
Sec. 26-88-120. Vacation rentals.

- (a) **Purpose.** This section provides requirements and standards for the operation of vacation rentals. These standards are intended to ensure that vacation rentals are compatible with and do not adversely impact surrounding residential and agricultural uses.
- (b) **Applicability.** The provisions of the section shall apply to all vacation rentals except where there is a primary owner in residence. This section does not apply to legally established hosted rentals or bed and breakfast inns, which are regulated by Section 26-88-118. As used in this section, "primary owner" does not include residences or condominiums owned as a timeshare, limited liability partnership or corporation, or fractional ownership of six (6) or more interests. Vacation rentals shall not be permitted in non-habitable structures, nor on parcels where the AH Combining Zone or the X Combining Zone have been placed. Vacation rentals shall also not be permitted within second dwelling units, nor in structures or dwellings with county covenants or agreements restricting their use including but not limited to affordable housing units, agricultural employee units, farmworker housing, farm family units, or on lands under a Williamson Act contract. Tents, yurts, RVs, and other provisions intended for temporary occupancy are not allowed as a part of a vacation rental.
- (c) **Permits Required.** Vacation rentals that meet the standards outlined in this section shall be allowed as provided by the underlying zone, subject to issuance of a zoning permit. Vacation rentals that do not meet the standards in this section may be permitted, subject to the granting of a use permit.
- (d) **Term of Permit.** Zoning permits shall run with the landowner and shall automatically expire upon sale or transfer of the property. Use permits shall run with the land but may be issued for limited term, as specified by the decision-maker. Both types of permits may be revoked for failure to comply with adopted standards, subject to the administrative and revocation procedures of Article 92 unless otherwise specified by this section.
- (e) **Permit Requirements.**
1. **Maximum Number of Guestrooms.** Vacation rentals may have a maximum of five (5) guestrooms or sleeping rooms. Vacation rentals with more than five (5) guestrooms or sleeping rooms may only be allowed if adequate sewage disposal capacity exists and neighborhood compatibility can be demonstrated, subject to the granting of a use permit. For purposes of determining the appropriate level of permit required, the actual number of bedrooms in the structure plus any additional rooms intended or used for sleeping shall be used.
 2. **Maximum Overnight Occupancy.** Maximum overnight occupancy for vacation rentals shall be up to a maximum of two (2) persons per sleeping room or guestroom, plus two (2) additional persons per property, up to a maximum of twelve (12) persons, excluding children under three (3) years of age. Vacation rentals with larger overnight occupancies may only be allowed subject to the granting of a use permit. For homes on a conditional or non-standard septic system, or those with capacity limited by a voluntary repair, the maximum overnight occupancy for vacation rentals shall be equal to the design load of the septic system. The property owner shall ensure that all contracts and online listings and advertisements clearly set forth the maximum number of overnight guests permitted at the property.
 3. **Maximum Number of Guests and Daytime Visitors.** The maximum number of total guests and visitors allowed at any time in a single vacation rental shall not exceed the maximum overnight occupancy plus six (6) additional persons per property during the daytime, or eighteen (18) persons, whichever is less, excluding children under three (3) years of age. Daytime visitors shall not be on the property during quiet hours. Vacation rentals with larger numbers of guests and visitors may only be allowed subject to the granting of a use permit. Notwithstanding, maximum guest limits may be exceeded on the following national holidays: Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve

and Christmas, so long as the holiday event does not otherwise trigger the requirement for a special or cultural events permit.

4. **Limit on Number of Residences or Structures per Parcel.** Only a single family residence, and a legally established guest house meeting current standards shall be used as a vacation rental. Only one (1) tenant shall be allowed on-site at any given time: Only one (1) transient rental is allowed per parcel. Parcels containing multiple residences or habitable structures may only be used as vacation rentals subject to the granting of a use permit, except that two (2) residences or structures may be used when the total number of guestrooms does not exceed five (5).
5. **Parking.** Parking shall be provided as follows: a minimum of one (1) on-site parking space for a vacation rental with up to two (2) guestrooms or sleeping rooms; two (2) on-site parking spaces for a three (3) or four (4) guestroom vacation rental. Larger vacation rentals must demonstrate adequate parking with a minimum of three (3) spaces. On-street parking may be considered for up to one (1) of the required parking spaces; otherwise, the number of vehicles allowed for overnight guests shall be limited to the off-street parking available, as demonstrated by the application materials and the property checklist, but shall not exceed one (1) vehicle per bedroom. This maximum number of vehicles permitted for guests shall be clearly set forth in all rental agreements and in all online advertisements and listings.

(f) **Performance Standards.**

1. **Noise Limits.** All activities associated with the vacation rental shall meet the general plan noise standards contained below. Quiet hours shall be from 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. The property owner shall ensure that the quiet hours and limits on outdoor activities are included in rental agreements and in all online advertisements and listings.

Hourly Noise Metric ¹ , dBA	Activity hours 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.	Quiet Hours 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
L50 (30 minutes in any hour)	50	45
L25 (15 minutes in any hour)	55	50
L08 (5 minutes in any hour)	60	55
L02 (1 minute in any hour)	65	60

¹ The sound level exceeded n% of the time in any hour. For example, the L50 is the value exceeded fifty percent (50%) of the time or thirty (30) minutes in any hour; this is the median noise level. The L02 is the sound level exceeded one (1) minute in any hour.

If the ambient noise level exceeds the standards above, adjust the standard to equal the ambient level, up to a maximum of five (5) dBA above the standard, provided that no measurable increase (i.e. one and one-half (1.5) dBA or more) shall be allowed.

Reduce the applicable standards above by five (5) dBA for simple tone noises, noises consisting primarily of speech or music, or for recurring impulsive noises, such as dog barking.

2. **Amplified Sound.** Outdoor amplified sound shall not be allowed at any time associated with a vacation rental.
3. **Pets.** Pets, if allowed by owner, shall be secured on the property at all times. Continual nuisance barking by unattended pets is prohibited.
4. **Trash and Recycling Facilities.** Recycling and refuse storage bins shall not be stored within public view unless in compliance with neighborhood standards. Recycling and trash receptacles shall be returned to screened storage areas within twenty-four (24) hours of trash pick-up.
5. **Outdoor Fire Areas.** Outdoor fire areas, when not prohibited by state or local fire bans, may be allowed but shall be limited to three (3) feet in diameter, shall be located on a non-combustible surface, shall be covered by a fire screen, and shall be extinguished as soon as it is no longer in use or by 10:00 p.m.,

whichever is earlier. No fire or fire area shall be located within twenty-five (25) feet of a structure or combustible material.

6. **Septic Systems and Sewer Connections.** The owner shall maintain a properly functioning septic system or sewer connection. In some cases, a per-room sewer fee may be applied.
7. **Transient Occupancy Tax.** The vacation rental owner or authorized agent shall maintain a transient occupancy tax certificate and remain current on all required reports and payments. Owner or authorized agent shall include the certificate number on all contracts or rental agreements, and in any advertising or websites.
8. **Certified Twenty-Four-Hour Property Manager.** All vacation rentals operating within unincorporated Sonoma County must have a certified property manager who is available twenty-four (24) hours per days, seven (7) days per week during all times that the property is rented or used on a transient basis. Certified property managers may be professional property managers, realtors, property owners, or other designated person provided that the individual has successfully completed a training course and achieved a qualifying score on a county-administered certification test. Certification shall be granted by the county and may be revoked by the county. Once certified, a property manager must continue to comply with all provisions set forth in this section, including timely reporting of all complains and their resolutions, in order to remain certified. Certified property managers must be located within a thirty-mile radius of the vacation rental and must be available to respond to complaints at all times during the rental period. Any requested change to the certified property manager for a vacation rental property shall be made through submittal of a new vacation supplemental application or similar form provided by the department, and shall include the signature of the certified property manager and the desired effective date of the change. In no case may a vacation rental operate without a current certified property manager. Operation of a vacation rental without a valid certified property manager shall be considered a violation of this section. The name and twenty-four-hour contact information of the certified property manager shall be provided to any interested party upon request.
9. **Emergency Access.** The owner of any vacation rental located behind a locked gate or within a gated community shall provide gate code or a lockbox with keys ("Knox Box" or similar) for exclusive use by the sheriff and emergency or fire services departments.
10. **Posting and Neighbor Notification of Permit and Standards.** Once a vacation rental permit has been approved, a copy of the permit listing all applicable standards and limits shall be posted within the vacation rental property. The owner shall post these standards in a prominent place within six (6) feet of the front door of the vacation rental, and include them as part of all rental agreements. At the permit holder's expense, the County shall provide mailed notice of permit issuance to property owners and immediate neighbors of the vacation rental unit using the standard three hundred feet (300') property owner mailing list. All advertising handouts, flyers, internet listings, or any other information provided for vacation rentals shall conform to the approved occupancy limits and standards as stated on the vacation rental permit. Advertising may only be conducted for properties operating under a valid permit. Advertising for a particular property inconsistent with the approvals for that property shall be considered a violation of these performance standards.
11. **Requirements for All Internet Advertisements and Listings.** All online advertisements and/or listings for the vacation rental property shall include the following:
 - a. Maximum occupancy, not including children under three (3);
 - b. Maximum number of vehicles;
 - c. Notification that quiet hours must be observed between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.;
 - d. Notification that no outdoor amplified sound is allowed; and,

e. The transient occupancy tax certificate number for that particular property.

(g) **Enforcement Process.**

1. Initial complaints on vacation rentals shall be directed to the certified property manager identified in the zoning permit or use permit, as applicable. The certified property manager shall be available twenty-four (24) hours during all times when the property is rented, and shall be available by phone during these hours. Should a problem or arise and be reported to the certified property manager, the certified property manager shall be responsible for contacting the tenant to correct the problem within sixty (60) minutes, or within thirty (30) minutes if during quiet hours, including visiting the site if necessary to ensure that the issue has been corrected. The certified property manager shall complete the online reporting form to report any such complaints, and their resolution or attempted resolution(s), to PRMD within twenty-four (24) hours of the occurrence. Failure to respond to complaints or report them to PRMD shall be considered a violation of this section, and shall be cause for revocation of certification status.

If the issue reoccurs, the complaint will be addressed by PRMD code enforcement section who may conduct an investigation to determine whether there was a violation of a zoning or use permit condition. Sheriff reports, online searches, citations or neighbor documentation consisting of photos, sound recordings and video may constitute proof of a violation. If code enforcement verifies that a zoning or use permit condition violation has occurred, a notice of violation may be issued and a penalty may be imposed in accordance with Chapter 1 of the Sonoma County Code.

At the discretion of the code enforcement officer or the director, the zoning permit or use permit may be scheduled for a revocation hearing with the board of zoning adjustments. If the permit is revoked, a zoning or use permit for a vacation rental may not be reapplied for or issued for a period of at least one (1) year.

2. **Three Strikes Penalty.** Upon receipt of any combination of three (3) administrative citations, verified violations, or hearing officer determinations of violation of any of the permit requirements or performance standards issued to the owner or occupants at the property within a two-year period, the vacation rental zoning permit is summarily revoked, subject to prior notice and to appeal, if requested within ten (10) days. Should such a revocation occur, an application to reestablish a vacation rental at the subject property shall not be accepted for a minimum period of two (2) years.

3. **Violation of Performance Standards—Administrative Citations.**

- a. In addition to all other legal remedies, criminal or civil, which may be pursued by the county to address a violation, a violation of this section may be subject to an administrative citation under Section 1-7.6.
- b. Violations of the following permit requirements and performance standards may be deemed infractions for the purposes of an administrative citation:
 1. Conduct of a cultural event, special event, party, wedding or other similar activity exceeding the allowable maximum occupancy;
 2. Exceeding the maximum permitted occupancy, not including children under three (3) years of age;
 3. Noise violations, as set forth in (f), above, including the use of outdoor amplified sound;
 4. Violations of quiet hours (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.);
 5. Exceeding maximum number of vehicles;
 6. Exceeding fire limits, including lighting fires during bans;

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7. Unsecured pets and/or nuisance barking;
 8. Operation of a vacation rental without a certified property manager;
 9. Failure of the property owner to include the specified limits in rental agreements and online listings or advertisements;
 10. Failure to include the individual property's transient occupancy tax certificate number in all contracts, advertising and online listings;
 11. Failure of the property owner to maintain current transient occupancy tax status.

(h) **Monitoring and Enforcement Fee.**

1. An annual fee may be adopted by the board of supervisors and collected by PRMD or the county tax collector to pay for monitoring and enforcement of vacation rentals.

(Ord. No. 6322 , § III(Exh. C), 9-1-2020; Ord. No. 6319 , § III(Exh. C), 8-18-2020; Ord. No. 6145, § IX(Exh. E) , 3-15-2016)

Editor's note(s)—Ord. No. 6145, § IX(Exh. E) , adopted March 15, 2016, amended § 26-88-120 in its entirety to read as herein set out. Former § 26-88-120 pertained to similar subject matter and derived from Ord. No. 5908, § II, adopted Nov. 9, 2010.