

County of Sonoma
Santa Rosa, California

November 6, 2025
ORD24-0007 Isabella Wotring

**RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION, COUNTY OF SONOMA,
STATE OF CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS ADOPT AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SONOMA COUNTY
CODE CHAPTER 26, TO ESTABLISH AN INITIAL SET OF OBJECTIVE
DESIGN STANDARDS (ODS) FOR MULTI-UNIT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
PROJECTS (EXCLUDING SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLINGS PROPOSED WITH
ADUS), TO IMPLEMENT THE SONOMA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
HOUSING ELEMENT POLICY HE-2C AND PROGRAM 12B**

WHEREAS, the California State Housing Accountability Act limits local government’s ability to deny, reduce the density of, or make infeasible housing development projects, emergency shelters, or farmworker housing that are consistent with objective local development standards; and

WHEREAS, the California Housing Crisis Act (also known as Senate Bill 330) precludes certain jurisdictions from placing limitations on housing by enacting policies that reduce allowed density, imposing a moratorium on housing, or imposing new design standards that are not objective; and

WHEREAS, the State of California remains in a critical housing shortage and objective design and development standards seek to streamline housing development by creating permitting consistency, decreasing costs, and promoting compatibility; and

WHEREAS, on August 22, 2023, at its regular meeting time, the County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 23-0249 adopting the 2023-2031 Sonoma County Housing Element, among other related actions; and

WHEREAS, Program 12b of the Housing Element commits Sonoma County to the creation and adoption of objective design and development standards for multifamily and affordable housing projects by the end of 2025; and

WHEREAS, amendments to Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Regulations) are proposed to implement objective design and development standards (“the Project”); and

WHEREAS, County staff engaged with local design professionals to inform the Project. Developer input aided in refining standards through the identification of unnecessary, missing, confusing, or burdensome requirements; and

WHEREAS, on September 19, 2024, the Planning Commission held an informational public workshop to discuss the intent of establishing objective design and development standards and possible approaches to the Project; and

WHEREAS, on October 17, 2025, notice of the Planning Commission's November 6, 2025, public hearing on the Project was published in *The Press Democrat*, in compliance with California Government Code and the County Code; and

WHEREAS, on November 6, 2025, the Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing on the Project to consider forwarding a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, at which all interested persons were given an opportunity to be heard and the Planning Commission considered all relevant testimony and evidence presented orally or in writing; and

NOW, THEREFORE, the Planning Commission finds and resolves as follows:

- A. The foregoing recitals are true and correct and incorporated fully into these findings.
- B. The project is consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan as follows:
 - a. The project is consistent with the Housing Element as it implements Program 12b and supports Policy HE-1c, Policy HE-2c by creating objective design standards for multifamily and mixed-use housing development projects. Policy HE-6b is further supported by standards which promote sustainable development.
 - b. The project is consistent with the Open Space and Resource Conservation Element Policies OSRC-1f, OSRC-2f, OSRC-4a, OSRC-4b, OSRC-5b, and OSRC-6a as proposed amendments include design standards for discretionary projects among which are provisions to prevent excess light pollution, encourage pedestrian and bicycle amenities, meet requirements for stormwater infiltration and detention, and promote compatibility with rural character through screening, massing, finishes, and architectural features.
 - c. The project is consistent with the Environmental Justice Element Policies EJ-4f and EJ-7a as proposed amendments include provisions to promote physical activity and recreational opportunities as well as standards to decrease privacy issues and reduce exposure to heat in preparation of changing climatic conditions.
 - d. The project is consistent with the Water Resources Element Policies WR-1c and WR-4e as amendments include compliance with Low-Impact Development standards for stormwater management and the County's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance which promotes water conservation.
 - e. The project is consistent with the Public Facilities Element Policy PF-2v as standards include the undergrounding of utilities for new housing development projects.
- C. The project is consistent with area and specific plans as this initial phase of Objective Design Standards is basic and broadly applicable without interfering with the unique character of the County's diverse communities. Further, though existing subjective design standards of area and specific plans are currently unenforceable for housing development projects under the Housing Accountability Act, any objective standards in area and specific plans shall still apply.
- D. The project is consistent with the Zoning Code (Chapter 26 of the Sonoma County Code) as included standards seek to accommodate existing subjective design

standards included in Article 82 (Design Review). Further, any existing objective design standards such as those included for Local Guidelines Combining Districts and all standards pertaining to environmental protections or construction requirements throughout the Code shall still apply, as permitted under the Housing Accountability Act.

- E. The Commission is not the decision-making body for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), but no additional CEQA impact analysis is needed for the individual components of the project. The proposed revisions to the County Code are exempt from further review under CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) (the common sense exemption) and Section 15308 (actions to protect the environment) because:
- a. It can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility the project will result in a direct or indirect adverse change in the environment because the code amendments do not make changes to allowed land uses or intensities and instead provide objective design standards where subjective standards previously applied, covering all the same topics and ensuring potential aesthetic impacts are addressed; and
 - b. The proposed amendments would only enhance and improve protections of the environment because objective standards are more specific and restrictive than current subjective design review standards, ensuring greater protections to aesthetic resources, and because the current subjective design standards are often unenforceable under the Housing Accountability Act. Further, all projects currently reviewed under CEQA will continue to be subject to environmental review.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission has had an opportunity to review this Resolution and its Exhibit A, and finds that it accurately sets forth the intentions of the Commission regarding the Project.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission recommends that the Board of Supervisors adopt the ordinance amending County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Regulations) Article 04 (Glossary), Article 06 (Agriculture and Resource Zones), Article 08 (Residential Zones), Article 10 (Commercial Zones), Article 14 (Special Purpose Zones), Article 16 (Supplemental Development Standards), Article 24 (Residential Use Standards), Article 59 (Affordable House District), Article 82 (Design Review), Article 86 (Parking Regulations), Article 88 (General Exceptions and Special Use Standards), Article 89 (Affordable Housing Program Requirements and Incentives), and Article 90 (Local Area Development Guidelines), and establishing Article 83 (Objective Design Standards) as set forth in Exhibit A incorporated herein.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission designates the Secretary of the Planning Commission as the custodian of the documents and other material which constitute the record of proceedings upon which the decision herein is based. These documents may be found at the office of the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION was introduced by **Commissioner Reed**, who motioned to adopt a resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt an Ordinance to amend Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Regulations) to establish an initial set of

Objective Design Standards (ODS) for multi-unit housing development projects to implement the Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element Policy HE-2c and Program 12b as recommended by staff. The Planning Commission also directed staff to revisit standards for sound wall massing breaks before bringing the item forward to the Board.

Seconded by **Commissioner Kapolchok**, and adopted on roll call by the Sonoma County Planning Commission on November 6, 2025, by the following vote:

Commissioner Kapolchok	Aye
Commissioner Reed	Aye
Commissioner Bahning	Aye
Commissioner Marquez	Aye
Commissioner McCaffery	Aye

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

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

SO ORDERED.