

Sebastopol City Council Meeting – June 25, 2013 – Synopsis and Commentary

All Council Members were present.

There were no proclamations or consent calendar items as the Council seemed determined to finish with the draft budget at this meeting.

Public Comment:

One speaker blamed a person who was not present for the increase in Lyme disease and compared his failure to that of Jonestown.

Discussion and Action

The remainder of the meeting was filled with the work of approving and adopting the budget. Right out of the blocks Council Member Slater voiced concerns about **Cittaslow** and also the amount allotted to **Council Member Initiatives**.

Council Member Initiatives

This was eventually reduced from \$5000 a Council Member to \$500.

Cittaslow

Council Member Slater:

Didn't think it should be a line item like a City department

While laudable, it has no track record like other non profits in the city

Should be funded at \$10,000 (not \$20,000) under Community Grants

Council Member Eder:

The Council has already made it a line item. (City manager noted that it could still be changed until actual budget adoption.)

Applauded Cittaslow and said its business plan “accounted for every cent.”

Favored giving \$10,000 with a mid year review to see how it goes.

Mayor Kyes:

It's different that other non profits in that the City applied for the Cittaslow distinction so it's now up to the City to maintain it. (He failed to mention that in all of the United States only Fairfax, Sonoma Valley and Sebastopol have this "distinction". They probably have it because, unlike other more sensible cities, they applied for it.)

Council Member Gurney:

Agreed the Cittaslow has no track record but believes the designation affords some status. Wanted to fund Cittaslow at \$20,000. She did think that \$50,000 was too much to give for a remodel of City Hall. (Hey, aren't they going to need more space for the new Cittaslow department?)

Vice Mayor Jacob:

Said that the concept of Cittaslow is *widely* accepted by the citizens of Sebastopol and feels it is actually underfunded and should receive more money. The amount he had in mind was not stated.

Public Comment followed.

The first speaker spoke for Cittaslow explaining that half of the money would go to "getting going" and the other half for community development

The second asked "who gets the cash" and is Cittaslow accountable to the council and what do they do other than "go slow". He also asked what criteria did they have to meet and who was "buddy buddy " with who on the Council.

The third speaker had concerns about the public/private partnership and said Cittaslow should get itself formed before it gets any city funding.

The fourth speaker had no problem with the leadership of Cittaslow but thought they should work through the Chamber of Commerce.

The fifth speaker said the Center for the Arts needs more money too as does the Senior Center, especially to transport seniors to the doctor. She also said that 50% of Parkside

school students are on a subsidized food program and more money should be spent there instead.

So then, four of the five speakers thought Cittaslow should not be funded at this time. But even with that, and Mayor Kyes previously saying that “we are \$1,000,000 short of where we need to be”, the Council voted 3:2 to fund Cittaslow the entire \$20,000 with Slater and Eder in the minority.

At the [February 19 meeting](#), **Vice Mayor Jacob** asked for a show of hands of those who opposed smart meters and then grinned broadly as almost every hand in the room went up. He said I think that tells us something. At this meeting, the opposition to Cittaslow was over 5:1 but the Council choose to ignore that because this time their supporters were in the minority. **The sad conclusion** is that this latest incident really does tell us something. And that is, our city is being run as what some call a “vetocracy”- the structural overweighting of some citizens views relative to others.

If you think you have the same pull as the supporters of the City Council, you try to get \$20,000 out of them! Does this smell like a political payoff to you?

Of Interest:

Council Member Gurney wanted to form a “[Design Charrette](#)” to study what could be done with the old Diamond Lumber yard. She didn't express a lot of enthusiasm about including the property owner in this design charrette. (Well, at least she didn't drop the word “vetocracy” on you!) She also was instrumental in halving the \$250,000 commitment (not an actual expenditure yet) for a new bay at our thirty-eight year old fire house. The Fire Department has equipment scattered about the city that would be more effective at the station. Well, don't worry, if your house catches fire maybe Cittaslow can meander that way and put it out using a design charrette.

So the City Budget is ready for a final vote soon-if the council can agree on a date. No small task.

Elapsed Time=4.0 hours --John Necker