

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
FROM: GABE OSBURN, PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
DIRECTOR  
SUBJECT: GAS STATION LAND USE REGULATIONS

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

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RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Economic Development Department recommends that the Council hold a study session and provide direction to staff related to the current gas station land use regulations. This item has no impact on current fiscal year budget.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 14, 2020, the City Council adopted Resolution No. RES-2020-002 endorsing the declaration of climate emergency and immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate. On September 13, 2021, the Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority adopted Resolution No. 2021-003 recommending ceasing all construction of new gas station infrastructure in Sonoma County to reduce fossil fuel emissions and prepare for the transition to zero-emission vehicles. On September 13, 2022, the City Council adopted Ordinance No. ORD-2022-010 amending Title 20 of the Santa Rosa City Code prohibiting new gas station land uses and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure for existing gas station land uses. On June 3, 2025, under Matters from Council Regarding Future Agenda Items, the Council moved to add a future agenda item to discuss potential changes to Zoning Code Section 20-61.020(E) addressing gas station modifications.

GOAL

This item relates to Council Goal #3 - Promote Citywide Economic Development and Goal #4 - Foster a Safe, Healthy and Inclusive Community.

BACKGROUND/PRIOR COUNCIL REVIEW

The City of Santa Rosa is a member of the Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA), which was formed in 2009 to coordinate countywide climate protection efforts among Sonoma County's nine incorporated cities and the

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County. RCPA is a special district governed by a twelve-member Board of Directors comprised of representatives from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and Council Members from each of the nine cities.

On September 9, 2019, the RCPA Board of Directors approved Resolution No. 2019-002 (Attachment 1) endorsing the declaration of a climate emergency and immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate, which included a commitment to working with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District on improving air quality and reducing ozone precursors, particulate matter, toxic air contaminants, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

On January 14, 2020, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 2020-002 (Climate Emergency Resolution) declaring a climate emergency and elevating climate issues to the highest priority in its goal setting (Attachment 2). The Climate Emergency Resolution commits the City to take action to mitigate, draw down, and take adaptive measures to reach carbon neutrality by 2030. Sonoma County's nine incorporated cities and the County of Sonoma have adopted similar climate emergency resolutions.

On March 8, 2021, the RCPA Board of Directors adopted a Climate Mobilization Strategy (Attachment 3) to solidify Sonoma County's commitment to mobilizing an emergency response commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis. The Strategy outlines 13 countywide strategies under local control that have the potential to significantly reduce GHG emissions by 2030. One of the Strategy initiatives is decarbonization by transitioning away from all use of fossil fuels.

On September 13, 2021, the RCPA Board of Directors adopted Resolution 2021-003 (Attachment 4) which recommended the County and all incorporated jurisdictions in Sonoma County "cease acceptance of all applications for new gas stations or expansion of existing gas station infrastructure in their local jurisdiction."

On July 14, 2022, the Planning Commission recommended that the City Council adopt an ordinance to prohibit new gas station land uses and to prohibit the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure for existing gas station land uses.

On September 13, 2022, the City Council adopted Ordinance No. ORD-2022-010 (Attachment 5) amending Title 20 of the Santa Rosa City Code prohibiting new gas station land uses and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure for existing gas station land uses. The Ordinance included language exempting existing applications for new gas stations that had been deemed complete for processing by the effective date of the ordinance (October 13, 2022). There were two such applications, a 7-Eleven on Highway 12, which was ultimately withdrawn, and Elm Tree Station on N. Wright Road, which was approved on appeal by Council on August 19, 2025.

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To date, the cities of Cotati, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa and Sebastopol, the Town of Windsor and the County of Sonoma have all adopted regulations to prohibit new fossil fuel-based gas stations.

On June 3, 2025, under Matters from Council Regarding Future Agenda Items, the City Council moved (6-1) to add a future agenda item to discuss potential changes Zoning Code Section 20-61.020(E), Gas Station Modifications.

### ANALYSIS

The following analysis provides a summary of 1) the gas station land use regulations that were in effect prior to September 13, 2022; 2) the current gas station land use regulations; 3) the direction provided by Council at the June 3, 2025 meeting; and 4) potential options for Council to consider:

#### **1. Gas Station Regulations Prior to September 13, 2022**

- Gas stations were allowed, with the approval of a Major Conditional Use Permit (action by the Planning Commission), in the following Zoning districts:
  - a. All of the City's commercial zoning districts, with the exception of Core Mixed Use (CMU), which covers the area in and surrounding Courthouse Square.
  - b. All of the City's industrial zoning districts, with the exception of Business Park (BP), which is primarily in the Corporate Center Parkway area and the Tesconi Circle area (off N. Dutton Avenue).
- The Zoning Code included specific regulations for gas stations, including the following:
  - a. Requiring a minimum lot area of 15,000 square-feet, with a width of at least 150 feet and depth of 100 feet.
  - b. Prohibiting new gas stations from locating adjacent to existing residential zoning districts or residential uses.
  - c. Requiring a minimum distance of 500 feet between gas stations, unless they were located within 150 feet of Highway 101 and Freeway 12 intersections.

#### **2. Current Gas Station Regulations**

- New gas stations are prohibited in all zoning districts.

- Zoning Code Section 20-61.020(E), Gas Station Modifications includes the following regulations:
  - Gas stations and related fossil fuel infrastructure cannot be enlarged, extended, reconstructed, or moved to a different portion of the lot or parcel of land occupied by such use, except as outlined below or as required for compliance with local, state, or federal law, or as approved by the Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA).
  - A Minor Conditional Use Permit is required for any modifications to existing gas stations and fossil fuel infrastructure. Land use entitlements required pursuant to this section are in addition to applicable CUPA permitting requirements.

Modifications to existing stations are limited to the following:

- a. To improve air, soil, groundwater, and stormwater quality. Gas stations may be modified to conform to current air or stormwater quality control regulations or to remediate contamination of soil or groundwater.
- b. To improve traffic safety. As determined by the City Engineer, the pedestrian and vehicular circulation features (e.g., curbing, sidewalks, traffic control devices) of a gas station may be modified to improve public safety.
- c. To enable zero emission vehicles. Gas stations may be modified to accommodate battery charging station(s) for zero emission vehicles.

### **3. June 3, 2025 Council Meeting**

During the June 3, 2025 meeting, under Matters from Council Regarding Future Agenda Items, the Council discussed the fact that the current Zoning Code regulations for gas stations provide little latitude for modifications to existing stations, including for renovations or relocations. It was noted that this has become an issue with some of the existing stations within the City.

The Council identified a need to further discuss potential changes to the ordinance to allow existing stations to renovate beyond the limited allowance, and to possibly relocate to a new site. However, potential relocation raised concerns regarding the creation of new brownfields and other environmental impacts. The Council moved (6-1) to add a future agenda item to provide for further discussion regarding modifications to the Zoning Code.

#### **4. Options**

The following are potential options for Council to consider:

- a. Retain the existing Zoning Code regulations with no changes.
- b. Revise the Zoning Code to revert to the prior regulations for gas stations.
- c. Amend the existing gas station regulations, which could include, but not be limited to, the following:
  - Allow for expansion of existing gas stations, which could include limitations on the number of new pumps, requirements for mitigation measures at the existing station related to improving circulation, air, soil, groundwater and stormwater quality, and/or other requirements.
  - Allow for relocation of existing gas stations, which could include limitations on where new stations could locate within the City, requirements for mitigation measures and remediation, as necessary, at the prior location, and/or other requirements.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

This study session does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund. Any direction for future changes to the Municipal Code that may have an impact on the General Fund will be analyzed at that time.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378, the recommended action is not a “project” subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is a discussion item only and does not have a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. In the alternative, the recommended action is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the recommended action may have a significant effect on the environment. Any direction for future changes to the Municipal Code resulting from this study session will be analyzed, as appropriate for compliance with CEQA.

#### **BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

See Background section above.

#### **NOTIFICATION**

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Not applicable.

### ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – RCPA Resolution No. 2019-002 (Climate Emergency)
- Attachment 2 – City Council Resolution No. 2020-002 (Climate Emergency)
- Attachment 3 – RCPA Climate Mobilization Strategy
- Attachment 4 – RCPA Resolution 2021-003 (Cease Construction of New Gas Station Infrastructure)
- Attachment 5 – City Council Ordinance No. ORD-2022-010 (Gas Station Prohibition)
- Attachment 6 – City Council Meeting Minutes, dated June 3, 2025

### PRESENTER(S)

Jessica Jones, Deputy Director – Planning