

Sebastopol City Council Meeting – September 17, 2013 – Synopsis and Commentary

All Council members were present. Once again, we had a double header, first session at 4:00.

The main business for the 4:00 session was to award a contract for a **Community Outreach Coordinator**. The purpose of this contract is to improve communications between the City and its citizenry, and coordinate public messaging about our great town. Read more here about the [intended scope of work and proposals received](#). \$40k is the budgeted amount.

Three proposals were received, and the contract was awarded to **Holly Hansen Consulting**. This was the recommendation from city staff, responsible for vetting and interviewing the candidates. Seems like a good choice, given her history publicizing the CORE and the SDAT projects, and her demonstrated lack of political axe to grind. Interestingly, Holly Hansen was the only one of the three who bothered to show up for this meeting. Contract was awarded by a 4:1 vote with **Councilmember Slayter** stating this was a luxury we cannot afford.

With this item ending earlier than expected, the Council decided to get a jump on the ubiquitous **Closed Session** to address with counsel “Threatened Litigation - Significant Exposure to Litigation.”

Next public session picks up at 6:00.

Three proclamations – Cittaslow International Day Sep 29, California Coastal Cleanup Day Sep 21, Russian River Cleanup Day Sep 28. (Maybe they picked Sep 29 for Cittaslow to honor John Necker on his birthday. Maybe not.)

Public comment – generally more of the same, with the same speakers, on the same topics. One took the Council to task for missing yet another chance for a proclamation. Another citing environmental health risks all around us that everyone is ignoring blamed any incoherency in her message on the building – “I would make more sense if your building wasn’t making me so sick.” Another espousing the evils of EMF and how there is now a conspiracy to deploy Smart Meters under the guise of providing a tool to combat climate change. Since this is one of the advertised, expected benefits of deploying such technology, it hardly qualifies as a conspiracy.

Council Announcements – among the many, we are getting a new crosswalk at Fircrest, in case you were wondering what the construction there was about.

User Fee Schedule – the [annual update to all fees](#) charged by the City was adopted with a **unanimous** vote, in accordance with staff recommendation. Some fees have gone up, but many have been reduced because many Civil Engineering services have been moved in-house. There continues to be concern, expressed by **Councilmember Eder** and others, over “tree fees” which can sometimes make it cheaper to cut down a suspect tree and pay the fine, instead of going through City processes. And it also came out from **City Attorney McLaughlin** that in order to enforce the fine, a legal complaint must be filed and processed on a court agenda. So this rarely, if ever, happens because of the hassle and expense. More like a plea bargain is what occurs. I wonder how often...

Bike Lane Design – staff was [authorized to issue an RFP](#) (Request for Proposal) that would design bike lanes on 3.25 miles of Hwy 116 through the City. The design phase has a budget of \$120k. Construction phase has a ballpark expected cost of around \$800k. **Engineering Director Kelly** was able to obtain a matching grant of \$60k for the design phase, so the City will get this phase for only

\$60k. The result will be a design ready for construction bids, once those funds are available. The vote **passed 4:1**, with **Mayor Kyes** wanting to spend the money on neighborhood bike lanes instead of on Hwy 116, even though the \$60k grant could not be used for that purpose. Did you know that adding bike lanes is really an EMF issue? I did not either, and credit **Mayor Kyes** for keeping a public comment speaker on topic in that regard, despite the speaker's suggestion that a potential EMF-induced seizure for a bike rider should be a consideration of the project.

Formula Business Moratorium – with another urgency ordinance the Council has acted **unanimously** to impose a temporary moratorium on new “formula businesses” in the City, with some exemptions. Read of [lots more details here](#). The idea is to keep the small town charm, its uniqueness, so as not to confuse Sebastopol with Anytown, USA. Not likely to happen, that confusion, for lots of reasons. The trick with this sort of ordinance is how to keep out the businesses you don't want, and get the ones you do, and not get sued. What you want and what I want don't always line up either. The main point of discussion was over what size limit in square footage would be exempt. It finally passed exempting those businesses under 5000 ft² in Redwood Marketplace, Fiesta and Southpoint shopping centers.

Other projects that are exempt are those that have already received land use approvals. Both the **City Attorney** and several **Councilmembers** made it very clear that this provision exempts the **CVS/Chase** project from this moratorium. That may be a good thing, since the City received a letter that day from Armstrong/CVS threatening more litigation if this moratorium were to be applied against their project. The main purpose of this moratorium appears to be to address all current vacant stores, especially in the new Barlow.

Committee Creation for the General Plan update – [Two committees](#) are involved in this effort. One is the **RFP Review Committee**. An RFP (Request for Proposal) has been issued for outside consultants to generate the General Plan. This first committee is tasked with processing proposals that are received, interviewing and vetting candidates, making recommendations on awarding the contract. There was lots of discussion on whether any Council members should be part of this group, or whether it should be left to the professionals. It was ultimately decided that **Mayor Kyes** and **Vice Mayor Jacob** would participate with this group in a somewhat ambiguous role.

Bids/Proposals are due on September 30. There were 3 parties at the optional informational pre-bid meeting. There is some question as to whether the stated budgeted amount of \$400k will be adequate, given the complexity of the expected work product and the amount of citizen involvement in Sebastopol.

The second group is the **General Plan Advisory Committee**. This group is broad-based, and would guide the update through the whole 3-4 years it may take to complete. The Council needs to decide how such a committee is to be constituted, and just how large it should be. Several ways to do this were kicked around. A broad-based group, representing as many facets of Sebastopol's various groups and interests is essential to make a General Plan that the whole community can get behind. This point was made repeatedly, most convincingly from **Councilmember Gurney**. How large the group should be was also a key topic. Somewhere in the twenties ought to work. No decisions made for this committee just yet.

9:15pm – back to **Closed Session** for more discussion of “Threatened Litigation - Significant Exposure to Litigation.”

--John Henel