

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION
MARCH 12, 2026

PROJECT TITLE

Conditional Use Permit Streamlining

APPLICANT

N/A

ADDRESS/LOCATION

Citywide

PROPERTY OWNER

N/A

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

N/A

FILE NUMBERS

N/A

APPLICATION DATES

N/A

APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES

N/A

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

Zoning Code Amendment

FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

City Council Action

PROJECT SITE ZONING

N/A

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

N/A

PROJECT PLANNER

Jessica Jones

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend adoption to City Council

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: JESSICA JONES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR - PLANNING
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SUBJECT: CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT STREAMLINING

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Planning Commission, by resolution, recommend to the City Council adoption of Zoning Code text amendments to address streamlining and process improvements for the Conditional Use Permit process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City is working on an initiative to streamline the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process with the goal of making it more predictable and less costly for applicants and business owners. The primary objective is to support economic development within the City by making it easier to establish and expand businesses. The proposal includes amendments to the Zoning Code to address three main elements: 1) Create a new Director Level CUP process, allowing certain uses to be reviewed and approved administratively rather than requiring a public meeting or hearing, unless one is specifically requested; 2) Reduce the level of CUP (Director, Minor, or Major) required for certain uses, to reduce timelines, lower costs and improve overall efficiency, while maintaining appropriate review and oversight; and 3) Update the Temporary Use Permit section of the Zoning Code to allow for a broader range of temporary activities, including pop-up retail and interim activities for vacant or underutilized sites and buildings, supporting the activation of spaces and encouraging reinvestment. Staff is recommending that the Planning Commission make a recommendation to the City Council to amend the Zoning Code to streamline the CUP process.

BACKGROUND

1. Project Description

The proposed project includes recommendations to amend the Santa Rosa Zoning Code to streamline the Conditional Use Permit process. The purpose of the amendments is to create a more predictable and less costly process for business owners looking to establish and expand businesses within the City, support economic development, and better allocate City resources.

2. Project History

On April 9, 2024, the City Council approved a five year (2024-2029) Economic Development Strategic Plan, which includes a vision for business growth, economic vibrancy and resiliency, and community investment. One of the actions within the Strategic Plan is to review and amend the Zoning Code, where needed, to align with economic strategies in support of development initiatives and opportunities.

On February 19, 2025, at the City Council Goal Setting Workshop, the Council set five strategic priorities for fiscal years 2025-2027. One of the priorities was to “promote Citywide economic development”.

On June 3, 2025, the City Council adopted General Plan 2050, which includes Land Use and Economic Development (Chapter 2). This chapter of the General Plan supports thoughtful land use planning and economic development strategies to enhance and build on neighborhood assets, address current challenges, improve fiscal stability, increase personal opportunity, and improve quality of life for everyone in Santa Rosa. More specifically, the General Plan includes an action to “ensure alignment between the General Plan, Zoning Code, and all City policies, procedures, plans, and strategies, including the Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan”.

In July and August 2025, City staff had the opportunity to present the CUP Streamlining initiative to downtown business owners and commercial real estate brokers. Through this effort, staff received early feedback on the existing CUP process and ideas for improvements to meet the goals, policies and actions set forth in the Economic Development Strategic Plan and General Plan 2050, and in support of Council goals.

On January 8, 2026, a project website was posted, with a summary of the project and links to draft Zoning Code amendments developed to address streamlining of the CUP process. Subsequently, notices were posted on the City’s social media outlets and e-mailed out to the Santa Rosa Metro Chamber, Downtown Action Organization, Railroad Square Association, Visit Santa Rosa, those who participated in the July and August 2025 business owner and broker meetings,

as well as to anyone with a business license in Santa Rosa (10,426 e-mails). The community was invited to review the draft streamlining amendments and provide comments by February 5, 2026. Following this effort, the draft amendments were further refined to the current proposal.

ANALYSIS

1. General Plan

The [General Plan](#) addresses issues related to the physical development and growth of Santa Rosa and guides the City's planning and zoning functions. Chapter 2, Land Use and Economic Development, of General Plan 2050 seeks to reinforce local pride, attract new business, retain and grow existing business, and bolster the vitality of the City as a whole by supporting thoughtful land use planning and economic development strategies. To that end, there are numerous goals, policies and actions supporting economic development that are relevant to the CUP Streamlining initiative:

- ***Goal 2-5: Create a business-friendly, diverse, and sustainable economy through the attraction of new business, and the expansion, retention, and support of existing business.***
 - Policy 2-5.1: Encourage growth of existing business clusters as well as new, diverse industries and job types throughout Santa Rosa.
 - ✓ Action 2-5.2: Ensure alignment between the General Plan, Zoning Code, and all City policies, procedures, plans, and strategies, including the Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan.
 - ✓ Action 2-5.3: Support and strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystems and create pathways to successful small business ownership.
- ***Goal 2-6: Create a vibrant and livable city.***
 - Policy 2-6.1: Address infrastructure needs and update policy, as appropriate, in support of economic accelerators.
 - ✓ Action 2-6.3: Explore and implement necessary amendments to the Zoning Code where needed to align with economic strategies and to create flexibility for development, redevelopment, and to fill vacant spaces.
 - ✓ Action 2-6.5: Support development of sports and entertainment (including health and wellness) as an economic driver to bolster

tourism and update the Zoning Code to allow these uses more broadly throughout all areas of the city.

- ✓ Action 2-6.6: Work with property owners, the business community, and others to support efforts to attract or expand development, redevelopment, and new businesses opportunities in vacant or underutilized commercial space.
- ✓ Action 2-6.7: Support community events and activities through policy development, direct programming and funding support.
- ***Goal 2-9: Foster sustained, inclusive growth that generates long-term, shared value in the community and creates economic opportunities for all residents.***
 - Action 2-9.2: Update the Zoning Code to allow mobile food and crafts vendors, farmers markets, art and artisan pop-ups and community gathering events in all nonresidential zoning districts.

The proposed CUP streamlining measures are consistent with the General Plan 2050. The draft Zoning Code amendments would provide a more predictable and less costly process for business owners, serving to support economic development by simplifying the process to establish and expand businesses within the City. The proposed creation of a Director CUP process will allow certain uses to be reviewed and approved administratively rather than requiring a public meeting or hearing, unless one is specifically requested. This new administrative process, coupled with reducing the level of CUP (Director, Minor, or Major) for certain uses, such as mobile food vending, commercial recreation facilities, and general retail stores, will reduce timelines and improve overall efficiency while still maintaining appropriate review and oversight. The proposed changes to the Temporary Use Permit section of the Zoning Code will allow for a broader range of temporary activities, including pop-up retail and interim activities for vacant or underutilized sites and buildings, supporting the activation of these spaces and encouraging reinvestment.

2. Other Applicable Plans

On April 9, 2024, the City Council approved a five year (2024-2029) [Economic Development Strategic Plan](#), which includes a vision for business growth, economic vibrancy and resiliency, and community investment. The Strategic Plan calls for the creation of a business-friendly, sustainable, and strong economy by attracting new businesses and expanding, retaining, and supporting existing businesses, and actively supporting small businesses. There are several goals and actions within the Strategic Plan that align with the proposed CUP streamlining amendments, including the following:

- **Goals:**
 - Establish Santa Rosa as a business-friendly city.
 - Support and grow existing small business.
 - Support and promote opportunities for entrepreneurship.
 - Increase revenue to businesses and the City.
 - Support a thriving economy.

- **Actions:**
 - Create a streamlined re-tenanting program with clear pathways for re-tenanting retail, restaurant, or office spaces.
 - Review and amend Zoning Code where needed to align with economic strategies in support of development initiatives and opportunities.
 - Explore, develop, and implement sports and entertainment as an economic driver for both residents and tourists.
 - Support community events and activities through direct programming and grants.

3. Zoning Code

The [Zoning Code](#) implements the goals and policies of the General Plan by classifying and regulating the use of land and structure development within the City. The proposed amendments to the Zoning Code have been developed to streamline the CUP Permit process, enhance the City's economic development efforts, reduce time and cost for business owners, and provide a more streamlined review authority process to better allocate City resources. Below is a summary of the proposed amendments (which are included in their entirety, in underline and strikeout format, in Attachment 1):

A. Temporary Use Permit and Conditional Use Permit (Chapter 20-52, Permit Review Process)

i. Zoning Code Section 20-52.040 Temporary Use Permit

The Temporary Use Permit section of the Zoning Code establishes procedures for the granting of ministerial Temporary Use Permits for short-term activities. Allowed temporary activities include car washes, construction yards, events on private property, outdoor displays and sales, seasonal sales lots, temporary auto sales, temporary parking lots, temporary real estate sales offices, temporary structures (non-habitable), temporary work trailers, and other similar temporary activities. In general, temporary activities are allowed for a 12-month period, with no option for an extension of time.

The proposed changes include adding the following to the list of allowed temporary activities:

- Pop-up retail, including general retail, restaurants, entertainment, arts activity, or other similar activity as determined by the Director, for a 12-month period, with up to two one-year extensions, for a maximum of three (3) years, when located within an existing structure(s) or temporary structure(s) (no construction of new permanent structures/facilities); and
- Interim activities on vacant or underutilized sites, when located within an existing structure(s) or temporary structure(s) (no construction of new permanent structures/facilities), including arts activities and general entertainment, or similar activities as determined by the Director, for a 12-month period, with up to two one-year extensions, for a maximum of three (3) years, when conducted on non-residential properties.

ii. Zoning Code Section 20-52.050 Conditional Use Permit

The Conditional Use Permit section of the Zoning Code provides a discretionary process for reviewing land use activities that may be desirable in the applicable zoning district, but whose effect on the site and surroundings need to be reviewed to determine consistency with City policies and regulations and for compatibility with surrounding uses. The current regulations include two CUP processes: 1) Minor Conditional Use Permit, with the review authority being the Zoning Administrator; and 2) Major Conditional Use Permit, with the review authority being the Planning Commission. The average review time for a Minor CUP is a minimum of three months, while a Major CUP takes a minimum of six months to complete.

The proposed amendments include establishing a new Director Conditional Use Permit process, with the review authority being the Director of Planning and Economic Development, or their staff appointed designee. Establishment of a Director level process would align with similar Director level entitlement processes that have been established recently, including Director Level Design Review and Director Landmark Alteration Permit. While a public meeting or hearing would not be required for action on a Director CUP, public notice at least 14 calendar days prior to taking action would be required to all property owners and tenants within 600 feet of the subject property. The notice will include language regarding the date the decision will be final, the fact that a public meeting/hearing will

not be held unless one is requested, and a description of how to request a public hearing. Similar to other Director level processes, the review time for a Director CUP is expected to take approximately four to eight weeks.

B. Land Use and Permit Requirements (Division 2, Zoning Districts and Allowable Land Uses)

The following land use tables have been updated to include proposed reductions in CUP requirements for certain uses to streamline the review process, provide more predictability for applicants, promote economic development, and better allocate City resources. In addition to streamlining for businesses, there are also several proposed reductions to the CUP requirements for residential uses; these are included as part of a continuing effort to streamline the development of housing consistent with Council goals and the Santa Rosa Housing Element.

- Zoning Code Table 2-2: Allowed Land Uses and Permit Requirements for Residential Districts
- Zoning Code Table 2-6: Allowed Land Uses and Permit Requirements for Commercial Districts
- Zoning Code Table 2-10: Allowed Land Uses and Permit Requirements for Industrial Districts
- Zoning Code Table 2-12: Allowed Land Uses and Permit Requirements for Special Purpose Districts

C. Other Related Sections of the Zoning Code:

The following specific Zoning Code sections include proposed reductions in the CUP process, as well as clarification to language referencing the CUP process and permitting requirements.

- 20-21.030 Allowable land uses and permit requirements
- 20-30.060 Fences, walls, and screening
- 20-30.070 Height measurement and exceptions
- 20-42.030 Accessory structures and uses
- 20-42.034 Alcoholic beverage sales
- 20-42.050 Day care facilities
- 20-42.070 Home occupations
- 20-42.080 Live-work and work-live units
- 20-42.090 Mixed use projects

- 20-42.110 Outdoor display and sales
- 20-42.140 Residential small lot subdivisions
- 20-42.160 Sidewalk cafes
- 20-42.164 Single room occupancy facilities
- 20-42.170 Storage outdoor
- 20-42.200 Large grocery store standards
- 20-42.210 Mobile food facility
- 20-50.020 Authority for land use and zoning decisions
- 20-54.050 Time limits and extensions
- 20-54.070 Permits to run with the land
- 20-61.030 Nonconforming structures
- 20-62.030 Filing and Processing of Appeals
- 20-70.020 Definitions of specialized terms and phrases

It should be noted that the City’s Charter, Section 51, provides that all general laws shall apply to the City – this includes the requirement for a hearing for a requested CUP. As noted, above, the proposed new Director CUP would not require a public hearing or meeting, unless one is requested by a member of the public. However, the Charter provides that the City Council “shall have the power to pass ordinances which in relation to municipal affairs shall control as against the general laws of the state.” “Municipal affair” generally means local in nature, not affecting persons or property outside the jurisdiction of the City and not interfering with a statewide regulatory scheme. This can and does include many zoning regulations.

Pursuant to Section 51 of the Charter of the City of Santa Rosa, staff will be recommending that the City Council determine that the procedures governing review and approval of Conditional Use Permits are a municipal affair relating to local zoning and land use regulation. Accordingly, and notwithstanding Government Code section 65905, the Council would adopt the procedures set forth in Zoning Code Chapter 20-52, Permit Review Procedures, as it relates to the proposed new Director CUP process, in lieu of any state-law public hearing requirements that would otherwise apply.

4. Summary of Public Comments

As noted above, in July and August 2025, City staff had the opportunity to present the CUP Streamlining initiative to downtown business owners and commercial real estate brokers. The purpose was to receive early feedback on the existing CUP process and collect ideas for improvements. On January 8, 2026, a project website was posted (<https://www.srcity.org/4292/Conditional-Use-Permit-Streamlining>), with a summary of the project and links to draft Zoning Code amendments. Notices were posted on the City’s social media outlets and e-mailed out to the Santa Rosa Metro Chamber, Downtown Action Organization,

Railroad Square Association, Visit Santa Rosa, those who participated in the July and August meetings, and to business license holders in Santa Rosa (10,426 e-mails). The community was invited to review the draft streamlining amendments and provide comments by February 5, 2026.

Staff have received numerous e-mails regarding the proposal. Some of the correspondence included clarifying questions and suggested edits, which were responded to and edits incorporated into the current proposal. The remaining e-mails provide either support or opposition to the proposed amendments (see Attachment 2). Note that the majority of the responses received have been in support, with only one in opposition that identifies general opposition to streamlining of City permitting processes.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact expected as a result of the proposed amendments. If adopted by Council, a resolution will be included to create a new Director CUP fee, which is expected to be similar to the existing Director Level Design Review and Director Landmark Alteration Permit fees. The CUP application fees provide for full cost recovery of staff time in reviewing and processing these applications and very depending on the level of CUP. With the proposed streamlining measures, the impact on staff time in reviewing Director CUP applications will be reduced from the time spent on Minor and Major CUP applications, which will be reflected in the application cost. As such, it is expected that staff resources will be better allocated with the introduction of the Director level review, which will ultimately limit the impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed CUP streamlining amendments have been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It has determined that the proposed action is exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the amendments or their implementation would have a significant effect on the environment. Specifically, while the proposed amendments will create a new Director level CUP process, reduce the CUP requirements of certain land uses, and allow for a broader range of temporary activities, they do not constitute approval of any specific development project and do not limit the City's discretion to consider environmental impacts, alternatives or mitigation measures in connection with any future discretionary approval. Any future development proposal under the Director level CUP process would be subject to separate discretionary approvals and independent environmental review under CEQA at the time a specific project is proposed.

The proposed action is also exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15183 in that the proposed Zoning Code text amendments are consistent with the General Plan. The Santa Rosa General Plan 2050 includes numerous goals, policies, and actions that support economic development, encourage policy and regulatory amendments in

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT STREAMLINING

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support of various business types, and align economic strategies to create flexibility for development, redevelopment, and to fill vacant commercial and industrial spaces within the City. The minor edits to streamline the CUP requirements for residential uses are consistent with the housing related goals, policies, and actions of the General Plan 2050 and the 2023-2031 Housing Element related to the City's continuing efforts to support housing development. The proposed amendments are consistent with, and do not change, the General Plan densities and land uses; the amendments address the CUP review process only. The EIR analyzed the proposed land uses and looked at environmental impacts of those uses. This streamlined review keeps those same land uses in place. The economic development and housing related goals, policies, and actions were reviewed as part of the General Plan 2050 Environmental Impact Report (EIR) adopted by City Council Resolution No. 2025-090, dated June 3, 2025. There are no impacts peculiar to the proposed amendments that were not already analyzed in the EIR or would require additional analysis.

Finally, the proposed action, as it relates to changes to the Temporary Use Permit section of the Zoning Code, is exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation. Specifically, CEQA Guidelines section 15304(e) provides the example of "minor temporary use of land having negligible or no permanent effects on the environment, including carnivals, sales of Christmas trees, etc." The proposed changes to the Temporary Use Permit regulations include minor edits to the existing regulations allowing temporary activities and structures within specified time limits. The proposed addition of allowing temporary pop-up retail and interim activities includes language requiring such uses to be located within existing structures or temporary structures that do not include the construction of permanent facilities.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The project was noticed as a public hearing per the requirements of Chapter 20-66 of the City Code. Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 20-66.020(D), Alternative to Mailing, if the number of property owners to whom notice would be mailed would exceed 1,000, the City may, as an alternative to mailing and on-site posting, provide notice by placing an advertisement of one-eighth page in at least one newspaper of general circulation 20 days prior to the hearing. Therefore, a one-eighth page advertisement was placed in the Press Democrat to meet Zoning Code and California Government Code Requirements.

In addition to the Press Democrat ad, notification of this public hearing was provided on bulletin board postings at City Hall and on the City website, through the City's various social media sites, and was e-mailed to the Santa Rosa Metro Chamber, Downtown Action Organization, Railroad Square Association, Visit Santa Rosa, those who participated in the July and August 2025 business owner and broker meetings, as well as to business license holders in Santa Rosa. Pursuant to Government Code Section 65091, where necessary, the City has incorporated notice procedures to the blind, aged, and disabled communities. These procedures include audio amplifier/assistive

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listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

LEVINE ACT

This project is exempt from the Levine Act (Gov. Code Section 84308) which prohibits city officials from participating in certain decisions regarding licenses, permits, and other entitlements for use if the official has received a campaign contribution of more than \$500 from a party, participant, or agent of a party or participant in the previous 12 months. The Levine Act is intended to prevent financial influence on decisions that affect specific, identifiable persons or participants. For more information see the FPPC website: www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/pay-to-play-limits-and-prohibitions.html

ISSUES

No issues have been identified at this time.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Draft Zoning Code Amendments (underline/strikeout format)
Attachment 2 – Public Correspondence

Resolution

CONTACT

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