

Sebastopol City Council Meeting-April 3, 2012 Synopsis and Commentary
--John Necker, Sebastopol Citizen

All Council Members were present. Several Proclamations and Presentations were made, one of which was recognizing Officer Dennis Colthurst for his selection as Sonoma County Peace Officer of the Year.



<http://sebastopol.towns.pressdemocrat.com/2012/03/photos/sonoma-county-peace-officer-of-the-year/>

Public comments ranged from perceived racial profiling by the Sebastopol Police Department to accusing President Obama of treason. Several people from Santa Rosa, including Ernie Carpenter, voiced concern about profiling and made some unfortunate references to the Trayvon Martin shooting in Florida. Only one person accused the President of treason.

Council Member Shaffer introduced a request to improve the landscape in front of City Hall. The work would be done by Rebuilding Together volunteers at no cost to the City. Council Member Gurney expressed disappointment that the project was planned before the Council could discuss it. She also indicated that a Rebuilding Together project for the needy would be a better idea. However, after hearing that Rebuilding Together often does one civic project a year and that another area was also available should she wish to pursue it, Council member Gurney, after offering a few gardening tips, relented. She also mentioned that had she been consulted in advance, she might have donated some of her discretionary funds to the project. She didn't state if she would still consider that or the spearheading improvements of the area that will still need some work.

Vice Mayor Kyes wanted to do something else but gave no clear examples of just what it was he had in mind. Mayor Wilson and Council Member Slater thought the idea was just fine the way it was and it passed on a 5-0 vote.

Staff returned with new five, six and seven year scenarios for the proposed water and sewer rate increases. All of them, while slightly reducing rates, would cost the City more over the long term as well as further exposing the City to a possible future catastrophic failure.

Council Member Slater was in favor of supporting the staff four-year plan and it seemed as if Mayor Wilson was strongly considering that too. Council Member Shaffer also supported it but she was still concerned about the impact on low income families.

Council Member Gurney wanted smaller increases spread out over a longer period of time.

Vice Mayor Kyes then presented his spreadsheet that convinced at least him that the City should just borrow about 4 million dollars to deal with all the repairs. He was unmoved by Council Member Slater's remarks that we have been enjoying artificially low rates over the years and borrowing would only be passing the problem and debt along to those who follow us. He was also unmoved when City Manager Griffin noted that such a loan would actually amount to 5.8 million with the debt service. Mr. Griffin wasn't even sure the banks would lend us that much and said he would never recommend pledging the General Fund to guarantee the debt.

Council Member Gurney showed a strong interest in exploring the loan option.

Council Member Shaffer was against borrowing as was Mayor Wilson, but the Mayor decided, in the interests of avoiding dissension, to have staff bring it back yet again so the Council could further study the loan option but wanted to move quickly to some decision then. When Council Member Gurney questioned his sense of urgency, the Mayor responded that he felt they would not be doing their job by prolonging a decision on this very painful issue.

It should be noted that under the terms of Proposition 128, only those who receive a water/sewer bill from the City will be eligible vote and approve the Council's eventual decision. If they do not approve it, the rates cannot then be increased.