# CITY OF SANTA ROSA PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

PROJECT TITLE APPLICANT

General Plan Implementation City of Santa Rosa

ADDRESS/LOCATION PROPERTY OWNER

Various Various

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER FILE NUMBERS

Various PLN25-0393

<u>APPLICATION DATES</u>
<u>APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES</u>

Not applicable Not applicable

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

Municipal Code Amendments Approval of Municipal Code and Zoning

Zoning Map Amendments by Council

PROJECT SITE ZONING GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

Various Various

PROJECT PLANNER RECOMMENDATION

Amy Nicholson Recommend adoption to City Council

Agenda Item #11.1

For Planning Commission Meeting of: September 25, 2025

CITY OF SANTA ROSA PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: AMY NICHOLSON, SUPERVISING PLANNER

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

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 and Municipal Code Amendments and Zoning Map amendments to (1) implement actions and policies within the General Plan 2050, (2) rezone 2,119 parcels to be consistent with the existing General Plan land use designation, and (3) apply the Missing Middle Housing Combining District to 1,991 parcels within the City to allow for an option to construct Missing Middle Housing.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In June 2025, the City Council adopted 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 majority of 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 total, 2,119 parcels citywide are proposed to be rezoned to ensure consistency between zoning designations and the General Plan land use map.

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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.

# **BACKGROUND**

# 1. <u>Project Description</u>

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. Additional detail is available in Exhibit A to Resolution 1.

# **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. Two new standards are proposed to implement General Plan actions:

Biological Resource Assessment (Action 3-5.11): Development on sites with natural habitat conditions that may support special-status species, sensitive communities, wildlife corridors, or regulated wetlands must include a biological resource assessment prepared by a qualified biologist.

Health Impact Assessment (Action 6-1.11): Nonresidential development proposals of 100,000 square feet or more located in Equity Priority Areas must include a health impact assessment that identifies and mitigates potential negative health effects.

#### 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 district, as follows:

"Development in all R-3 and TV-R districts shall provide at least the midpoint of the allowed density, unless topography, parcel configuration, heritage trees, historic preservation, or utility constraints make the midpoint impossible to achieve."

# 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 is applied to areas within downtown to allow for multi-family residential development in all residential or mixed-use buildings and a variety of uses that primarily serve local residents including office, retail, and live-work spaces. Housing developments are described as low- and mid-rise apartments and condominiums, small-lot single-family attached dwellings, duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes. 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 follows:

- Reclassify the Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU) zoning district from residential to commercial.
- Update the Neighborhood Commercial (CN) zoning district to implement the "Retail and Business Services" land use instead of the "Mixed Use" land use.
- Update the Community Shopping Center (CSC) zoning district to implement "Retail and Business Services" land use instead of "Mixed Use" land use.
- Revise the Light Industrial (IL) zoning district to implement the "Light Industry" land use only.
- Update the Open Space Conservation (OSC) zoning district to implement the "Parks and Recreation" land use instead of the "Residential – Low Density/Open Space" land use.
- Add "Parks and Recreation" as an implementing land use for the Open Space – Recreation (OSR) zoning district.

# 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, the following amendments are proposed:

- Establish a new land use category: Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure, permitted by right as an accessory use in all zones and allowed with a Minor Conditional Use Permit as a primary use in commercial and industrial zones.
- Add a definition for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure to the Zoning Code glossary.
- Exempt EV Charging Infrastructure 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, the following amendments are proposed:

- Clarify that MEHKOs are not considered Home Occupations under Zoning Code Section 20-42.070.
- Amend Section 20-21.040 to state that MEHKOs are exempt from Zoning Code regulations but must obtain a Business Tax Certificate and approval from the Sonoma County Health Department.

#### 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 include:

- Update land use tables in Chapters 20-22, 20-23, 20-24, and 20-26 to replace "multi-family dwelling" with "multi-family."
- Amend a glossary definition: Multi-family: Two or more dwelling units located on the same parcel. The units may be attached or detached.
- Modify the Design Review section to exempt the construction of detached multi-family dwellings from Design Review. Duplex, Half-plex, Single-Family Attached (up to two units) would be allowed with Director approval.

### Various Additional Amendments:

In alignment with the vision, goals, policies, and actions outlined in the General

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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: Various land use tables have been revised to clarify permitted uses and better align those uses with the intent and standards of each zoning district, improving usability and reducing ambiguity for applicants and staff.
- Subdivision and Development Standards Refinement: Standards for subdivision and development in residential and commercial districts have been refined to clarify the applicable development requirements for each zoning district, ensuring consistency and predictability in project review.
- Removing Chapter 20-16 from the Zoning Code: This Chapter was superseded by Chapter 20-35 (Resilient City Development) adopted in December 2024, thereby fully integrating the temporary ordinance into the permanent Code. This enables the City to respond more nimbly following disasters while maintaining streamlining measures that support economic and housing development.
- Clerical and procedural updates: Various edits are proposed to improve clarity regarding review authority, review procedures for City projects, along with refinements to various glossary terms to support consistent interpretation and implementation of the Code.

#### Missing Middle Housing:

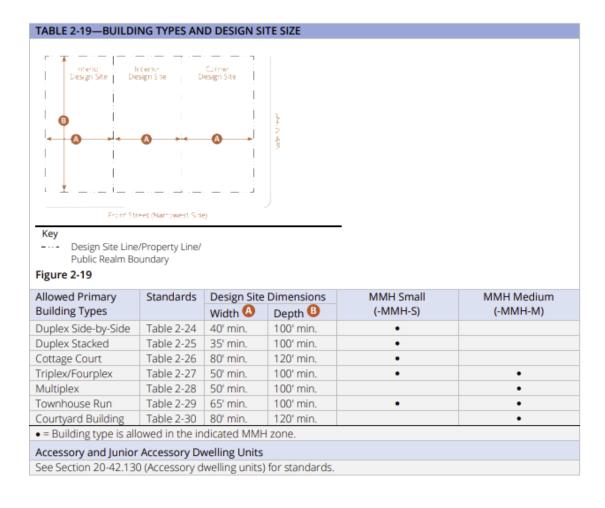
The General Plan 2050 establishes a vision and policy foundation for the development of Missing Middle Housing (MMH), a category of house-scale buildings with multiple units located in walkable neighborhoods. The term "middle" refers to the scale and form of the buildings, not to affordability requirements. 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.

MMH is designed to introduce "gentle density," a modest increase in residential units that blends into existing residential neighborhoods. These units are regulated through form-based design standards that ensure compatibility with surrounding development, focusing on building scale, frontage types (such as stoops and terraces), site planning, parking, and open space.

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 (side-by-side and stacked), cottage courts, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhouses. The MMH-M zone accommodates moderate-intensity housing types including triplexes, fourplexes, 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 include in the table below:

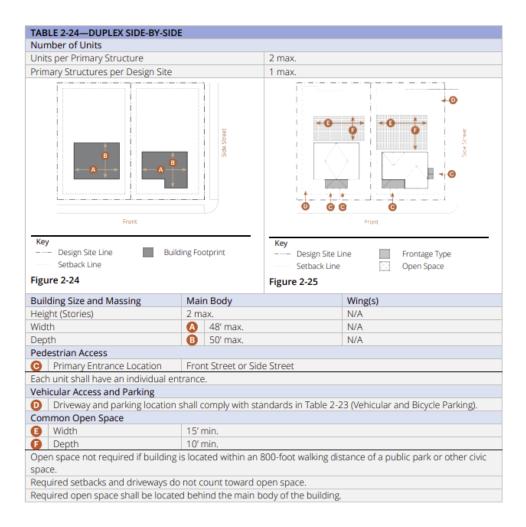


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The MMH Combining District allows a range of building types, each with its own set of development standards. These standards regulate:

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

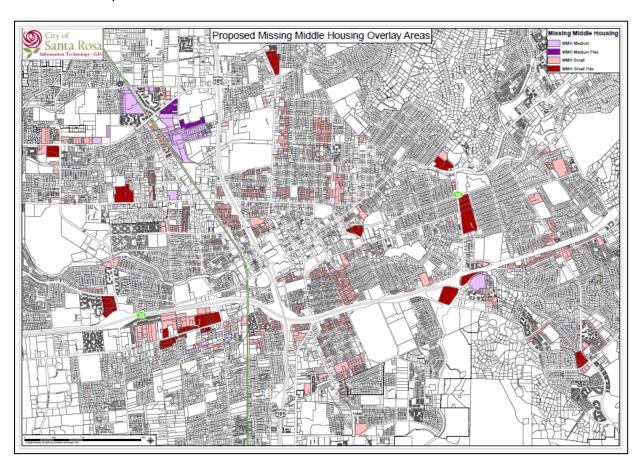
As example, the Duplex Side-by-Side building type with standards is provided below:



#### 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 Coddingtown Mall, and near commercial centers in Bennett Valley (shown in below). 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.



Permitting process for Missing Middle Housing:

<u>Land Use Permitted By—Right:</u> 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.

<u>Design Review:</u> 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.

<u>Landmark Alteration Permits:</u> 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:**

# <u>Title 18 – Buildings and Construction</u>

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)

Several changes are proposed to the Park and Recreation Land and Fees Chapter which has a purpose to provide for: (1) the acquisition of park land for neighborhood and community parks through dedication of land; and (2) the acquisition of park land for neighborhood and community parks and development of park and recreation facilities by imposition of fees in connection with the development of new dwelling units. Substantive amendments are summarized below, while minor language clarifications and all detail and can be reviewed in detail in Exhibit A of Resolution 1.

- Defining school recreational land as publicly accessible and recreational land at schools and through public private partnerships.
- Example formula demonstrating the required dedication acreage of park land for single-family attached dwelling units (which has an average population of 2.75/dwelling unit) has been revised be consistent with the long-standing General Plan requirement of 3.5 acres of neighborhood or community park per 1,000 residents, as follows:

$$\frac{2.75 \times 3.5}{1,000} = .00963 \ acres/DU$$

- The determination of land or fee considerations have been revised to include legal encumbrances as a variable to consider in addition to the existing items including natural features, access, and location of the land. This Section also includes a proposed change which replaces *location* with *proximity* as it

relates to existing and proposed park sites and trails.

- The term "private open space" is proposed to be replaced with "private parkland" throughout Section 19-70.120 Credit for Private Open Space to better reflect the intent of privately owned land used for park and recreation purposes. Although open space can be a park and a park can be considered a type of open space, the General Plan makes a distinction between the two, which is demonstrated as Open Space being described and implemented through Chapter 3 of the General Plan, and Parks (including open space parks) are defined and implemented through Chapter 6 of the General Plan.
- The Park amenities elements table in Section 19-17.120 would be revised to reflect park amenities described in the General Plan, as follows:
  - (E) Elements Table:
  - Children's Play apparatus Areas for both 2-5 and 5-12 age groups
  - Landscape park-like with quiet area Trees and Landscaping
  - Family Picnic Area,
  - Game court area Sports Court
  - Turf playfield Lawn Area or Athletic Field
  - Swimming pool <u>and/or sprayground</u> (42' x 75' with adjacent deck/lawn area)
  - Recreation center building with community programming

### 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 2,119 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 is consistent with the general plan land use, and Resolution 2 to this Staff Report would allow for all non-planned development zoning and general plan land use inconsistencies to be resolved, reducing confusion for property owners, and bringing the City into compliance with State law.

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

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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).

# 2. <u>Project History</u>

March 2020	General Plan 2050 Project Commencement
December 8, 2020	City Council accepted the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Member Selection Process and approved the CAC Organizational Framework
May 2021	Missing Middle Housing Project Commencement
July 20, 2021	City Council and Planning Commission provided input on the Community Vision Statement
November 16, 2021	City Council and Planning Commission provided input on the Equity Priority Communities' Empowerment and Outreach Work Plan
April 19, 2022	Missing Middle Housing Community Workshop #1
May 24, 2022	City Council and Planning Commission provided input on the draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives
October 25, 2022	City Council and Planning Commission provided input on the Preferred Alternative
February 7, 2023	Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the EIR was distributed to initiate a 30-day response period (February 7 – March 8, 2023)
February 27, 2023	Scoping Meeting was conducted to receive comments from the public, organizations and interested public agencies on the scope of the EIR
March 13, 2023	City provided notification of the Proposed Project and EIR pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 to locally affiliated Tribes - Consultation has continued throughout the project.
April 2023	Missing Middle Housing Project incorporated into General Plan 2050 process
July 1, 2023	Draft General Plan released to the public
Summer 2023	In-person and online workshops, pop-up events, and distribution of public survey
August 2023	Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, Community Advisory Board, and Waterways Advisory Committee Study Sessions on Draft General Plan
September 2023	City Council, Planning Commission, Design Review Board, and Cultural Heritage Board Study Sessions on Draft General Plan
March 24, 2025	Missing Middle Housing Community Workshop #2
October 7, 2024	Revised General Plan 2050 released and Draft EIR Circulated for Public Review

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November 14, 2024	Planning Commission public hearing on the adequacy of the General Plan 2050 Draft EIR
April 8, 2025	California Board of Forestry review of the Safety Element
April 24, 2025	Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on the General Plan 2050 Final EIR and the General Plan 2050 and Specific Plan amendments and unanimously recommended certification of the FEIR, adoption of the General Plan 2050, and approval of the associated Specific Plan Amendments
June 3, 2025	City Council conducted a public hearing on the General Plan 2050 Final EIR and the General Plan 2050 and Specific Plan amendments and unanimously voted to certify the FEIR, adopt the General Plan 2050, and approve of the associated Specific Plan Amendments
August 21, 2025	Design Review and Preservation Board Study Session on the Missing Middle Housing Combining District

# SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The General Plan 2050 process involved numerous public workshops, surveys, and City Review Authority meetings during which the public provided feedback which informed the development of the General Plan. A compilation of comments received during this process can be reviewed in Attachment 6 to this Staff Report.

As summarized in the Project History section above, Missing Middle Housing was a focused effort of the General Plan process, which included two Community Workshops, and a Design Review and Preservation Board Study Session. Written and verbal comments received regarding Missing Middle Housing are summarized below. All written comments can be reviewed in Attachment 6.

- Concerns were raised about potential effects on the character and integrity of designated Preservation Districts.
- Several commenters expressed that requiring only one parking space per unit may not adequately meet residents' needs.
- A community member emphasized the importance of notifying nearby property owners about proposed changes to the City's Zoning Code.
- Some residents voiced enthusiasm for the opportunity to build additional units to accommodate multigenerational living or to provide more flexibility in response to rising rental costs.
- There was support for encouraging both rental and ownership housing options within new developments.
- Support was expressed for the inclusion of a diverse array of innovative Missing Middle Housing prototypes.
- Comments encouraged the City to consider a broader geographic application of Missing Middle Housing beyond the currently proposed areas.

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 Support was expressed for streamlining the permitting process and reducing associated costs to make condominium development more feasible.

# **FISCAL IMPACT**

Approval of the Project will not have an effect 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 strategies. 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.

### 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.

### **PUBLIC 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.

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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.

# **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: <a href="https://www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/pay-to-play-limits-and-prohibitions.html">www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/pay-to-play-limits-and-prohibitions.html</a>

# **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – General Plan 2050

Attachment 2 – General Plan 2050 Final Environmental Impact Report

Attachment 3 – General Plan 2050 Draft Environmental Impact Report

Attachment 4 – Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Guidance Document

Attachment 5 – MMH Existing Conditions Report & Recommendations

Attachment 6 – Public Correspondence

Resolution 1/Exhibit A – Municipal and Zoning Code Amendments

Resolution 2/Exhibit A – Zoning Map Amendments

Resolution 3/Exhibit A – Missing Middle Housing Zoning Map Amendments

### CONTACT

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