



City of Sebastopol

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: July 7, 2026

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Sebastopol Commons: Building the Commons Committee
Responsible Department: Public Works
Subject: Sebastopol Commons: Building the Commons Committee Third Quarterly Report

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RECOMMENDATION

Receive the third informational report from the Building the Commons Committee and provide feedback regarding the continued evaluation of the O'Reilly Building and Civic Center alternatives, including future community outreach efforts.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM

1. Presentation of agenda item by the Requestor or Responsible Department
2. Questions and discussion from Councilmembers
3. Public comment period
4. Presentation Received

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reflects the Committee’s continued work and progress to advance the Sebastopol Commons as a vibrant, shared civic asset.

BACKGROUND

The Sebastopol Commons is envisioned as a shared civic space and multi-use community hub within Sebastopol city limits, serving West Sonoma County residents. It is intended to support education, arts & culture, health & wellness, senior services, community connection, recreational classes, and potentially public library or library-adjacent functions that foster learning, access, and civic engagement.

The Building the Commons Oversight Committee was established by City Council action in 2025. It is charged with guiding early concept development, assessing community needs, exploring funding strategies, and providing quarterly reports to Council on progress in the following areas:

- Identifying and securing membership
- Developing lists of needs and shared needs
- Compiling research on similar projects
- Exploring and defining the project concept and determining the scope of a feasibility study
- Performing other related duties as assigned by the City Council

DISCUSSION

As part of the responsibilities of the Committee, the Committee was tasked with providing quarterly updates. Tonight’s item provides the third quarterly update. The two ad hoc Subcommittees have prepared the following information as a status of their work for the Committee:

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Funding Assessment Subcommittee

The Funding Assessment Subcommittee has begun work on an in-depth analysis of potential locations for a new community center. The subcommittee narrowed down options to two main choices:



City of Sebastopol

Option A: O'Reilly building

Option B: Rebuild of existing city properties on the block of Bodega Avenue and N High Street.

The subcommittee has researched the pros and cons of each option, including timeline considerations, costs, and community needs. A formal analysis is included as Attachment A.

The subcommittee also reviewed the potential for consolidating city facilities, including the library, senior center, and community center. Options in both the current civic center area and a potential new location near the Arts Center and Ives Park were explored. The Rite Aid building was also considered, but it was determined that it is not available as it's under contract. The O'Reilly location was toured with the library to assess its suitability as well as with the entire committee.

At this stage, the Committee is seeking feedback from the City Council regarding these two potential directions. The Committee and City staff will continue evaluating both options, refining the financial and operational models, assessing potential funding strategies, while also beginning broader community outreach regarding the opportunities and considerations associated with a potential move to the O'Reilly Building.

Needs Assessment Subcommittee

Findings from stakeholder interviews highlights enthusiasm for the project and the need to identify key needs such as pedestrian, bike, and public transit access were critical factors, along with potential educational elements and food distribution.

Focus of this subcommittee will now transition from formal interviews to informal outreach and education, gathering community input on the Commons concept through conversations and existing channels (e.g., library, Senior Center). The subcommittee is identifying opportunities for engagement with community leaders to gather high-value, in-depth insights on community assets, motivations, challenges, partnerships, public spaces, identity, resiliency, and priorities. These personalized sessions will build trust, strengthen relationships, map stakeholders, and uncover opportunities that inform the Commons vision.

As the project advances, the focus of the subcommittee will shift toward broader community outreach and engagement. Next steps include assisting with public education and outreach efforts related to the potential locations, gathering community feedback, and helping facilitate conversations with community organizations, residents, and stakeholders regarding the opportunities, concerns, and priorities associated with a future Commons facility. These outreach efforts will help inform future financial analysis, operational planning, and eventual recommendations to the City Council.

FUTURE ITEMS

The committee will be making a final recommendation to City Council at the September 15th Council Meeting.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Over the past several months, the Committee has narrowed its analysis to two potential paths for development of a future Commons facility and has begun evaluating the financial, operational, and community implications associated with each option. While additional work remains, including refinement of financial models and funding strategies, the Committee believes sufficient information is available to begin discussing the feasibility of the concepts and to gauge City Council's level of interest in continuing to pursue them.

Staff believes that obtaining preliminary Council feedback at this stage will help focus future efforts and ensure that additional analysis and community outreach are directed toward options that have the potential to receive broader community and Council support. Community engagement will be an important next step in the process and will help inform any future recommendation brought forward by the Committee.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS / PRIORITIES / GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

This item aligns with:



City of Sebastopol

City Council Goals

- Community Vitality: Enhance Sebastopol as a great place to live that values community health and wellbeing; preserve unique character.
- Infrastructure: Maintain high-quality facilities and services, including repairing/replacing outdated city facilities.
- High Performance Organization: Restore public trust; improve public communications.
- Economic Development

General Plan Consistency

- Action CSF 6c–6d: Collaborate with County library system and partners to expand library services/facilities.
- Action CSF 6j: Conduct needs assessments and prioritize public/community facility improvements with extensive outreach.
- Action CSF 6e: Establish innovative funding approaches for cultural, community, and library facilities/services.

Supports Sonoma County Mayors and Councilmembers Association priorities on shared facilities, mental health, homelessness, and emergency preparedness.

PUBLIC COMMENT

As of preparation, no written public comments received. Any received after publication will be provided as supplemental materials. Oral comments may be provided during the public comment period.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act; available for public review at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no additional fiscal impact associated with receipt of this informational item.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION

Receive the report and provide feedback on the continued evaluation of the Commons alternatives.

OPTION(S)

None. This item is informational only.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Sebastopol Commons Finance Subcommittee Third Quarterly Report to Full Committee, dated xxx.
2. Survey Response Summary

APPROVALS

Department Head Responsible for Agenda Item: Approval Date:
 CEQA Determination (Community Development/Planning): Approval Date: N/A
The proposed action is Exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15306.
 Administrative Services (Financial): Approval Date: N/A
Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: Yes No N/A

City Attorney Approval: Approval Date:
 City Manager Approval: Approval Date:

Attachment A
Placeholder for
Funding Assessment Subcommittee Report

Attachment B

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY – as of May 11, 2026

Every group is dealing with the same core problems: not enough space, not enough storage, not enough meeting rooms, parking issues, and serious funding pressure — especially since the City pulled its subsidy. A lot of these organizations are small, mostly volunteer-run, and they're all struggling with visibility and getting enough people through the door, especially younger folks, families, and Spanish-speaking communities.

The goal is consistent: a well-designed, centrally located Commons would be a game-changer. People see it as the practical solution to help organizations collaborate, share costs, boost visibility, and actually serve the community better.

What people keep asking for:

- Flexible multi-use spaces (no fixed seating) and plenty of meeting/classrooms
- At least one good commercial or community kitchen
- Decent restrooms that are actually in the same building as the events
- Storage (archives, books, emergency supplies, etc.)
- Stage/performance area for the arts groups
- Outdoor space
- Good parking and accessibility
- Some dedicated but shared office/co-working space where groups can keep their own identity and privacy when needed

Size-wise, groups are thinking anywhere from a few thousand square feet up to a total complex around 18–20K sq ft. Most want 6–7 day access with long hours.

Location thoughts:

- O'Reilly property keeps coming up as really promising because of the parking and existing infrastructure.
- Downtown/near the Plaza for visibility and walkability.
- Some folks like the broader corridor idea (Burnett to Ives Park area) or North Town.
- Strong preference for fixing up existing buildings rather than starting from scratch.

Interview specifics:

- Webster really needs performance space and sees the Commons as key to keeping concerts and events alive.
- Senior Center (Katie) is bursting at the seams and needs room to grow.
- Health clinic (Ellen) likes the idea of co-locating services and emergency preparedness.
- Public radio (Alicia) wants to reach more Spanish-speaking and Indigenous families and needs proper event space with kitchen + restrooms.
- History folks (Teresa) want display areas and storytelling space.
- Library Friends and civic groups want work/storage space and better coordination.
- Almost everyone is open to partnerships and sharing resources.

People also talked about the bigger picture — we need better marketing, restored City support, more public-private partnerships, and real outreach to all parts of the community, especially our diverse and lower-income residents.

A few folks (like Rev Christy) suggested we think about multiple hubs instead of just one giant building, which is worth considering.

Interview: (Webster)

Organization Overview

- Size: 2 full-time + 2.5 half-time staff.
- Usage: Concerts draw 200–500 attendees; no tracked numbers for classes, events, and tenant uses.
- Service Area: Primarily Sebastopol and West County, with some concerts drawing from the wider Bay Area.

Current Challenges

- Major obstacle: Loss of City subsidy, resulting in lack of funding and inability to underwrite events.
- Most comparable community centers operate on low or no fees.
- Solutions needed: Restoration of City support, additional funding, and consistent community backing.
- Success factor: Improved targeted marketing.

Collaboration & Partnership

- Already partnering with other local organizations and open to additional partnerships.
- Shared Commons Complex would be highly desirable.
 - Key requirements: Classrooms, flexible multi-use space (no fixed seating), stage/backstage/green room, adequate well-located restrooms, two commercial kitchens, storage, and outdoor space.
 - Schedule: 7 days/week, 7 am – 11 pm.
 - Size: Approximately 18–20K sq ft (including storage).

Community Perspective

- Most important community assets: Basic public services (water, sewer, roads) plus parks, Library, Senior Center, Art Center, and Community Center.
- Current adequacy in Sebastopol/West County: Moderate – more dedicated spaces are desired.
- Lives in West County; public transportation would be desirable but is currently difficult.
- Interested in all listed community space types: meeting rooms, gathering spaces, community kitchen, outdoor space, art display, co-working/office space, etc.

Potential Partners & Development

- Non-profits: Key organizations, especially those needing a new home. Focus on groups willing to share space and their specific needs.
- Commercial fits: Coffee shop, bookstore.
- Influencers & stakeholders: Local leaders, schools, healthcare providers, Community Foundation, wine industry, and broader Sonoma County players.
- Funding/Donations: Donors prioritize trust — well-managed organizations that use funds appropriately and deliver clear community benefit.

Unasked questions (left for follow-up):

- Have we left out an important question?
- Do you want to add anything more?
- Suggested location for The Commons Complex.

Overall takeaway: The interviewee strongly supports the Commons concept as a solution for sustainability challenges and sees it as a vital multi-use hub for West County, provided it includes the right mix of performance, kitchen, flexible, and support spaces plus restored public funding and strong marketing.

Interview: (Gill)

The group has approximately 330 members and operates with no paid staff, relying on a small administrative team. It functions as a time-exchange system where members trade hours of services and skills. It serves residents across Sebastopol and surrounding areas (including Forestville, Occidental, Valley Ford, and parts of Santa Rosa), with emphasis on active participation rather than strict geographic limits.

Challenges:

- Limited publicity and difficulty reaching younger demographics and families.
- Low conversion from interest (e.g., at farmer's markets) to active membership.
- Time constraints for members, especially seniors.
- Lack of storage space and dedicated meeting facilities for nonprofits.
- Need for better coordination and visibility for community events.

Strong support for a central downtown hub that would:

- Serve as a gathering place for nonprofits and community groups
- Provide shared meeting rooms, storage, and collaboration space
- Enable regular activities such as weekly coffee hours for idea-sharing
- Offer tech support and onboarding assistance for programs like time-banking
- Facilitate partnerships between nonprofits, businesses, and schools

Desired Amenities & Location:

- Emphasis on a downtown location with accessible meeting and storage facilities.
- The representative highlighted the value of public-private partnerships and the potential use of underutilized spaces for nonprofit collaboration.

Outreach & Collaboration Ideas:

- Partner with schools, PTAs, local businesses, and banks to increase visibility.
- Participate in community events to promote shared resources.
- Develop structured approaches for nonprofits to connect without overwhelming attendees.

Interview: (Teresa)

The group manages a museum and farm property that functions as a public city park. It is entirely volunteer-run and focuses on historical preservation, education, and community access.

Current Challenges:

- Limited storage space for archives and collections.
- Difficulty tracking visitor numbers and increasing public awareness.
- Need for stronger marketing support and clearer agreements with the city.
- Challenge of engaging younger generations in historical preservation.
- General difficulties in coordinating multiple nonprofits sharing space.

Commons Support for a shared community hub that would allow different organizations to collaborate efficiently. The representative emphasized the value of including historical content, storytelling, and displays within the new space to educate and connect the community with local history.

Needs:

- Storage space for archives.
- Display areas for historical exhibits.
- Meeting rooms for board meetings, speaker events, and programs.
- No need for office space or full relocation.
- Strong interest in partnerships that improve visibility and bring historical programming into a central location.

Excitement about the potential of the O'Reilly property due to its parking and existing infrastructure. Emphasis on utilizing underutilized spaces rather than new construction, with clear management structures and defined responsibilities when multiple organizations share a facility.

Interview: (Katie)

The organization operates two facilities with 9 full-time equivalent staff at the main site and 4.5 at the secondary location.

It serves approximately 1,200 older adults (primarily 60+, average age 72–75, mostly women, many living alone, with about one-third reporting low income) and handles more than 100 transactions per day at its café-style service.

Current Challenges

- Severe space and parking limitations, resulting in waitlists for programs and activities.
- Clients strongly prefer the original building and consistent, personalized service.
- Need for long-term financial stability and acquiring new donors to replace those lost to relocation or death.

Commons Strong interest in a larger shared community space that would support collaboration with other nonprofits while maintaining privacy and identity for different services.

The representative expressed openness to partnerships and noted many existing collaborations already in place.

Desired Space & Amenities

- Total space required: Currently ~5,000 sq ft; ideally at least 10,000 sq ft to accommodate growth.
- Dedicated rooms for classes, events, offices, dining, and storage.
- Commercial kitchen.
- Adequate parking and separation/privacy between different user groups.
- Schedule: Access 6 days per week, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm.

Community Needs Identified

- Library, senior services, youth spaces, medical/healthcare, and transportation were highlighted as essential.
- Current shortage of adequate community space in Sebastopol and West County.
- Suggested partners include other nonprofits, the library, health providers, and compatible commercial entities.

Interview: (Rev Christy)

The organization is a 501(c)(3) with a small staff (1 full-time, 1 part-time administrative, 1 part-time musician). It serves an average of 96 people on Sundays from a congregation of about 200, plus additional visitors through tenants and programs. It serves families with young children (ages 6–10), elders, and people new to or returning to faith communities. The facility also hosts tenants including a café, music teachers, 12-step groups, and other community activities.

Current Challenges

- Financial constraints and difficulty funding additional staff amid rising costs.
- Navigating cultural shifts in a “post-Christiandom” era.
- Need for more gathering and meeting spaces.

The organization is not interested in relocating but is open to partnerships and continuing to rent out its own event spaces (including outdoor areas).

It would benefit from additional large meeting rooms and gathering spaces within a shared community hub.

Desired Space & Amenities:

- Additional large meeting room(s) and flexible gathering spaces.
- Clear rental guidelines for shared use.
- Emphasis on multi-generational and inclusive programming.

Community Needs Identified:

- Welcoming spaces away from home (similar to libraries or cafés).
- Child-friendly outdoor areas.
- Greater affordable housing and ethnic diversity in the community.
- Strong support for involving teens and young parents to create ownership and responsibility.
- Suggestion to de-center the concept — consider multiple community spaces rather than a single large complex.
- Creative use of existing empty commercial spaces.

Near the Plaza would be a strong location for success.

Interview: (Litwin)

Overview A representative from local civic organizations was interviewed as part of the community effort to explore a shared community commons space. The discussion focused on nonprofit needs, current facilities, challenges, and strong support for developing a central hub, with the O'Reilly Building identified as a promising near-term location.

Key Points from the Interview

- The group is 100% volunteer-driven with approximately 25 active members (occasional contractors for groundskeeping and social media). Their facility serves as a heavily used, affordable convening space for many local nonprofits and community groups, with good parking and access. They organize well-attended public events that draw hundreds to thousands of attendees.
- Challenges
 - Increasing membership but difficulty converting to active participation.
 - Limited marketing and IT/administrative support for smaller nonprofits.
 - Visibility/awareness issues for community events.
 - Need for better collaboration and shared resources.
- Vision for a Community Commons Strong support for creating a central hub for nonprofits that would provide:
 - Shared meeting and event spaces
 - Collaborative marketing and visibility
 - Pooled administrative services (reception, databases, professional support)
 - Cost savings and synergy through physical proximity

Desired Space Requirements: 3,000–4,000 sq ft with tall ceilings, good natural light, wood beams, outdoor areas, multiple meeting rooms, restrooms, and a commercial kitchen.

- Plans are underway for kitchen improvements (including transition to induction cooking and associated electrical upgrades) and a broader capital improvement plan. The organization currently uses co-located space but would benefit from larger, more flexible facilities if membership grows.
- Preference for the O'Reilly Building as a practical first step for the commons. Emphasis on the need for a compelling overall vision for downtown Sebastopol, including future plans for the current City Hall/Library site. Importance of public-private partnerships and maintaining vitality on Main Street was highlighted.
- Willing to provide letters/emails of support to City Council when requested and share details for community events.

Interview: (Alicia)

- The station is a long-running (53-year), volunteer-driven public radio operation serving approximately 10 counties. It broadcasts in five languages (English, Spanish, and three indigenous languages from Mexico) and focuses on locally relevant public affairs programming. It has a small paid staff and around 40 volunteers, and is recognized as a trusted source during emergencies and for reaching Spanish-speaking and bilingual communities.
- Challenges
 - Chronic funding limitations and heavy reliance on volunteers.
 - Difficulty with visibility (“best kept secret”) despite strong community impact.
 - Current studio space constraints, particularly lack of convenient bathroom facilities and limited ability to host events.
 - Transmission requirements that restrict relocation options.
- Strong support for a central community hub, with emphasis on:
 - Serving Spanish-speaking, Indigenous, and low-income families
 - Including a youth center as a key component to provide safe gathering space
 - Providing shared amenities such as a commercial kitchen and properly located restrooms
 - Opportunities for collaboration, event hosting, and community outreach
- Outreach & Collaboration Recommendations
 - Use the station’s radio broadcasts, social media, and programmer networks to reach Latino and Indigenous communities.
 - Partner with Spanish-language media (including translations in outlets like the Press Democrat).
 - Conduct community surveys and distribute them through trusted local channels.
 - Focus on integrated neighborhoods with high Spanish-speaking populations and prioritize services for youth and low-income families.
- For hosting community events, essential requirements include:
 - On-site kitchen access
 - Restrooms in the same building (not across a parking lot)
 - Adequate parking and flexible event space
- The representative stressed the importance of strong partnerships among community organizations and building broad awareness before presenting specific proposals. They expressed interest in ongoing collaboration and helping distribute information about the project.

Interview: (Dana)

- Existing community facilities (library, senior center, and community center) are underutilized due to space constraints and issues such as flooding.
- The representative highlighted broader challenges in the rural area, including funding limitations, transportation barriers for students and families, and the need for stronger partnerships between schools, nonprofits, and other organizations.
- Strong interest in a shared multi-purpose hub that combines services rather than simply replacing existing ones.
- The space should support collaboration across sectors and serve multiple community functions, including educational and recreational needs.
- North Town was identified as the most feasible location due to accessibility and practicality. Other options discussed included the O'Reilly campus and the old CBS building.
- Key factors considered were parking, existing infrastructure, storage needs, and avoiding floodplain restrictions.

Desired Amenities

- Training rooms and conference spaces
- Community kitchen
- Flexible areas suitable for school and nonprofit partnerships
- Indoor recreational facilities, particularly useful during winter months
- Emphasis on staffing needs and creative partnership models (e.g., in-kind services or fee-for-service arrangements) with schools and nonprofits.
- The conversation also touched on opportunities for community education initiatives.

Interview: (Ellen)

This organization serves approximately 1,000 clients per month across multiple sites (largest in Sebastopol, plus Guerneville, Forestville, and Occidental) with over 200 staff members. The organization intentionally maintains smaller, distributed sites for better community access and emergency redundancy.

Major Challenges:

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining clinical staff due to high local housing costs and competition from larger systems like Kaiser and Providence.
- Tight finances and funding uncertainty, especially related to federal policy changes affecting coverage for undocumented patients.
- Need for stable funding and affordable staff housing.

Interest in Community Commons:

- Supportive of a shared community hub that could provide confidential clinical and meeting spaces, shared office areas, and improved service navigation for residents.
- Highlighted the O'Reilly site as particularly promising due to its parking, accessibility, and location away from downtown traffic. Also mentioned the old CVS site as a potential option.
- Emphasized the value of co-locating health services with other community resources (social services, senior support, emergency preparedness).

Additional Opportunities:

- Potential for emergency response capabilities and storage of emergency resources (including food distribution) within the commons.
- Interest in creative partnerships, including use of the space for events, classes, and wellness activities.
- Noted the importance of proper licensing for healthcare delivery and adequate parking.

Broader Context:

- Stressed the need for better coordination between healthcare, social services, and local government in West County.
- Expressed openness to ongoing partnership as the project develops.

Interview: (Slayter)

The respondent represents two volunteer-led community organizations:

- One focused on international student exchange and cultural programs (11 board members, all volunteers). Serves ~20 student travelers/hosts and families annually, plus broader community engagement.
- One focused on home repair assistance for low-income homeowners (9 board members, all volunteers). Completes ~20 home projects per year on a single annual work day.

Major Obstacles

- Limited capacity/opportunities compared to demand (more applicants than available slots).
- Financial constraints, especially funding for materials, insurance costs, volunteer recruitment, and identifying project needs. Suggested Solutions: Restore the City's Community Grants Program and increase governmental funding support.

Success Factors: Greater availability of public funding (e.g., models used by similar programs in neighboring cities involving Housing Authority and USDA support).

Partnerships

- The student exchange group maintains ties with statewide and international sister-city networks and does not need new local partners.
- The home repair group plans to affiliate with a larger regional rebuilding organization.

Community Space Needs

- Student exchange group: Interested in shared meeting space (~400-500 sq ft) for once-monthly meetings. Desired amenities include tables, chairs, and a small kitchen/wet bar with counter, sink, and refrigerator.
- Home repair group: Prefers informal meetings in members' homes; no strong need for dedicated shared space.

Community Member Perspective: Most important community assets for thriving: public commons (sidewalks, parking, roads, pathways, trails, parks).

Current assessment:

- Public spaces in Sebastopol need better ongoing maintenance and enhanced infrastructure such as street furniture and public art.
- Likely to use a wide range of community facilities (meeting rooms, parks/playgrounds, art display areas, gathering spaces, community kitchen, office/co-working space, outdoor areas, conference rooms), but not childcare.

Future needs: Improved public transportation access.

Potential Partners & Broader Collaboration

- Invite local design professionals (architects, landscape designers, planners) due to their proven value in community planning efforts.
- Potential commercial partner: A local clean energy provider (as both funder and public outreach outpost).
- Key influencer/funder: The same clean energy entity, noted for strong financial position and community respect.
- Broader involvement recommended from Sonoma County-level partners with grant/funding access.

Location Recommendation for The Commons: A central downtown corridor running east-west from the Burnett Street parking lot area to Ives Park (including Taqueria property, South High parking lot, and SCA space), and north-south from the Library to the Willow Street extension (S. Main to Petaluma Avenue). This broader downtown area has underutilized spaces (e.g., former Vet's Hall) with high potential.

Interview (Fraser)

Organization Profile

- Volunteer-run group with ~150 members and a 4-person board.
- Serves thousands of West County residents (west of Santa Rosa, south of Guerneville) each month through library-related activities.
- Fully volunteer-operated.

Current Challenges

- Insufficient space for ongoing work.
- Specific needs:
 1. Dedicated work space (tables, chairs, work counters).
 2. Additional storage for books (ideally inside the library or on the same property).
 3. Retail-style space to buy/sell books.

Success Factors for the Organization and Community

- Recruitment of younger volunteers.
- Adequate on-site or nearby parking.
- Continued strong partnership with the library while maintaining independence.

Shared Community Space Preferences

- Would utilize a shared “Commons” facility for: work space, meeting space, and dedicated storage.
- Desired schedule: 5–7 days per week, including some evenings.
- Space and amenities needed: comparable to the library’s Forum Room and former work room — tables, chairs, work tables, and shelving.

Community Needs Perspective

- Most important community assets: opportunities for retired people to volunteer and contribute through non-profits.
- Current gaps: Library and Senior Center already need more space.
- Location priorities: Accessible by public transit (on or near a bus line).
- Enhancements that would increase usage: Inclusion of a coffee shop.
- Most desired spaces: meeting rooms, storage/work space, gathering areas, and potentially a community kitchen.

Potential Partners and Collaborators

- Suggested partners for a Commons: library-related groups, a coffee shop, child-oriented activity/childcare space, food bank, and medical services addressing current community needs.
- Commercial fit: Coffee shop.
- Engagement: Sonoma County elected leaders and additional funding/grant sources. local elected officials, service providers, and empathetic bridge-builders who listen and connect people.
- Location: Sites with ample parking and high foot traffic, such as the former Rite Aid or CVS properties, or areas near SCA and Ives Park.

Interview (Jaffe)

Business / Non-Profit Leader

Organization Size & Reach

- Community hall: 6 independent contractors, 13 volunteer board members; serves ~125 members and 1,500 community members monthly, primarily West County (events draw from all of Sonoma County).
- Related grant-making organization: 1 part-time independent contractor (1/3 time), 6 volunteer board members; supports 7–8K people per month through grants in the Forestville, Occidental, and Hessel areas.

Major Obstacles

- Large amount of untapped community capacity (financial, intellectual, energy).
- Lack of suitable meeting space and space for physical archives.

Solutions Needed

- Small-to-large meeting rooms and storage space.
- Ongoing community-building efforts.

Success Factors in Sebastopol / West County

- Physical connectivity to the Laguna Trail to become a destination from downtown and a recreational hub.
- Fractional meeting spaces (differently sized rooms available on varied terms).

Partnership Interest Strongly yes — already actively partnering and views partnerships as an organizational goal (examples: joint events with other nonprofits and service clubs).

Community Space Requirements

- Flexibility & Certainty: Fractional meeting/classroom space, affordable rates, reliable scheduling.
- Schedule: High flexibility in availability.
- Space & Amenities: Indoor/outdoor options; strong pedestrian, cyclist, and public transit connectivity; catering kitchen and/or coffee/tea/small nibbles kitchen.
- Room Sizes Needed:
 - 1–20 person flexible spaces
 - 20–100 person flexible spaces
 - 100–300 person flexible spaces
 - All with small kitchen areas

Community Member Perspectives

- Essential Spaces/Services: A true “third place” — safe, public, welcoming indoor/outdoor gathering space where people can go regularly, become familiar, and that reflects community intentions. Includes public restrooms.
- Current Gaps: Lack of cohesive theme, design, and beauty in public spaces. The town could be significantly more attractive while preserving its unique character (no strip malls).
- Usage Interest: All listed options plus food distribution spots and clean restrooms.

- Desired Improvements: Reduce controversy and competition; create synergy and connection; make the town pleasant, comfortable, and easy to be in. Public transit access is important.

Potential Partners & Broader Ecosystem

- Invite all current stakeholders, new residents, returning younger people, major “heavy lifters” (SASC, SCCC, Library, Ives Park, NGOs/CBOs), and groups like Peacetown.
- Commercial fits: Limited retail; some office/service spaces (tutors, massage, therapists), dance studio, higher-education outpost (SRJC/Extended Education), court outpost.
- Key influencers & supporters: Economic Development Board, Regional Parks, City of Santa Rosa, local media (Press Democrat, Sebastopol Times), and those with access to “frozen money” (e.g., fully depreciated buildings).
- Donor motivations: Financial ROI plus strong intangible/community-building returns.

Additional Insights

- Important missing question: “What’s missing here in our community?”
- The community lacks a 50–100 year vision.
- Strong call to invest in creating and realizing that long-term vision.
- Grateful for efforts toward a Commons Complex.
- Preferred approach: Repurpose an existing building in a location that can act as a catalyst for the community’s 50–100 year vision.

Interview (Philena)

Business / Non-Profit Leader

Organization Size & Reach

- Cultural center: 8 employees (4.5 FTEs); serves a minimum of 3,500 participants monthly across classes, performances, rentals, and events.
- Related service club: All-volunteer with ~30 members (growing); runs large community events (e.g., 6,000+ attendees for major fireworks, 500 for Halloween and Easter events) and provides scholarships/grants.
- Serves all ages (children to elders), with strong participation from Sebastopol, West County, and Santa Rosa areas.

Major Obstacles

- Primary challenge for the center: Current flood-zone location, which makes rebuilding impractical — relocation is the most likely solution.
- Service club: No major obstacles; membership is actively growing.

Solutions Needed

- Funding support (including possible City contribution) and new funding sources.
- Better community marketing and communication.
- Relocation or major facility improvements for the flood-affected organization.

Success Factors in Sebastopol / West County

- Secure funding and improved facilities.
- Stronger marketing to increase visibility and engagement.

Partnership Interest Very high — already partnering with other nonprofits and interested in expanding collaborations (e.g., with local schools for financial literacy, arts education, tutoring, and work experience programs).

Community Space Requirements

- Resources Needed: More storage space, additional/shared classrooms, concert hall, commercial kitchen, outdoor space, and meeting space.
- Schedule: 8 AM – midnight (especially Thursday–Sunday for concerts and events); daytime primarily for meetings.
- Space & Amenities:
 - Main concert hall: 5,000–6,000 sq ft with stage, lighting, sound, green room, and separate restrooms.
 - Multiple classrooms of varying sizes (10–50+ people).
 - Basic conference rooms with sound, lighting, and IT capabilities.

Community Member Perspectives

- Essential Spaces/Services: Gathering spaces for all ages, cultural venues for live music, theater, and arts education, plus athletic spaces (especially basketball and pickleball).

- Current Gaps: Significant shortage of space overall; many existing facilities are inadequate.
- Usage Interest: High interest in all listed community spaces (meeting rooms, gathering areas, parks, art display, kitchen, office/co-working, outdoor space, conference rooms, childcare, etc.).
- Transit: Interviewee does not need it personally, but believes clientele would benefit from good public transit options.

Potential Partners & Broader Ecosystem

- Invite all service clubs and organizations needing space.
- Entities needing new homes: The arts center and similar groups.
- Commercial fits: Bookstores or similar community-oriented businesses.
- Funding leads: Local philanthropists and business leaders with resources.
- Common challenge: Reliance on the “same 10 people” for leadership and organizing.

Location Preference Close to the center of town, within walking distance