

Sebastopol City Council Meeting – April 1, 2014 – Synopsis and Commentary

There were two closed sessions before the Regular City Council Meeting.

- Anticipated litigation regarding potential Sonoma County Landfill liability.
- Conference with Real Property Negotiator (385 Morris Street).

Proclamations and Presentations:

- April 6-2 is National Crime Victim's Rights Week and also The Week of the Young Child
- April is also Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Child Abuse Prevention Month and California Safe Digging Month

Years of Service awards were given to:

- Junior accountant Daniel Plutino (5 years)
- Firefighter Douglas Buonaccorsi (25 years)
- Reserve Officer David Andrews (30 years)

[Transition Sebastopol](#) praised the Council for “Leadership in Promoting and Using Renewable Energy Sources.” They also had some nice things to say about **David Brennan**, a former city manager who served from August 1999 to March 2009.

Public Comment (aka Open Mike):

Mighty tame tonight-rainy weather keeps the gadflies hunkered down. Pray for MORE rain!!!!

Consent Calendar:

Approved without discussion (5:0) was the authorization of the **Open Space Grant** for the Skate Park. Since it is the only qualifying project in town, our **Planning Director** will be clawing back about \$75,000 from the state for improvements for the park that would otherwise vaporize in the cauldron of Sacramento politics.

Also approved was the resolution urging passage of the [Postal Service Protection Act of 2013](#). This resolution was brought forward by **Mayor Jacob** at the urging of Lisa Maldonado,

Executive Director of the [North Bay Labor Council](#) , who was kind enough to supply him the wording of said resolution.

Discussion and Action Items:

The “Peace Wall” was back. ([See our March 4, 2014 Notes](#)). It became clear early that this is something **Mayor Jacob** and **Council Member Gurney** wanted to push through. Fortunately, **Council Member Eder** began citing the pitfalls of approving such a project without a comprehensive policy. Council Member Gurney asked that public comment be reopened on this item. She feigned ignorance of what they could possibly say. As it turned out, she really didn't know. Eight people spoke and it was 50/50 pro and con. Sensing they were about to lose four votes no matter what they did, Mayor Jacob and Council Member Gurney went hard astern and agreed with Council Member Eder to delay the wall and task the Planning Commission to craft a policy for all projects like this. The wall will be back.

Council Member Kyes wanted to send it to Planning with a rider that the Council is in favor of the wall and **Council Member Gurney** wanted to include crafting a policy for the naming public property. Fortunately, she prevailed and he did not.

So, thanks to **Council Member Eder**, with the support of **Council Member Slayter**, the City will have, at least with this, a policy in place before it acts. What a concept!

Approved 5:0

Following was one hour and twenty-five minutes of discussion, most of it necessary, on just how the Council was going to choose members for the **General Plan Advisory Committee**. **Mayor Jacob** was finally able to persuade the other council members to consider one small item at a time-[a near Herculean feat](#). So the process continues to flow as there is a great deal more ahh... material to be moved.

The last item, titled the “**Revenue Retention and Enhancement Options**”, considered spending **\$15,000 on a survey** consultant and a minimum of another **\$15,000 on a UUT consultant**.

The **Special Sales Tax** survey consultant would produce an on-line survey that would poll our

residents to gauge how the City can best raise more money for its meager coffers.

Sebastopol has two add-on taxes, the ¼ cent **Measure T** with no expiration and the ½ cent **Measure Y** that will expire in 2021.

Prolonging or increasing UTT (**Utility Users Tax**) is another option. At 4% on gas and electric usage, it is set to expire in January of 2015. It generates \$330,000 a year but will drop to about \$165,000 for the 2014/15 fiscal year.

How bad is it? The language in this agenda item states:

- a significant backlog of deferred maintenance, debt servicing, and desired staffing needs
- needed **street maintenance** is estimated at between **\$8,000,000** and **\$10,000,000**
- if the UUT expires there will be a **budget shortfall** in 2014/15
- there is **no funding for new vehicles or projects** through 2018
- **City reserves are low** and we are only projecting saving \$25,000 a year for the next two years

The report finishes by saying, "the City is not funding crucial, critical items that are necessary for the health of our City and Citizens."

There was a lot of back and forth on this but it was clear the Council is dreading the thought of raising the UUT tax (or expanding it to include cell phones, cable, garbage, etc.) and also raising the sales tax to the point of having the voters reject both. If that happens we will be much more like [Palm Drive Hospital](#) than is desired.

It was close to 11:00pm, I'm old, was tired AND sober (a bad combination) but my notes indicate:

- The City will ask that the UUT continue and remain unchanged
- The City will ask for a ¼ cent increase in sales tax
- The City Manager/Attorney will be authorized to spend up to \$15,000 for consulting assistance if needed

Approved 4:1 with Council Member Eder in the minority.

Is it not time to stop throwing money at **Cittaslow, the Railroad Brier Patch Berry removal, the Occupy benches, the bicycle lanes, the cob structures**, and other projects that are unable to show a return on investment-other than talk?

Let's get fiscally healthy first so we don't have to frack the Laguna to avoid bankruptcy!

Duration 5:00

John Necker