

RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE COUNTY OF SONOMA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ADOPT AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE SONOMA COUNTY CODE CHAPTER 26 (ZONING CODE) PERTAINING TO THE REGULATION OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES.

WHEREAS, the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 and subsequent federal and state laws significantly limit local authority over the siting, permitting, and regulation of wireless telecommunications facilities, while preserving local authority over visual impacts, safety, and land use consistency exercised in a manner consistent with federal law; and

WHEREAS, Sonoma County's existing telecommunications regulations were adopted in 1996 and no longer fully reflect current wireless technologies, regulatory frameworks, or best practices for evaluating visual, scenic, and environmental impacts; and

WHEREAS, Permit Sonoma prepared comprehensive updates to the telecommunications ordinance to modernize definitions, clarify permit pathways, strengthen alternatives and visual-analysis standards, and establish clear decommissioning and removal requirements; and

WHEREAS, in April 2025, the Planning Agency established a Telecommunications Ad-Hoc Committee to provide advisory input on ordinance updates, application requirements, alternatives analysis, visual simulation practices, and federal law considerations; and

WHEREAS, the Ad-Hoc Committee met six times between August and December 2025 with staff and County Counsel and provided input that informed the proposed ordinance amendments and current application checklist; and

WHEREAS, the proposed ordinance updates clarify ministerial processing for Eligible Facilities Requests consistent with federal law, while retaining Conditional Use Permit review for new freestanding telecommunications towers and other facilities with potential environmental or scenic impacts; and

WHEREAS, the proposed ordinance strengthens requirements for alternatives analysis, including minimum numbers of site, design, and height alternatives; standardized coverage mapping; structured trade-off analysis; and demonstration of the least-impact feasible alternative capable of addressing the identified service gap; and

WHEREAS, the proposed ordinance integrates enhanced visual-analysis and simulation requirements to ensure consistent, transparent, and evidence-based evaluation of visual and scenic impacts; and

WHEREAS, the proposed ordinance establishes decommissioning and removal standards to ensure abandoned or unused telecommunications facilities are removed in a timely fashion and sites restored to protect scenic, environmental, and public safety values; and

WHEREAS, Permit Sonoma has determined that the proposed ordinance amendments are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15061(b)(3) and/or 15305 because the amendments constitute organizational, procedural, and regulatory changes that do not have the potential to result in a significant effect on the environment; and

WHEREAS, notice of the Planning Commission's April 16, 2026 public hearing on the proposed ordinance amendments was published in *The Press Democrat* in compliance with applicable provisions of California Government Code and the Sonoma County Code; and

WHEREAS, on April 16, 2026, the Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing to consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, at which time all interested persons were given an opportunity to be heard and the Commission considered all testimony and evidence presented orally and in writing;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE PLANNING COMMISSION FINDS AND RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

1. The foregoing recitals are true and correct and are incorporated herein by reference.
2. The Planning Commission is not the final decision-making body for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); however, the Commission has reviewed the proposed CEQA exemption determination and finds it appropriate for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.
3. The proposed ordinance amendments are consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan because they support essential telecommunications infrastructure while protecting scenic resources, community character, public safety, and environmental values through strengthened alternatives analysis, visual standards, and decommissioning requirements.
4. The proposed ordinance amendments are consistent with Chapter 26 of the Sonoma County Code because they modernize definitions, clarify permitting pathways, align local regulations with federal and state law, and provide clear, objective, and enforceable development standards for telecommunications facilities.
5. The Planning Commission finds that the siting and regulation of wireless telecommunications facilities are governed by the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 (47 U.S.C. § 332(c)(7)), as amended, and implementing regulations and orders of the Federal Communications Commission, which preserve limited local land use authority while preempting local regulations that prohibit or effectively prohibit the provision of personal wireless services or unreasonably discriminate among providers of functionally equivalent services.
6. The Planning Commission acknowledges that under applicable federal law, including relevant orders of the Federal Communications Commission, a local government may not deny or condition approval of a wireless telecommunications facility in a manner that materially inhibits the provision of wireless service, network densification, technological upgrades, or the introduction of new services. The proposed ordinance amendments are intended to be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with this federal standard.
7. The Planning Commission finds that federal law requires ministerial approval of Eligible Facilities Requests, as defined by 47 U.S.C. § 1455(a) and related regulations, when such requests do not substantially change the physical dimensions of an existing wireless tower or base station. The proposed ordinance appropriately provides for ministerial processing of such requests and does not impose discretionary review where federal law precludes it.
8. The Planning Commission acknowledges that, pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 332(c)(7)(B)(iv), the County may not regulate the placement, construction, or modification of personal wireless service facilities on the basis of the environmental effects of radio frequency emissions, provided the facilities comply with Federal Communications Commission standards. The proposed ordinance does not regulate facilities on that basis.
9. The Planning Commission finds that federal law establishes mandatory timelines for review of wireless facility applications. The proposed ordinance clarifies permit pathways and application

requirements in order to facilitate timely and predictable processing consistent with applicable federal deadlines.

10. The Planning Commission further finds that, within the limits established by federal law, local governments retain authority to regulate the placement, height, bulk, and design of wireless telecommunications facilities through objective and reasonable land use standards addressing visual character, scenic resources, public safety, and land use compatibility. The proposed ordinance amendments exercise this preserved authority in a manner intended to be consistent with federal requirements.
11. The Planning Commission finds that requiring applicants to evaluate reasonable site, design, and height alternatives, and to demonstrate that the proposed facility represents the least-impact feasible alternative capable of addressing the identified service need, is consistent with federal law so long as such standards are applied in a manner that does not materially inhibit the provision of wireless service.
12. The Planning Commission intends that the proposed ordinance amendments be construed and applied in a manner consistent with controlling federal and state law. If any provision is determined to conflict with applicable federal requirements, such provision shall be interpreted or applied to the maximum extent permissible, consistent with federal preemption principles.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

1. That the Planning Commission has reviewed this Resolution and any associated Exhibits and finds that they accurately reflect the Commission's intent regarding the proposed telecommunications ordinance amendments.
2. That the Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed amendments to the Sonoma County Telecommunications Ordinance as set forth in Exhibit A, incorporated herein by reference.
3. That the Planning Commission designates the Secretary of the Planning Commission as custodian of the documents and other materials that constitute the record of proceedings upon which this recommendation is based. These documents are available at Permit Sonoma, 2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, California 95403.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

1. The Planning Commission recommends that Chapter 2 remain unchanged and that it continue to review use permits for Telecommunication Facilities consistent with current practice. The Commission further recommends that staff report to the Planning Agency on the status of the new ordinance after one year, prior to making any recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding changes to the review authority for Telecommunication Facilities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

1. That the Planning Commission recommends the following changes to the staff recommended ordinance to include the following:
 - a. That the following standards be required for all Freestanding Commercial Facilities:
 - i. Require 1,000 foot noticing radius for neighborhood notification.
 - ii. Facilities shall be designed so as to provide adequate warning of potential hazards as well as location and operator identification and telephone number for public contact. Facilities may also be required to provide anti-climb devices or other security measures.
 - iii. Significant adverse impacts on biotic resources, including any threatened, rare or endangered species, shall be mitigated.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The Planning Commission recommends that a pipeline provision be adopted that applies the standards of this ordinance to all use permit applications for Freestanding Commercial Facilities not in complete status as of the effective date of this ordinance.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION was introduced by **Commissioner Koenigshofer**, who moved its adoption, seconded by **Commissioner Reed**, and adopted on roll call by the Sonoma County Planning Commission on April 16, 2026, by the following vote:

Commissioner Bahning	Aye
Commissioner Kapolchok	Aye
Commissioner Koenigshofer	Aye
Commissioner McCaffery	Aye
Commissioner Reed	Aye

Ayes: 5 Noes: 0 Absent: 0 Abstain: 0

WHEREUPON, the Chair declared the foregoing Resolution duly adopted; and

SO ORDERED.