

ORDINANCE NO. ()

AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SONOMA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AMENDING SONOMA COUNTY CODE CHAPTER 26 (ZONING), SECTIONS 26-040-010 (DEFINITIONS), 26-30-120 (TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES), 26-64-040 (TELECOMMUNICATION FACILITIES IN THE SR DISTRICT), AND 26-88-130 (TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES), TO UPDATE REGULATIONS GOVERNING WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES

The Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, State of California, ordains as follows:

Section I. Purpose and Authority.

On October 8, 2024, the Board of Supervisors directed Permit Sonoma staff to update the County’s telecommunications ordinance to encourage collocation of facilities on existing structures, clarify permitting thresholds, improve visual compatibility standards, and address emerging issues including microplastic pollution and long-term material durability.

In response to that direction, the Planning Agency convened the Telecommunications Ad Hoc Committee in April 2025. The Committee met six times between August and December 2025 with staff to review challenges with the existing ordinance, evaluate draft concepts, and provide input on application requirements, alternatives analysis standards, and visual simulation practices. Staff presented a summary of the Ad Hoc Committee’s work to the Planning Agency on January 29, 2026.

The County’s telecommunications regulations were originally adopted in 1996 following the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. Since that time, wireless technology has evolved significantly, with modern networks providing essential services including emergency response, wildfire preparedness, and disaster recovery, particularly in areas without wired infrastructure. Federal and state law have increasingly constrained local authority over wireless facilities during this period, making it important that the County’s regulations be clear, consistent, and legally defensible.

This Ordinance amends Chapter 26 (Zoning) to update telecommunications facility regulations to reflect current technology, improve application requirements, clarify permitting pathways, and ensure consistency with applicable federal and state law.

Section II. Findings.

On April 16, 2026, the Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing on the proposed ordinance amendments and related implementation matters. At the conclusion of that hearing, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended that the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed amendments to Chapter 26, with modifications to increase the public hearing noticing radius for telecommunications use permits from 300 feet to 1,000 feet and to restore language regarding significant adverse impacts to biotic

resources and anti-climbing provisions from Section 26-88-130 into Section 26-30-120(f)(1). The Planning Commission also recommended that Chapter 2 of the County Code remain unchanged and that the Planning Commission continue to review use permits for telecommunications facilities consistent with current practice, with staff to report to the Planning Agency on implementation in one year after the effective date of this Ordinance.

On May 19, 2026, the Board of Supervisors held a duly noticed public hearing on the proposed ordinance. The Board considered the staff report, the Planning Commission's recommendation and resolution, public testimony, and all other evidence in the record.

The Board of Supervisors finds as follows:

A. The proposed amendments are consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan, including policies related to public facilities and services, scenic resource protection, and land use compatibility. The amendments support General Plan policies that require evaluation of telecommunications facilities for visual and environmental impacts while recognizing the essential role of wireless infrastructure in supporting public safety, emergency response, and community connectivity.

B. The proposed amendments are necessary to reflect current wireless technology and industry practices, align local regulations with federal and state law, and improve the clarity and predictability of the County's telecommunications permitting process. The existing ordinance was adopted in 1996 and does not address current permitting frameworks, including Eligible Facilities Requests and collocation standards established under federal law.

C. The proposed amendments strengthen the County's ability to regulate the siting, design, and visual impacts of telecommunications facilities within the constraints of applicable federal and state law. The amendments require applicants to evaluate a minimum of three site alternatives, multiple design and height alternatives, and to demonstrate that the proposed facility represents the least-impact feasible option. These requirements improve application quality, support more consistent and evidence-based decision-making, and reduce the risk of appeal.

D. The proposed amendments codify requirements for the removal of abandoned telecommunications facilities, including timelines for decommissioning, removal of foundations to a minimum of four feet below grade, and site restoration. These provisions address gaps in the existing code and protect against long-term visual and environmental impacts from unused infrastructure.

E. The proposed amendments address the potential for microplastic pollution from synthetic "faux-tree" telecommunications facilities by requiring applicants to provide technical documentation demonstrating that synthetic materials are suitable for long-term outdoor exposure and will not deteriorate in a manner that creates environmental pollution. These standards are intended to prevent litter and microplastic impacts while allowing applicants the opportunity to demonstrate compliance where appropriate.

F. The proposed amendments establish a structured, tiered permitting framework for attached and collocated facilities, addressing an area of modern telecommunications permitting not currently addressed in code. This framework provides greater predictability for applicants and helps ensure that routine modifications can be processed efficiently while maintaining appropriate review for higher-impact facilities.

Section III. Amendments to Chapter 26. Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Code) is amended as provided in Exhibit A.

Section IV. Applicability to Pending Applications (Pipeline Provision)

This Ordinance shall apply prospectively. Any application for a telecommunications facility submitted to the County prior to the effective date of this Ordinance shall be processed and reviewed in accordance with the regulations in effect at the time the application was received.

Any application submitted on or after the effective date of this Ordinance shall be subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, unless an applicant submits a written request to Permit Sonoma staff requesting their pending application be subject to the standards in this Ordinance.

Section V. Environmental Determination.

Permit Sonoma has determined that this Ordinance is not a “project” as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21065 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3), because it will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment and does not authorize any development projects. All future development projects reviewed under this Ordinance will be required to undergo separate CEQA review prior to authorization.

Alternatively, if adoption of this Ordinance is determined to constitute a project, it is exempt from CEQA under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that the Ordinance will have no significant effect on the environment. The Ordinance clarifies existing regulations and adopts new standards for restoration of sites to pre-project conditions upon abandonment of facilities, and does not authorize any new development.

Section VI. Severability. If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, or phrase of this Ordinance is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portion of this Ordinance. The Board of Supervisors hereby declares that it would have passed this Ordinance and every section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase thereof irrespective of the fact that any one or more sections, subsections, sentences, clauses or phrases be declared unconstitutional or invalid.

Section VII. Effective Date. This Ordinance shall be and the same is hereby declared to be in full force and effect from and after thirty (30) days after the date of its passage and shall be published once before the expiration of fifteen (15) days after said passage, with

the names of the Supervisors voting for or against the same, in *The Press Democrat*, a newspaper of general circulation published in the County of Sonoma, State of California.

In regular session of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, introduced and adopted on the 19th day of May, 2026, on regular roll call of the members of said Board by the following vote:

SUPERVISORS:

Rabbitt: Coursey: Gore: Hopkins: Hermosillo:

Ayes: Noes: Absent: Abstain:

WHEREUPON, the Chair declared the above and foregoing Ordinance duly adopted and

SO ORDERED.

Chair, Board of Supervisors
County of Sonoma

ATTEST:

David Guhin,
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors