

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: GABE OSBURN, PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: VACANT PARCEL ACTIVATION STRATEGIES

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Council hold a study session for Council to receive information, ask questions, and provide direction related to the various policies, procedures and options associated with the activation of vacant parcels and structures to support a variety of use types.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this study session is to provide the City Council with information about the various policies and procedures associated with the temporary activation of vacant parcels and structures, as well as to present the Vacant Parcel Pop-Up Partnership Pilot Program ("Pop- Up Program") as one potential option. The Council will be asked to provide direction on how to proceed, including feedback on the potential uses of the spaces and next steps in developing programs.

BACKGROUND

This session aligns with the City's vision and Economic Development Strategic Plan, which emphasizes "identifying and optimizing land opportunities," "welcoming new ventures," and "supporting and investing in a diverse community."

The City of Santa Rosa is exploring opportunities to activate vacant parcels and buildings to enhance and foster economic growth, support existing and emerging businesses, and advance activity in the downtown while benefiting property owners by increasing visibility and reducing vacancy periods. These vacant parcels can serve various purposes, including business and merchanting activities such as pop-up retail or markets, recreation, outdoor (fitness and leisure), education including art and culture, and engagement and entertainment activities such as bits, concerts, and other events.

One option being considered is a new Pop-up Business Partnership Pilot Program encouraging the temporary use of vacant parcels and commercial properties in partnership with private property owners. This Pop-Up Program would provide

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operators, entrepreneurs, and small businesses with a low-risk, low-cost opportunity to utilize vacant commercial spaces for a limited time. The Pop-Up Program would help activate vacant spaces, deter vandalism, and bring vibrancy to underutilized areas of the city.

The City has identified vacant parcels and buildings currently for sale or lease or awaiting future development. These vacant spaces could serve as temporary locations for small businesses, entrepreneurs, or community events, and they present an opportunity to generate significant vitality.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

None.

ANALYSIS

The proposed Pop-Up Program would be implemented for an initial 12-month period and aims to facilitate the temporary use of privately owned vacant properties. This would provide business owners with low-cost opportunities to test their concepts, while property owners can reduce vacancies, gain exposure, and potentially attract long-term tenants.

City's Role in the Pop-Up Program:

1. Program Facilitation and Property Matching:

The City will facilitate the Pop-Up Program by matching property owners with potential pop-up operators or businesses. This will involve maintaining a comprehensive database of available properties and coordinating with property owners to identify suitable matches for short-term tenants.

2. Technical Assistance and Permitting Guidance:

The City will provide technical assistance to pop-up operators, guiding them through the necessary permitting processes and ensuring compliance with zoning and other applicable regulations. This will include developing a pre-zoned temporary use permit system for specific addresses, allowing for quicker occupancy of vacant spaces.

3. Promotion and Public Awareness:

The City will actively and widely promote the Pop-Up Program through its social media and communication channels, ensuring that property owners and potential pop-up operators are aware of the opportunity and its benefits. This outreach will encourage participation and raise awareness within the broader community.

Private Property Owners' Role:

1. Voluntary Participation:

Property owners will voluntarily participate in the Pop-Up Program, offering their vacant spaces for temporary use.

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2. Flexible Leasing Agreements:

Property owners will negotiate flexible, short-term, low-cost lease agreements with pop-up operators. These agreements will allow property owners to retain control over their properties while allowing temporary activation.

3. Opportunity for Long-Term Tenancy:

Property owners will retain the right to pursue long-term tenants or development opportunities after the pop-up tenancy, benefiting from increased exposure and a reduced vacancy rate.

Benefits to Property Owners can include reduced long-term vacancy rates, increased visibility, and minimal commitment.

Pop-Up Operators' Role:

1. Application Process:

Entrepreneurs or businesses interested in participating will apply through the City's Pop-Up Program to be considered for available spaces.

2. Regulatory Compliance:

Pop-up operators must comply with all local regulations, including business licensing, health and safety standards, and other applicable requirements.

Benefits to Pop-Up Operators include low-cost entry, supplying a mechanism to test business concepts, branding, and marketing with little upfront investment and opportunity for growth.

In addition to the private property Pop-Up Program, opportunities on city-owned outdoor sites could also be included, such as Comstock Mall or Jeju Way, where activation could benefit the community, and areas such as Third Street. Challenges could consist of any necessary surface, utility, or ADA improvements requiring one-time expenditures.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact from conducting the Study Session. Any potential fiscal impact associated with specific direction provided by the City Council would be analyzed prior to the formal adoption of any new actions directed at activating vacant parcels.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) and 15378 in that there is no possibility that the implementation of this action may have significant effects on the environment, and no further environmental review is required.

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BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

PRESENTER

Gabe Osburn, Director
Planning and Economic Development