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Subject: 7/6/21 Public Comment RE: \$72,000 for Homeless Outreach; Why?
Date: Thursday, July 01, 2021 3:34:25 PM

Dear Council Members,

I am writing in regards to your commitment of \$72,000 in public monies towards a Homeless Outreach Coordinator. How many homeless individuals are in Sebastopol? Less than 200?

Given the fact that the Council was debating spending \$80,000 on a fire truck, which is a crucial piece of equipment for our fire department, it seems odd that you would easily allocate \$72,000 (or more) toward a homeless outreach person. Our fire department serves our entire community of 7800 and provides support for Sonoma County at large.

The residents and businesses of Sebastopol pay taxes to ensure their community safety. Fire protection (as we live in an area prone to wildfire) is a baseline service that the City provides. At a bare minimum, the Council should be prioritizing fire and police service in funding as these are the departments which aid us in times of crisis, from flood to fire.

It is completely unclear what the goals are for this outreach position. Is it to get the people living illegally on Morris Street into permanent housing? All of these people have been contacted several times and have been offered services. They have refused service and shelter.

Prior to funding this position with precious tax dollars, it seems that the Council should outline the exact goals for this expenditure. Does it have a goal, which can be completed in a year or is this an on-going, funded position? Why do the citizens of Sebastopol need this position?

The citizen's of Sebastopol have lost revenue since the County converted the Sebastopol Inn into Permanent Supportive Housing for homeless people.

It seems the County could easily support an outreach coordinator at the Sebastopol Inn as they already have security and staff on-site. In addition, the County has tremendous funds from Project Homekey and Measure O.

The Sebastopol Inn's annual budget is over \$1,000,000; we know the security costs are \$55,000 per month.

Measure O will bring in \$25,000,000 annually.

Why are the citizens of Sebastopol funding this \$72,000 position when the Council expressed concerns over spending \$80,000 on a fire truck?

Sebastopol also manages Park Village, which is also homeless housing. Last year, the City paid to improve Park Village and built additional RV sites.

It seems that Sebastopol has much more homeless services per capita than other small Sonoma County towns. Given the fact that Sebastopol already provides so much service despite our small size, small budget and rather larger budget deficit, it seems odd that the Council is choosing to spend more money on homeless services.

Despite our high level of homeless services and the loss of sales tax and transportation occupancy tax due to the Sebastopol Inn conversion, we still have a persistent homeless encampment on Morris Street.

The City and County have been offering services to the illegal RV campers on Morris Street for over 5 years. There have been multiple complaints by local businesses, a death, a fire, bicycle lane blockage, and on-going health and safety issues.

The Council continues to turn a blind eye to these problems despite the fact that they are allocating funds to consultants for "Relaunching Sebastopol" and community vitality.

If the Council does not listen to and mitigate consistent complaints by business owners, why spend the money on consultants?

As Council noted, many of our parks and public works projects remain unfunded. We still have understaffing in our fire, police and administrative departments.

The Police Audit said that understaffing of the Police Department was impacting its functioning. It noted that bringing up the staffing levels was a priority. If the Council funds consultants to make recommendations, it seems they should be followed.

One cost-effective solution to motivating the RV campers on Morris Street to take the shelter that is offered to them would be to establish RV parking permits. Many cities and counties in California have this program. RVs parked on public streets need to be permitted through a residence or business. A permit system could be put into place after people have been offered shelter and service.

Taxpayers pay for homeless services (the state of California will be spending \$12 Billion/ \$75,000 per homeless person this year) which provide valuable resources for homeless people. Homeless people need to use these resources as living on the streets is not helpful to them and does not provide a pathway to permanent housing. By accepting shelter and

service, homeless people start the journey toward being housed.

If the Council spends this money on Homeless Outreach and not on the fire department and not on our City departments and not on our public parks and not on our roads, then it seems Council should have very clear and detailed goals and reasons.

The budget deficit for the City is projected to grow over time and the citizens of Sebastopol should be assured that baseline services in fire, police, public works, water and sewer are being prioritized.

Thank you for your work on behalf of our citizens.

Kate Haug
Sebastopol