initial assessment given the need to ensure it truly meets community needs rather than just being driven by available space and funding.

 It was decided to start with one-on-one surveys with community leader engaging the participation of interested community members in the conduct of the surveys.

Expanding Self-Healing Community Initiatives: We have discussed expanding the concept of a self-healing community beyond traditional library services, with city council that the initiative should be broader and more comprehensive.

Libraries as Community Hubs: We learned that public libraries can serve as community hubs offering various services like ESL classes and job fairs.

In the course of these discussions, we the challenge of getting people to envision something beyond their immediate interests.

It appears that Community members lack experience with modern library services; this ,in turn, suggests the need to approach the concept from different community perspectives to capture broader imagination

Sebastopol Health Index Initiative: The group discussed creating a community index focused on social determinants of health, aiming to improve Sebastopol's score from a C+ to an A+. We have discussed using examples from other communities to demonstrate what actions led to their improvements. A report that highlighted Sebastopol's strengths and weaknesses, which resonated with the city council.

It was proposed that our report should be based upon "evidence based" standards and validated surveys.

How does a community tested achieved high scores. As noted above, the group agreed to interview local leaders to gather data and support for the initiative, with the support of interested community members ...a true community survey.

Sebastopol Commons Language Approval: The group discussed the language approved by City Council regarding the Sebastopol Commons and West County scope of the Building the Commons project.

The sub-committee has on-going discussion conversation also touched on the importance of community trust in public spaces,

Community Health Score Improvement Plan: We have explored strategies for improving their community's health score using social determinants of health data. The team aims to interview 30 community members, with council members volunteering to help conduct interviews. Dory suggested reaching out to people in various community settings like churches, farmer's markets, and laundromats. The group agreed to emphasize the importance of the study and Dory's expertise in their presentation to the council.

Resources Reviewed This Quarter

West County Community Services (WCCS)
https://westcountyservices.org/about-wccs/

- 2022 Needs Assessment: Understanding West County Communities and Populations thriough the Lens of Self-Healing Communities

County Health Ranking & Roadmaps
https://www.countyhealthrankings.org

Prioritized Community Health Needs

https://sonomacounty.gov/health-and-human-services/health-services/about-us/prioritized-community-health-needs

Public libraries for community building
https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/public-libraries-for-community-building

Sonoma County Sonoma County Master Plan for Aging
https://sonomacounty.gov/Main%20County%20Site/Health%20and%20Human%20Services/Human%20Services/Adult%20and%20Aging/Documents/CC%20Sonoma%20County%20Master%20Plan%20for%20Aging%20FINAL%209.9.24.pdf

Community Commons
https://www.communitycommons.org

Reimaging the Civic Commons (Tools for Your City)
https://civiccommons.us/resources/

Community Health Needs Assessment (County of Sonoma)
https://sonomacounty.gov/health-and-human-services/health-services/about-us/community-health-needs-assessment

Measure What Matters Tool Kit
https://civiccommons.us/2019/01/measure-matters-diy-toolkit/

Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (AFCS)
https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/forum-for-community-solutions/

Key findings about Americans' declining trust in government and each other
https://civiccommons.us/2019/07/key-findings-americans-declining-trust-government/

SONOMA COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024-25
https://sonomacounty.gov/Main%20County%20Site/Health%20and%20Human%20Services/Health%20Services/Documents/About%20Us/Public%20Reports/Assement-Improvement-Plan2024-25-Eng.pdf

Project for Public Spaces
https://www.pps.org/?mc_cid=f31b4b9fbc&mc_eid=44ba17a25b

Asset-Based Community Development Toolkit
https://www.calgary.ca/social-services/asset-based-community-development-toolkit.html

The City of Calgary created the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) toolkit in partnership with [Tamarack Institute](#) to support Calgarians in building connected communities. ABCD is an evidence-based approach that focuses on identifying and utilizing assets within the community to foster community connection. The purpose is to bring consistency and deepen knowledge for those who work with the community, such as organizations, staff, and/or volunteers.

....among others.

D.   ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT 1

PROJECT GOALS

!.   LEARN ABOUT THE COMMUNITY: Our initial orientation is to learn about our community needs, assets, and interests through community events, reading reports and familiarizing ourselves with available services as well as community projects and activities.

2.   LISTEN TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS: We do not believe that it is possible to learn everything we need to know by reading and observation. We plan to talk to others about their interests and perceptions to put it into context. This will involve contacting community members through formal channels, such engaging local organization, or informally by chatting with people that we encounter in other situations, such as shopping at local stores or attending school activities. By listening to the community, we hope to identify an area in which there seems to be a common interest in making a change.

Health organization staff need to maintain regular contact with the community to collect enough information to make sound recommendations and decisions on health services and priorities and to identify important community issues.

3.   BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A SHARED VISION: Once we have identified that there are some common interests among community members and we have identified a few individuals who seem willing to work on a community development initiative, the next step is to hold a community gathering. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to invite representatives of specific organizations or sector to attend, but more often it would be a public event for a neighborhood or, for other types of communities, for all the identified members. The purpose of this gathering would be to develop a shared "community vision"; i.e., through imagining their ideal community and discussing their ideas together they will determine arrive at a common vision and some broad strategic directions that all are committed to

working towards. You may also use this gathering to ask for support for the initiative, elicit community input or invite members to join a steering committee or help in other ways.

4.   ASSESS COMMUNITY ASSETS AND RESOURCES, NEEDS AND ISSUES: To be able to work effectively in a community development context, we will need to gather some information about your community. It is extremely helpful to undertake a comprehensive community assessment which will collect both **qualitative** and **quantitative** data on a wide range of community features. Unfortunately, often time and budget restraints will necessitate choosing between methods and limiting the assessment to particular areas of interest. Deciding what and how much information to collect may be aided by a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the community, which may point to particular areas being higher priorities for action.

There are many methods of community assessment used in community development practice. A few of the more common methods are listed below; additional information is contained in the resources section.

Compiling a community demographic profile is an excellent start. It is helpful to update the profile periodically so you will be able to track changes that occur within your community and respond accordingly. A demographic profile includes statistical

Other community statistics may also be of interest to you, such as crime rates, morbidity and mortality rates, or availability of affordable housing. However, simply collecting information will not be sufficient; it must be analyzed in order for it to be meaningful. For example, you might be interested in the relative proportion of seniors to youth in your community, or the proportion of the population for whom English is a second language. You may want to compare the most recent data available with previous years; perhaps to identify the rate of growth of the population, changes in ethno-cultural patterns or age distribution.

Statistical information isn't the only type of information that is important to collect. Finding out how residents perceive their community is also essential to effective community development practice. Community surveys, community asset mapping, environmental scans, focus groups and key informant interviews are other methods of obtaining community data.

5.   HELP COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO RECOGNIZE AND ARTICULATE AREAS OF CONCERN AND THEIR CAUSES: In any community development process, it is the community that is in the driver's seat. Community members will define the issues and the process for resolving them, which might be quite different than what would be proposed by an external "expert". However, it is

the community members that are most familiar with the situation and, in many cases, have knowledge and wisdom that an external "expert" lacks. By providing tools, resources, meeting space and facilitation, community developers **empower** the community to start to take ownership of the issues and the development of solutions.

If we genuinely want to empower [communities], we must do it in such a way that they become independent of our charity, that they become self-reliant, that they can sustain their own development without our help.

6.   ESTABLISH A 'VEHICLE FOR CHANGE': In most circumstances it will be necessary to create a "vehicle for change" for an organizational change, which in most cases will start as a steering committee. Depending on the circumstances, this nature of the group could range from a few unaffiliated individuals or a coalition of organizations and institutions. In time, the steering committee may evolve into or be adopted by a community organization. There is a wide range of activities that the steering committee will need to undertake to ensure that it will be able to plan, organize, implement and evaluate the initiative effectively, including developing a charter or terms of reference, establishing governance policies, obtaining sufficient resources to carry out the work and identifying potential partners who can contribute to its success.

7.   DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN: Assuming that the community as a whole has set the strategic directions for the initiative, the steering committee will now develop the action plan. Depending on the size of the group and the complexity of the initiative, there may be other steps between setting the strategic directions and the action plan. You may want to create a comprehensive strategic plan containing long, mid and short-term objectives, and mid-level plans for communications, resource development or human resources. In addition, if there are a number of activities or events to plan, you will need a separate action plan for each one. The point we need to arrive at is a well thought out plan that is easily comprehended by community members, clearly links activities with objectives and indicates responsibilities, time frames and resources required.

8.   IMPLEMENT ACTION PLAN: This is the heart of the initiative, in which financial and human resources, including volunteers and community members, are **mobilized** to act. This may take many different forms. Perhaps the community has decided to establish a coalition against homelessness and is working to ensure all organizations that come into contact with homeless persons are able to provide referrals to appropriate sources of assistance. The actions might consist of:

- working with community workers to identify needs and appropriate services.
- developing informational brochures.

- eliciting support from targeted organizations.
- distributing the brochures to the organizations; and
- meeting with organizational representatives to provide further information.

In addition to implementing the various action steps, it is important to ensure that the factors that are required for the success of any community initiative are in place, such as:

- shared vision and purpose
- concrete, attainable goals and objectives
- sufficient funds, staff, materials and time
- skilled, participatory leadership
- clear roles and policy guidelines
- mutual respect
- open communications, including both formal and informal methods
- recognition that there are "process" people and there are "action" people; ensure there is a variety of ways of participating in or contributing to the initiative
- time and resources management; don't take on more than you can handle at one time; set priorities
- conflict management: don't let problems slide - address them in an open, honest and timely manner
- good record-keeping, e.g. financial reports, meeting minutes, successes
- celebration of successes
- fun; don't forget to celebrate your successes - even small ones!

9.   EVALUATE RESULTS OF ACTIONS: Traditionally, community development workers have relied more on their own experience, anecdotal evidence from others to guide their practice rather than formal evaluation procedures. Often it is difficult to find reasonable and appropriate measures in terms of the cost and time involved, especially when the desired outcomes, as is often the case with prevention and capacity-building initiatives, may not be seen for several years. However, there are many reasons why it is important to evaluate your work. Most importantly, you may need to demonstrate that you have not caused any harm to others through your actions. Other reasons to evaluate may be to demonstrate the effectiveness of the initiative so that it will be continued, to satisfy funder requirements and to provide information that will be useful to others or to subsequent initiatives. Evaluation plans may be formal or informal and tailored to the needs and resources of the group. IN community development, a participatory evaluation method is usually conducted in addition to or sometimes in place of more traditional method. Participatory evaluation involves program participants and/or community members in the evaluation design, data collection, and the analysis and interpretation of results.

"If one is concerned with increasing people's capacity to participate fully and gain some degree of control over their lives, then research methods themselves can be part of this method."

10.   REFLECT AND REGROUP: Allow time for the group to catch its breath before embarking on the next initiative. Thank everyone that contributed and make sure there is good follow up communication with media, partner and funders. Celebrate your successes and reflect on any disappointments that might have occurred. Discuss how well the organizational processes and structures worked and identify areas that need some attention before the next rush of activity occurs. Also, it is important to provide a space for participants to reflect on their personal development as a result of being part of the group. When the group is ready to tackle a new initiative, they might want to revisit the community assessment information and the strategic directions and decide whether either of those steps need to be repeated.

ATTACHMENT 2

B.   DROP BOX

The committee's "drop box" contains aa member developed information bank .

One new topic is released each week with updates as may be necessary

1.   ARTICLES PUBLISHED TO DATE:

TOPIC 1   THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SPACES IN CIVIC LIFE (10-31-2025)
Public spaces are vital for civic life as they foster democracy, social cohesion, and economic activity. They act as inclusive gathering places for diverse populations, supporting everything from community events and local businesses to cultural exchange and civic participation. Well-designed public spaces contribute to a sense of community, improve public health, and encourage civic engagement and stewardship

TOPIC 2 (A)THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS (This Topic will be released in two parts) Community-based planning is a participatory approach where community members are actively involved in shaping the future of their area by sharing decision-making power. It is a collaborative process that emphasizes local needs, values, and resources to develop shared visions and action plans for community development, resource management, and public services. The process typically involves creating a vision, assessing the current situation, setting goals, and implementing plans, with an emphasis on empowerment, inclusivity, and strategic use of local assets

TOPIC 2 (B) (Stage 1): MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
Meaningful community engagement is a collaborative, ongoing process of
working with diverse groups of people to address shared concerns and achieve
mutual goals. It moves beyond traditional top-down approaches by fostering
equitable partnerships with shared power, ensuring community voices are
heard and influence decisions, and building trust through a two-way
exchange of knowledge and resources. Key components include building trust,
shared decision-making, and implementing structures for sustainability.

TOPIC 2 (C) (Stage2): INFORMED PLANNING: Community development
informed planning is a process where communities actively participate in
shaping their future, ensuring plans reflect the needs and aspirations of
residents. This approach emphasizes collaboration, data-driven decision
making, and a holistic view of community needs, leading to more effective and
sustainable development.

It is a systematic approach that uses research, data, and stakeholder input to
create actionable plans that are more likely to achieve desired outcomes. It
involves gathering and analyzing information to understand the situation,
identify needs, and develop solutions that are realistic and effective. This
approach contrasts with planning based on assumptions or limited
information, leading to better decisions and more successful
results. [1]

TOPIC 2 (C) (Stage 3) VISIONING: Developing a shared vision for the
community's future, defining goals and aspirations.

Community envisioning, in the context of community development, is a
collaborative process where community members collectively define and
describe their desired future for the community This process moves beyond
merely addressing existing problems, but rather focuses on imagining potential
and identifying shared aspirations for the community's future. [2]

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[1] Corps Planning: Risk-Informed Planning
https://planning.erdc.dren.mil/toolbox/library/FactSheets/RiskInformedPlanningFactSheet_Nov2017.pdf
and
Evidence-Informed Planning and Decision-Making
https://carleton.ca/qualityinitiatives/evidence-informed-planning-and-decision-making/#:~:text=Evidence%2Dinformed%20planning%20and%20decision%2Dmaking%20is%20a%20systematic%20approach,Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation

[2] *Community Visioning: How to Capture Community Aspirations*
https://granicus.com/uk/blog/community-visioning-how-to-capture-community-aspirations/#:~:text=It%20gives%20your%20community%20a,market%20and%20promote%20your%20community.

In essence, community visioning is a powerful tool for shaping a community's future by empowering its residents to collectively define their aspirations and work towards a shared vision.

TOPIC 2 (C) (Stage 4) COMMUNITY ASSETS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT: A community assets and needs assessment is a process that identifies a community's strengths (assets) and its challenges (needs) to inform and prioritize action. It involves systematically collecting data on available resources— like skills, local institutions, and organizations—and the issues or gaps that need addressing. The goal is to create a clear picture of the current situation to develop effective strategies for community improvement.

TOPIC 2 (C) (Stage 5) PLAN DEVELOPMENT Creating a detailed plan with specific strategies, actions, and timelines.

A Civic Public Places Plan (like San Francisco's) is a community-driven   vision for transforming central urban areas into inclusive, vibrant, and   functional spaces for gathering, events, nature, and daily life, focusing on   improved streets, plazas, transit, and green infrastructure, moving away   from exclusionary mid-century designs to create democratic hubs for all residents. These plans involve interagency cooperation, deep community engagement, and innovative designs for sustainability, accessibility, and   social connection, making cities more livable and strengthening civic life.

An informed plan is a course of action that is developed after carefully considering all available information, potential outcomes, and the values of the individual or group making the plan. It involves gathering relevant data, analyzing risks and benefits, and making a choice that aligns with the decision-maker's goals and preferences. [3]

A community development plan is a roadmap for improving a community's social, economic, and environmental well-being. It involves a collaborative process of engaging stakeholders, assessing needs, setting goals, and implementing and evaluating actions. Effective community development plans are responsive, inclusive, and focused on achieving sustainable and positive change.

2.   **UPCOMING TOPIC AREAS**

TOPIC 3   SELECTED PUBLIC SPACES DESIGNS

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[3] *What is an informed decision? (Including how to make one*)
https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/informed-decision#:~:text=A%20reasoned%20or%20informed%20decision,lead%20to%20more%20successful%20results.

TOPIC 4   PROPOSAL WRITING TOOLKITS   A proposal writing toolkit is a set of resources, processes, and tools designed to streamline, standardize, and improve the creation of proposals. It helps individuals and teams, including sales departments, grant writers, and freelancers, produce high-quality, persuasive documents with greater efficiency and consistency.

TOPIC 5:   COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING TRENDS
Community development grant funding trends show a growing focus on issues like climate change, public health, and social equity, with an   increasing emphasis on collaborative projects and long-term sustainability. Funding agencies are using data analytics to better assess proposals, while competition is fierce, favoring innovative projects with broad impact. There is also a rise in specialized lending through Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to support underserved areas.

TOPIC 6:   CALIFORNIA RESILIENCE CENTER FUNDING
Resilience center funding supports the creation and upgrades of local facilities to act as emergency shelters and community hubs. Funding sources include state programs, such as California's Community Resilience Centers (CRC) program, and federal initiatives like the Department of Energy's funding for climate resilience centers led by Minority Serving Institutions. Funding is used for both the physical infrastructure of the centers (construction, retrofits) and the social infrastructure (community programming, services).

TOPIC 7:   FUNDING TRENDS PUBLIC LIBRARIES Based on reports from library and funding organizations, grant funding for public libraries is facing significant uncertainty due to volatile federal support and increased reliance on state and private sources. Federal funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is threatened, causing a shift in how libraries seek and receive grant money.