

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL  
CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM

**Meeting Date:** November 19, 2019  
**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
**From:** Vice Mayor Slayter  
City Administration  
**Subject:** Discussion and Consideration of Request for City of Sebastopol to Purchase Carbon Off-Set Credits for Official City Travel  
**Recommndation:** That the City Council discuss and provide direction to staff  
**Funding:** Currently Budgeted:  Yes  No  N/A

Net General Fund Amount: \$150.00 to \$500.00

**INTRODUCTION:**

This item is to request City Council discuss and consider the request for the City of Sebastopol to Purchase Carbon Off-Set Credits for Official City Travel.

**BACKGROUND:**

A carbon credit is defined as, “a quantified environmental benefit that is designed to compensate for impacts to habitat, environmental functions, or ecosystem services.”

Many cities and organizations are tracking their carbon emissions - calculating their overall footprint and finding ways to reduce and offset that footprint. The Sebastopol City Council strives to set and meet greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals by approving policies that are aimed at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Carbon offsetting has emerged as a method for reducing the cost of compliance with mandatory GHG regulation while also enabling cities to voluntarily reduce their carbon footprints. These voluntary reductions are often included in a suite of measures towards achieving net-zero carbon emissions or “carbon neutrality.”

A single carbon offset credit represents one metric ton of carbon dioxide or equivalent greenhouse gas and is generated by a reduction in emissions made by a voluntary project designed specifically for that purpose.

Carbon offsets are generated by projects with clearly defined objectives, usually beyond the confines of a municipality’s own operational sites. Typical carbon offset projects include building wind turbines or solar farms, supporting methane reduction projects including landfill methane capture, planting trees and preserving forests. A carbon offset is therefore additional to any reduction in emissions that would have been achieved due to regulatory compliance or participation in a mandatory program. Each project passes strict verification and validation checks before the offsets can be officially certified as genuine, allowing the offsets to be traded anywhere in the world.

**DISCUSSION:**

Local governments play a strong role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating negative impacts of climate change through actions as well as policies. With the recent switch to Sonoma Clean Power's carbon-free and one hundred percent renewable Evergreen electrical service, the City of Sebastopol has taken a positive, significant and meaningful step towards attaining carbon neutrality. This item focuses on another effort the City of Sebastopol can take to reduce its greenhouse gas emission and carbon footprint.

Local elected officials and staff attend many meetings, conferences and trainings that require either driving or flying to these events. In an effort to offset these miles, Cities can purchase offsets from verified GHG reduction projects that reduce emissions from sources beyond the immediate functions of their City. The aggregate of carbon offset purchases from many entities has a larger impact than individual, oftentimes modest, projects within the bounds of each company or government operation. This request is for Sebastopol to take part in this type of program.

No one is required to buy carbon offsets, doing so is a voluntary undertaking to offset greenhouse gas emissions. Private industry, NGOs and Governmental entities who invest in carbon offsets are voluntarily demonstrating their commitment to positively impact global climate change while minimizing their own environmental impact. Purchasers of carbon offset credits can specify the type of offset activity they wish to support. Should this request be approved, Council input towards this topic would be helpful to guide future research.

Based upon a review of the last two years, the City of Sebastopol Council and staff traveled for conferences, training and meetings an average of 15,000 miles per year by automobile and 3,000 miles per year by airplane. These miles equate to 6 metric tons of GHG emissions for driving and 2.3 metric tons for flying. Carbon offset credits are available through the Center for Climate Protection at a rate of approximately \$15.00 per metric ton.

For reference, offsetting 8.3 metric tons of carbon equates to planting approximately 170 urban trees.

The Council is welcome to consider more impactful possibilities beyond just offsetting carbon emission impacts from official travel to include the carbon offset of all motorized internal combustion activities, including the day-to-day internal operation of equipment and vehicles from the Sebastopol Public Works, Police and Fire Departments.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The City Council discuss and approve the request for Vice Mayor Slayter and Staff to continue research into the purchase of carbon offset credits and return to Council with a specific Carbon Off-Set Credit for Official City Travel Program policy proposal.

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

None