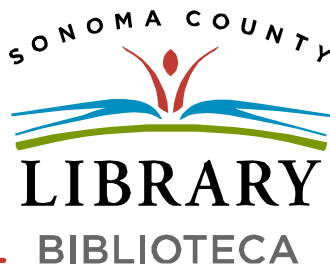


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LIBRARY COMMISSION

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April 3, 2023

City of Sebastopol
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95473

Dear Mayor Hinton and Councilmembers,

I am writing to add context to a letter you received from Sebastopol Library Commissioner Fred Engbarth. The matter of adding staff at the Sebastopol Regional Library is more complicated than just hiring more people.

As a governing body for a small city, I'm sure you're aware of the complexities of hiring new staff when there are physical space and budget constraints. The Sebastopol branch is known for its innovation and dedication to service, as the foot traffic in the branch demonstrates. It's also a small and inadequate space for what your community needs and expects from a regional library.

The Library uses a variety of factors to determine staffing levels for our branches. Circulation is one of them, but we also consider the size of the facility, the total population served, as well as other equity-based factors, including service to underserved and marginalized populations and the goals of our Reimagining Plan.

Noting the physical limitations of the branch, the assertion that we are not abiding by the requirements of the JPA is simply not true. Sebastopol has the fourth-largest staff in our entire countywide system, despite being seventh in size and ninth in terms of total population served. Branches with a staff larger than Sebastopol are at least 2.5 times larger and 2-4 times the population. For comparison, Petaluma Regional Library is 26,400 square feet and serves a population that is four times larger than Sebastopol's.

The only practical way to add as many staff as Commissioner Engbarth and Branch Manager Rose suggest is to spend considerable funds to remodel the existing space, which would **reduce** the square footage allotted to the public, a solution that, in my opinion, is a step backward. Plus, those funds do not currently exist.

I have listened and heard the request for more staff, but the building simply cannot support it. Our recent Facilities Master Plan, which we provided to the City in 2022, states: "Given the

inadequacies of the existing building, it is strongly recommended that it be replaced with a larger branch of at least 20,000 square feet.” This is compared to 10,000 square feet now in use.

I confess to being surprised that Commissioner Engbarth took the step of sending his letter without discussing his concerns with the Library Commission Chair or with me; I can imagine how a City Council might feel if the shoe was on the other foot. No one proactively reached out to us to better understand our decision-making process for staffing levels. I appreciate hearing his passion for the community, and we will discuss improving our internal communication.


As you are aware, library leaders have discussed the facility issue many times over the past few years with various Sebastopol Library Commissioners, City Councilmembers, and community members. I urge you to consider our shared responsibility as part of the JPA to provide comprehensive library services to the community with adequate branch facilities, and let’s produce a practical plan together which expands or replaces this well-loved, but inadequate, branch facility for all of our library lovers.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact me at (707) 545-0831 ext. 1505.

Sincerely,



Erika Thibault
Library Director



Deborah Doyle
Library Commission Chair

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