

Sebastopol Town Hall Notes

Affordable Housing

Challenges:

- Granny units with land and enough water.
- Leveling the real estate market from greed so that the increased homeless population have a chance to restore life.
- Permit Resource Management Department (PRMD) still difficult.
- What else besides granny units will help low and moderate income citizens afford housing? What are other communities doing to house people?
- PRMD – no high fines to new owners of red tag property. Help new owners make it right, not get them to pay high fines.
- Loosen regulations to allow development of tiny homes!
- Encourage homeowners to build (rental) units within their existing homes. Give tax breaks to homeowners who provide long-term housing.
- Supply is low, demand is high.
- How can affordable housing be increased while maintaining quality of life within all county communities?

Solutions:

- Allow subdivision of larger (but still small) lots for development of small living structures/tiny homes.
- Sonoma county building permit and code enforcement must change its position of permitting measures to one of support for community projects that want to incorporate alternative technologies, permaculture, and sustainability.
- Reviewing the many types of dwellings that people in the world live in, such as yurts, converted cargo trailers, etc., which can make living situations more possible for the many.
- Allow more “granny units.” Self-help housing through Burbank Housing and others really helps.
- There are county efforts to make it easier for tiny houses.
- Review “experimental test site” legislation for New Mexico, Hawaii, and Colorado that advocates and supports emerging site specific sustainably communities. How can we implement it here?
- Require PRMD to reduce and eliminate unnecessary requirements and fees to build or add “in-law” units.
- Provide tax breaks (property tax) to landlords who rent below market value as an incentive to keep rents at affordable rates.

- *Establish a public bank (public funding, owned by citizens) to provide low cost loans for mortgages, infrastructure repairs, and float local bonds so that people are not dependent on national banks and free of onerous fees.*
- *Loosen regulations in housing permits and more accountability for nonprofits serving the homeless. Allocate funds to a wide variety of nonprofits where now most is given to Catholic Charities. More programs to be set up for veterans who wish to engage in rural farming.*
- *We need more live/work spaces and multiuse areas.*
- *Find ways to encourage and support creative/alternative/cooperative housing opportunities via potential rezoning, discounted sewer/water for "granny units" or otherwise support for smaller living structures like yurts, domes, etc.*
- *There is a lot of land in Sonoma County.*
- *Create a nonprofit whose sole job is to ensure that all residents have access to affordable housing.*

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Coast: Protection, Access

Challenges:

- *Energy needs.*
- *Access to Jenner Headlands from Hwy 1.*
- *There should not be parking or other fees to access our coastline. There is so little for those of limited means; our scenic areas should be welcoming to everyone.*
- *Parks and public land need financial support. How about adding local state parks to county permits for an additional fee so that state parks can get financial support? Local low-income families and individuals get a free pass.*
- *Preserving fisheries and sport fishing.*
- *We need to keep the coast accessible to everyone, including the poor.*
- *All of our coastal protection heroes are gone or very elderly. How can we guarantee the work they've done will continue?*
- *Repair roads and parking lots and tell the state they don't need parking fees.*

Solutions:

- *Solar Energy*
- *How to adopt Native American principles and practices to honor the Creator, other living beings and all of creation? Every change we make within ourselves makes a difference.*
- *Coastal decomposition and restoration programs and education for adults and youth. Encourage investment in coastal wealth, make memories so that access remains a cultural priority.*
- *More volunteering!*
- *Do not permit wine grapes to be grown on coastal agricultural land—reserve remaining agricultural lands for food crops.*
- *Allow beach fires on at least a few beaches.*
- *Keep beaches free. Find funds from other sources—tourism, taxes, etc...*

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Homelessness

Challenges:

- How to improve collaboration, various human services, providers, and law enforcement.
- Taking care of people who won't or can't take advantage of shelters: mentally ill, addicted and defiant individuals.
- Work to create homes for homeless—partner with agencies to better address root causes but housing first!
- If you provide shelter, the homeless population increases and so does crime. What can be done?
- See homeless people as people first—demonizing them is a barrier to solutions.
- Stop agencies from pressuring the homeless to give up their pets because they fill our animal shelters and are later killed, which destroys families.
- Multiple/different needs of each person—require wide variety of help and resources/talents.
- Some might suffer from serious mental illness.

Solutions:

- Don't sell old Sutter building originally build for the indigenous population.
- Have the Veteran Housing & Urban Development-Veterans Administrative Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Straits Settlements Volunteer Forces (SSVF) programs be more accountable to what they actively do.
- Shelters, rehabilitations (health care & job training), affordable housing.
- Free health care and nurseries for all newborns in Sonoma County.
- "Camps", facilities, drug issues, transients.
- Stop PRMD from imposing costly and unnecessary rules & fees, allow property owners to assess rooms or units.
- "Wet" facilities with services that provide for pets as well as people.
- Change of attitudes. Homelessness is not a crime; treat them with respect.
- We need a county-wide investment in housing, not fragmented by region.
- Simple and straightforward job training.
- Consider transitioning Palm Drive Health Care District hospital to a family support center.
- More self-help and transitional housing.
- More veterans and mental health services.
- More motels turned into housing; an example is the one in Santa Rosa.

- *Pets are family too. Loosen regulations allowing homeless to be housed with their pets.*
- *County should pass Laura's Law to aid the homeless who are suffering from severe and untreated mental illness.*
- *Please consider promotion of tiny homes: stand-alone or on trailers.*
- *Give the homeless jobs cleaning streets and the Santa Rosa creek.*
- *More public bathrooms like Italy, public showers, laundry facilities, free meals, health care and support services, etc.*
- *Coordinated mental health services!*
- *Homeless people must be part of formulating solutions.*

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Roads and Infrastructure

Challenges:

- *Funding.*
- *Wider roads for bikers.*
- *Too much through traffic in Sebastopol.*
- *Return to two-way streets.*
- *Funding—there is a lot of competition for local taxes on the ballot.*
- *Roads where there are smaller populations are in bad shape. There are county crews that fill pot holes and it is done quickly and carelessly, which actually makes it worse.*
- *Too many single-occupied cars, which results in traffic congestion.*
- *No sufficient public transit to accommodate needs.*

Solutions:

- *138,000 electrical cars on clean power by 2030.*
- *Make road maintenance and repair a higher priority.*
- *Re-divert MTC funds from Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) to roads.*
- *Create a “pot hole” or “other” road condition report site.*
- *Develop by-pass routes around Sebastopol.*
- *Fee based on miles travelled yearly, determined at smog check.*
- *Toll roads.*
- *We need to pay more to get more services. I am willing if the money is spent responsibly.*
- *Get more cars off the roads through improved public transit.*

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Russian River: Environmental Health

Challenges:

- *River clean-up days need to be advertised farther in advance.*
- *Too much farm runoff. We must take care of the salmon.*
- *River people expect Santa Rosa to pay for everything.*
- *Conflicting environmental opinions.*
- *No money spared to protect and improve water quality.*
- *Runoff from local agriculture.*
- *Lack of collaboration between multiple agencies.*
- *River is under-funded by the county.*
- *Work on getting rid of Arundo Donax, the giant reed that is invasive and wiping out the natural riparian habitat on the Russian River.*

Solutions:

- *Make changes small and incremental, not drastic.*
- *Be more involved in the regional water quality control board.*
- *County can lead in collaborative, non-duplicative efforts and prioritization.*
- *Ban pesticide use near rivers, streams, tributaries, creeks, rills, rivulets, and seasonal waterways.*
- *Deputies for river keeper.*
- *Watch "water the great mystery" on YouTube.*

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Tourism Impacts: Wineries, Vacation Rentals By Owner (VRBO)

Challenges:

- *There are no guidelines for approval of new commercial wineries in rural areas.*
- *We need the income but the infrastructure is not ready for the increased traffic.*
- *Roadside garbage is an embarrassment.*
- *Winery impact has overwhelmed other quality of life concerns.*
- *Environmental impact of runoff to our watershed.*
- *Promote environment and gentle use activities.*
- *Utilize public land for trails that is now used for waste water – perimeter only like Europe.*
- *What is your position specifically on the “Dairyman” proposal?*
- *VRBO is encouraging a transient community. Is this a potential barrier to affordable housing?*
- *Long-term problems of monoculture, environmental degradation, and poisoning for future generations.*
- *Traffic congestion results in increased accident rate.*
- *Wine grapes are taking over agricultural land used for growing food.*
- *Where is agricultural diversity?*
- *Some sort of oversight of VRBOs without taxing too much.*
- *Sonoma County needs a thoughtful plan for supporting the economic benefit of the wine industry without harming the qualities that make our area so desirable. We are at a tipping point.*

Solutions:

- *Put emphasis on repairing roads heavily utilized by bicycles and tourists.*
- *Bring back severe fines for littering.*
- *Make any short-term rental properties obtain a use permit as with hotels and B&Bs.*
- *Make all short-term rentals collect and pay Transient Occupancy Tax.*
- *Make and enforce noise and traffic ordinances in unincorporated areas.*
- *Make wine visits only in areas of commercial use or limit the number of people who can visit wineries in rural areas.*
- *2-way streets in Sebastopol.*
- *Allow people who have an AirBnB to pay occupancy taxes, but whose units are not legal or permitted properly.*
- *Move into sustainable land use principles and practices, permaculture.*

- *County needs a thoroughly researched plan for winery expansion and operations that will respect the families that live here and benefit all of us, not just the wine industry executives.*

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Other

Challenges:

- Sonoma County needs a solution to huge pension liability. This problem will only get worse.
- Pension viability.
- County permit process is difficult and creates an adversarial climate for homeowners. Many residents skip the process entirely, which hurts the county financially and leads to work that may not be up to code.
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU) influence on Board.
- Climate change.
- I love wine, but 60% of our agricultural (Ag) land is in wine grapes now. We need to reign that in and encourage the growing of actual food.
- Mental health.
- Funding needs to really help seriously mentally ill. There also needs to be financial accountability for organizations that receive funding.
- Sonoma compost should be returned and waste management back to the county.
- Work to return compost & wood recycling centers like the one we had at the dump
- From the tens of thousands of acres of public lands, designate a safe firearms training and practice area. Consult with experienced range designers from NRS, GOC, and other knowledgeable experts.
- Chipping instead of burn piles. The North Bay has the worst air quality.
- Green Valley Road area is cut off because of flooding many times in winter. We need to fix this.
- Stop the proliferation of wineries and vineyards—too much land in single usage.
- Green House Gas (GHG)—how will Lynda work with Sonoma Clean Power, Center for Climate Protection, and others dedicated to help survive global warming, rising sea levels, and the demise of species and habitats?

Solutions:

- Sonoma West Medical Center should be closed down—it is not financially viable and a hardship for those who pay property taxes to keep it afloat. Tax money is needed for more police, which are needed for the increased crime due to pot farms.
- Support the hospital. 15% of the 12,000 people who have now used it came from Guerneville and the River. They expect to be profitable in October. Human life is precious. There is a bad shortage in West County. Let's keep working. The stroke center and emergency room are saving lives!
- Change pension systems from defined benefit to defined contribution.

- *Require that county salaries, perks, and benefits do not exceed average county incomes.*
- *Any improvements with regards to permits would be welcome! The permit process should encourage people to get unpermitted work up to code. The county should not punish, but welcome homeowners who want to comply.*
- *Improve the county system—assist families in helping their loved ones who have serious mental illness and welcome families as allies in the process of treatment. Offer more constructive options, such as cognitive therapy, funded by the county. More input from families on how monies are distributed for the mentally ill.*