

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: GABE OSBURN, DIRECTOR OF THE PLANNING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN 2050 MUNICIPAL CODE AND ZONING MAP
IMPLEMENTATION

AGENDA ACTION: ORDINANCE INTRODUCTION

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission and the Planning and Economic Development Department recommend that the Council introduce three ordinances to 1) amend Municipal Code Titles 18, 19, 20 and 21 to implement the General Plan 2050; 2) rezone 2,089 properties to implement the existing General Plan land use designation; and 3) rezone 1,991 properties to add the Missing Middle Housing Combining District; and direct staff to bring forward a General Plan land use amendment to resolve General Plan land use and zoning inconsistencies for certain properties within the City. This item has no impact on current fiscal year budget.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2025, the City Council adopted the General Plan 2050, which establishes a long-term vision for Santa Rosa's physical development. Implementation of the General Plan occurs through multiple avenues, including the review of new development projects, guidance for City staff work plans, and direction for public investments in infrastructure and facilities. In addition to these tools, amendments to the Municipal Code, Zoning Code, and Zoning Map are necessary to fully align the City's regulatory framework with the General Plan. The proposed Municipal and Zoning Code and Map amendments serve to codify policies and land use changes already established in the General Plan 2050. This package includes a Zoning Code text amendment to create the Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Combining District, along with a rezoning action to apply the MMH Combining District to 1,991 parcels. In addition, as required by State law, 2,089 parcels citywide are proposed to be rezoned to ensure consistency between zoning designations and the General Plan land use map. Additional amendments include updates to Title 18 – Buildings and Construction to streamline permitting for electric vehicle charging infrastructure; revisions to Title 19 – Park and Recreation Land and Fees to align park dedication and improvement requirements with General Plan

policies; and the elimination of the Growth Management Ordinance in Title 21, which was removed from the General Plan 2050 to better support the City's housing production goals.

GOAL

This item relates to Council Goal #4 - Foster a Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive Community to realize the General Plan vision of a diverse, equitable, and sustainable city where all have access to quality housing, education, jobs, cultural experiences, and healthy, resilient neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND/PRIOR COUNCIL REVIEW

The City of Santa Rosa initiated the General Plan 2050 update in March 2020. In May 2021, the City launched the Missing Middle Housing project, which was later integrated into the General Plan process in April 2023. Community workshops on Missing Middle Housing were held in April 2022 and March 2025. Notices in English and Spanish were sent to all property owners with parcels proposed for inclusion in the initiative prior to the March 2025 workshop. Throughout 2021 and 2022, the Council and Planning Commission participated in joint study sessions to shape the General Plan's direction, including input on the Community Vision Statement (July 2021) and Land Use and Circulation Alternatives (May and October 2022).

The Draft General Plan was released in July 2023, followed by extensive public outreach, including workshops, surveys, and advisory board study sessions. In September 2023, the Council, Planning Commission, and other City review authorities held study sessions to review the draft.

The revised General Plan and Draft EIR were released in October 2024. The Planning Commission held hearings on the Draft and Final EIR and recommended adoption of the General Plan and associated Specific Plan amendments in April 2025. On June 3, 2025, the City Council held a public hearing and unanimously voted to certify the Final EIR (RES-2025-090), adopt the General Plan 2050 and approve the Specific Plan amendments (RES-2025-091).

On September 25, 2025, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the General Plan Implementation package and voted unanimously to recommend adoption of the proposed Municipal and Zoning Code and Zoning Map amendments. The Commission's action included a motion for the City Council to consider removing the properties along the south side of Parker Drive from the rezoning to implement the existing General Plan land use designations and to consider directing staff to bring forward a General Plan land use amendment to resolve the inconsistencies.

ANALYSIS

1. Project Description

The following proposed amendments to the City's Zoning Code are intended to implement key goals, policies, and actions of the General Plan 2050. These changes support housing production, environmental sustainability, economic development, and regulatory clarity, while ensuring consistency with adopted plans and state law. All amendment details are provided in Attachment 1 to this Staff Report and described further in the Planning Commission Staff Report included as Attachment 12.

Zoning Code Amendments:

Performance Standards for New Development:

Zoning Code Section 20-30.090 establishes performance standards designed to minimize operational impacts of land uses and promote compatibility with surrounding areas. Specified new developments are now required to provide a Biological Resource Assessment and a Health Impact Assessment, in alignment with two General Plan actions (Action 3-5.11 and Action 6-1.11).

Mid-Point Density Required:

To support efficient land use and housing production, General Plan Action 2-3.4 requires residential development in Medium and Medium High Density land use designations to achieve at least the midpoint of the allowed density range, unless physical or regulatory constraints prevent it. This requirement is proposed to be codified in the development standards for R-3 and TV-R zoning districts.

Neighborhood Mixed Use Zoning District:

The Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU) zoning district was created following adoption of the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan in October 2020. The NMU zoning district allows multi-family housing and neighborhood-serving uses, including office, retail, and live-work spaces, in designated downtown areas. The NMU zoning district implements and is consistent with the Neighborhood Mixed Use land use classification of the General Plan. To better reflect the nature of permitted uses, the NMU district is proposed to be reclassified from a residential zoning district to a commercial zoning district.

Zoning District Table:

To improve clarity and alignment with the General Plan 2050, the Zoning Code's implementing zoning district table is proposed to be updated as shown in Attachment 1.

Electric Vehicle Charging:

To support greenhouse gas reduction goals and implement General Plan Action 3-6.35 - *Review and amend the City's Building Code and Zoning Code to facilitate the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure*, amendments are proposed establish Electric Vehicle (EV) charging as a permitted accessory use in all zoning districts and allowed as a primary use in commercial and industrial districts. EV charging infrastructure would also be exempt from Design Review requirements.

Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations (MEHKO):

MEHKOs are small-scale food facilities operated from private homes, authorized by State law and adopted by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors in December 2024. To support entrepreneurship and implement General Plan Actions 2-5.3 and 2-5.4, amendments to the Zoning Code are proposed which clarify that MEHKOs are exempt from Zoning Code regulations but must obtain a Business Tax Certificate and Sonoma County Health Permit.

Multi-family Land Use:

To support flexible housing types and density goals, the definition of multi-family land use is proposed to be updated to reflect parcel use rather than structure type. This change allows detached units to qualify as multi-family if located on the same parcel. Amendments also exempt the construction of detached multi-family units, duplexes, half-plexes, and up to two single-family attached units from Design Review.

Various Additional Amendments:

In alignment with the vision, goals, policies, and actions outlined in the General Plan 2050, staff recommends a series of additional minor amendments to the City's Zoning Code. These amendments are intended to improve clarity, consistency, and functionality within the Code, while ensuring that zoning regulations effectively support the City's long-term planning objectives, as follows:

- Land Use Table Revisions
- Subdivision and Development Standards Refinement
- Removing Chapter 20-16 from the Zoning Code (superseded by Chapter 20-35 in December 2024)
- Clerical and procedural updates

Missing Middle Housing:

The General Plan 2050 establishes a vision and policy foundation for the development of Missing Middle Housing (MMH), a category of house-scale

buildings with multiple units located in walkable neighborhoods. The term “middle” refers to the scale and form of the buildings, not to affordability requirements. While MMH units are typically smaller and may be more affordable due to reduced square footage, they are not required to be deed-restricted as affordable housing.

Missing Middle Housing Development and Design Standards:

Zoning Code Section 20-28.100 establishes the Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Combining District, which includes two primary zones, MMH-Small (-MMH-S) and MMH-Medium (-MMH-M), each with a corresponding Flex subzone (-MMH-S-F and -MMH-M-F). The MMH-S zone is intended to support small-to-medium footprint, low-intensity housing types such as duplexes, cottage courts, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhouses. The MMH-M zone accommodates moderate-intensity housing types including multiplexes, courtyard buildings, and townhouses. The Flex subzones allow for additional frontage types to support non-residential ground floor uses, expanding the potential for mixed-use development while maintaining compatibility with the residential character of the area.

MMH may allow for the construction of more residential units than permitted under base zoning and General Plan land use designations. The exact number of units is determined on a project-specific basis, depending on lot size and building type. The types of housing units with corresponding lot size requirements and MMH zones are included in Table 2-19 of Attachment 1.

The MMH Combining District allows a range of optional building types, each with its own set of development standards. These standards regulate:

- Building form and massing (e.g., maximum height, width, and depth)
- Frontage types (e.g., stoops, terraces)
- Site layout and orientation
- Parking requirements
- Open space provisions

Missing Middle Housing Locations:

The MMH Combining District is proposed to be applied to 1,991 parcels located on the periphery of Downtown Santa Rosa, including areas within the McDonald, Ridgway, St. Rose, Burbank Gardens and West End Historic Preservation Districts, near Santa Rosa Junior College, centered around Sebastopol Road, along Farmer’s Lane, adjacent to Coddington Mall, and near commercial centers in Bennett Valley (shown in Attachment 7). The MMH-S and MMH-H zones were selected based on the surrounding development context to ensure neighborhood compatibility with the scale and intensity of housing types permitted. While the MMH regulations provide an optional development pathway for property owners, there is no requirement to construct MMH units.

Planning review process for Missing Middle Housing:

Land Use Permitted By Right: Missing Middle Housing developments proposed in the MMH-S or MMH-M zone that comply with each of the development standards in Section 20-28.100 would be allowed without a Use Permit.

Design Review: Missing Middle Housing developments designed to meet the development and design standards in Section 20-28.100 and the base residential zoning district, would be exempt from the design review process.

Landmark Alteration Permits: Missing Middle Housing developments within any of the City's Historic Preservation Districts would be subject to the Landmark Alteration Permit process identified in Section 20-58.060, which requires Zoning Administrator review for any developments that result in less than 5,000 square feet of new building area, and Design Review and Preservation Board (DRPB) review for developments that result in more than 5,000 square feet of new building area. Both of these processes require review during a public meeting and are directly noticed by mail to property owners and tenants, with a Press Democrat notice and on-site sign required for any projects requiring DRPB review, in accordance with Section 20-66.020.

Developments in the City's Historic Preservation Districts would also be subject to each of the requirements in the Historic Combining District in Section 20-28.040 which includes height maximums and character defining elements.

Municipal Code Amendments:

Title 18 – Buildings and Construction

Amendments to Chapter 18-69 of Title 18 – Expedited Permit Process for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations are proposed to streamline permitting requirements for EV infrastructure and implement General Plan 2050 Action 3-6.35, which calls for reviewing and amending the City's Building and Zoning Codes to facilitate EV charging installation.

Title 19 – Subdivisions (Chapter 19-70 – Park and Recreation Land and Fees)

Proposed updates to the Park and Recreation Land and Fees Chapter would support park land acquisition and facility development through land dedication and fees tied to new housing.

Title 21 – Chapter 21-03: Growth Management

The General Plan 2050 does not include a Growth Management Element as the previous versions of the City's General Plan did. This Element was eliminated

based on the conflict between the program and realization of City housing production goals and Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) requirements. Because the General Plan Element has been eliminated, this Chapter from the Municipal Code is proposed to be removed.

Zoning Map Amendments

Zoning and General Plan Consistency: A total of 2,089 parcels within the City are proposed to be rezoned to implement the existing General Plan land use designation. California Government Code Section 65860 requires that the zoning district of properties be consistent with the general plan land use, and Ordinance 2 to this Staff Report would allow for all non-planned development zoning and General Plan land use inconsistencies to be resolved; bringing the City into compliance with State law.

The total number of parcels proposed for rezoning is now 2,089, which reflects a reduction of 30 parcels from the version previously reviewed by the Planning Commission. As outlined in the background section of this Staff Report, the Commission recommended that the City Council consider removing the properties along the south side of Parker Drive from the rezoning proposal. They also recommended that staff be directed to initiate a General Plan land use amendment to address inconsistencies in that area.

Since that meeting, staff has been contacted by two additional community members with concerns about the rezoning of their properties, one owns a rural residential property on Giffen Avenue and the other owns a restaurant in the shopping center at Highway 12 and Mountain Hawk. In both cases, the existing zoning (Rural Residential and Neighborhood Commercial, respectively) aligns with the current use of the properties. However, the General Plan land use designations are inconsistent with both the zoning and the actual use. Similar to the situation on Parker Drive, staff recommends that these sites also be removed from the proposed rezoning and included in the recommendation for a future General Plan land use amendment to resolve the inconsistencies.

Missing Middle Housing Combining District: As previously discussed in the Zoning Code Amendments section of this staff report, the Missing Middle Housing Combining District would be applied to a total of 1,991 parcels throughout the City in walkable neighborhoods that are currently designated by the General Plan as Medium Density Residential (8-18 units/acre) and Transit-Village Medium (25-40 units/acre).

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of this action does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed amendments to the Municipal Code, Zoning Code, and Zoning Map have been reviewed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) for the General Plan 2050 evaluated the environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the General Plan, including the proposed rezonings and Missing Middle Housing standards. No new or more significant environmental impacts have been identified, and no additional mitigation measures are required for the proposed amendments. Therefore, these actions are within the scope of the General Plan 2050 Final EIR, and no further environmental review is necessary pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15162. Additionally, CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 (i) exempts rezonings for consistency with the general plan from additional environmental review.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Design Review and Preservation Board (DRPB) reviewed the proposed Missing Middle Housing standards at the August 21, 2025, DRPB meeting. The Board expressed support for the proposed standards, noting that they provide additional housing options while requiring designs that are compatible with the scale and character of existing neighborhoods. Several Board members also recommended that staff consider a streamlined review process for projects that comply with the development and design standards outlined in the proposed regulations. One Board member expressed concern that the proposed units are not required to be affordable, noting that the term "Missing Middle Housing" is often misunderstood as synonymous with affordable housing. The member recommended that, if affordability is not a requirement, this distinction should be clearly stated in the regulations to avoid confusion.

The Planning Commission reviewed the proposed General Plan Implementation package at the September 25, 2025, meeting. The meeting was well attended by members of the public who had received courtesy notices indicating that their properties were proposed for rezoning; either to align with long-standing General Plan land use designations (as required by State law) or to be included in the proposed Missing Middle Housing Combining District.

Several public commenters raised concerns about the impact of Missing Middle Housing on neighborhood character. One comment specifically referenced the Ridgway Historic Preservation District. Staff clarified that Missing Middle Housing is limited to a maximum height of 35 feet. In Historic Preservation Districts, new units must also comply with the Landmark Alteration Permit process and the Historic Combining District standards, which includes a 35-foot height limit and require incorporation of district character-defining elements.

Written and verbal public comments were primarily from residents of the single-family neighborhood just east of Memorial Hospital. Many expressed strong opposition to the proposed rezoning of their properties from R-1-6 (Single-Family Residential) to CO

(Office Commercial), expressing it would fundamentally alter the character of their neighborhood. Planning staff explained that the issue could be addressed by applying for a General Plan map amendment to change the land use designation of the three affected blocks from the long existing Office land use to Low Density Residential. This change would allow the R-1-6 zoning to remain in place, preserving the neighborhood's character while ensuring consistency with State law. Staff also noted that members of the public could advocate for the City Council to direct staff to initiate this amendment process.

The Commission unanimously adopted three resolutions recommending Council approval of the Municipal Code Text Amendments and Zoning Map Amendments. Recognizing the concerns of the Memorial Hospital neighborhood, the Commission passed a separate motion with two specific recommendations to the Council:

- 1) Consider removing the parcels along the south side of Parker Drive between Doyle Park Drive and Alderbrook Drive from the rezoning for consistency with pre-existing General Plan designations, and direct staff to initiate a General Plan amendment and to designate these parcels as Low Density Residential; or
- 2) Proceed with the rezoning for consistency with pre-existing General Plan designations, and direct staff to initiate a General Plan amendment to designate the parcels along the south side of Parker Drive between Doyle Park Drive and Alderbrook Drive as Low Density Residential and rezone these parcels back to the R-1-6 (Single-Family) zoning district.

Staff is currently preparing a City-initiated General Plan amendment package that will incorporate maps from the newly adopted Active Transportation Plan and targeted land use changes along Sebastopol Road that were inadvertently omitted from the General Plan 2050 update. Staff recommends, consistent with the Planning Commission's recommendation, that the Council direct inclusion of land use changes along Parker Drive and Doyle Park Drive, as well as the two additional sites noted in the Zoning Map Amendments section of this Staff Report (above), into the General Plan amendment package. These additions are expected to have minimal impact on staff workload, as they align with the current planning efforts already underway.

NOTIFICATION

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.

A courtesy notice was mailed to all property owners whose properties are proposed to be rezoned for consistency with the General Plan land use designations, as well as to

property owners whose parcels would be included in the proposed Missing Middle Housing Combining District in advance of the Planning Commission public hearing. The notice advised residents that a future Council public hearing would be scheduled on this item, but they would not receive any additional mailed notice.

The notice was also sent out via GovDelivery email to those who have subscribed to mailing lists, through the City's various social media sites, and was posted at City Hall and the City and project websites. 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 listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A summary of the written and verbal comments on Missing Middle Housing are summarized below. All written comments are included in Attachment 13.

- Concerns about impacts to Preservation Districts and existing neighborhoods outside of Preservation Districts.
- Parking minimums may not meet resident needs.
- Emphasis on notifying nearby property owners of zoning changes.
- Support for multigenerational housing and rental flexibility.
- Interest in both rental and ownership options.
- Enthusiasm for diverse Missing Middle Housing prototypes.
- Suggestions to expand geographic scope of Missing Middle Housing.
- Support for streamlining permitting and lowering condo development costs.

Planning staff have received written and verbal comments from property owners within the Ridgway Preservation District and along Kingwood Street, whose properties are proposed to be included in the Missing Middle Housing Combining District. These comments express concerns regarding the compatibility and appropriateness of introducing new housing types in these areas. Some commenters stated that the Combining District implies eminent domain. Staff clarified that the City is not proposing to purchase these properties, and there is no requirement for property owners to develop Missing Middle Housing. The Combining District simply provides an optional development pathway that may be used at the property owner's discretion.

At this time, Staff is not recommending the exclusion of these properties from the proposed district. The areas were identified based on objective criteria, including existing General Plan land use designations intended for medium density residential development and proximity to walkable amenities. Inclusion in the Combining District does not mandate the development of Missing Middle Housing, nor does it affect the legality of existing residential uses.

Comments received on the proposed rezonings for General Plan land use consistency

included general inquiries and concerns that the rezoning may affect existing and established uses or change the character of existing neighborhood, as described in the Planning Commission meeting summary above.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Redline Municipal Code Text Amendments
 - Attachment 2 – [General Plan 2050](#)
 - Attachment 3 – [General Plan 2050 Final Environmental Impact Report](#)
 - Attachment 4 – [General Plan 2050 Draft Environmental Impact Report](#)
 - Attachment 5 – [Missing Middle Housing \(MMH\) Guidance Document](#)
 - Attachment 6 – [MMH Existing Conditions Report & Recommendations](#)
 - Attachment 7 – MMH Proposed Location Map
 - Attachment 8 – Planning Commission Draft Minutes – September 25, 2025
 - Attachment 9 – Planning Commission Resolution PC-RES-2025-014
 - Attachment 10 – Planning Commission Resolution PC-RES-2025-015
 - Attachment 11 – Planning Commission Resolution PC-RES-2025-016
 - Attachment 12 – Planning Commission Staff Report – September 25, 2025
 - Attachment 13 – Public Correspondence
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- Ordinance 1 – Municipal and Zoning Code Amendments
 - Ordinance 2 – Zoning Map Amendments
 - Ordinance 3 – Missing Middle Housing Zoning Map Amendments

PRESENTER

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