



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 4/14/2026

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma

Staff Name and Phone Number: Scott Orr, Director, (707) 565-1754, Haleigh Frye, Planner III, (707) 565-2477, Ross Markey, Comprehensive Planning Manager, (707) 565-2543

Vote Requirement: Informational Only

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

General Plan Sonoma: Policy Development Kickoff Board Workshop

Recommended Action:

Hold a public workshop to:

- Review and provide feedback to Permit Sonoma Staff on the Draft Community Engagement Framework, and the revised Draft Vision and Guiding Principles, and;
- Receive updates on the project schedule.

Executive Summary:

A General Plan reflects community values, sets the vision for future growth, and guides land use, housing, job creation, natural resource management, and social and economic equity. State General Plan Guidelines recommend updating General Plans every 5 to 10 years to ensure that they remain relevant and reflect local physical and demographic changes, as well as broader changes in culture and technology. In 2024, staff initiated General Plan Sonoma to update Sonoma County General Plan 2020 to address changes in local demographic and environmental conditions, and to identify goals, policies, and programs to support the community's vision for the future.

Community visioning began in June 2024 with public engagement running from January through July 2025 resulting in the development of the Draft Vision and Guiding Principles, which express the community's aspirations for the County's future and will be the foundation used to guide General Plan policy development.

On December 16, 2025, the Board of Supervisors authorized Permit Sonoma to execute an agreement to partner with a consultant, PlaceWorks, to complete the remaining scope of work for General Plan Sonoma, which is focused on policy development and includes ongoing community engagement, an analysis of existing conditions and trends, land use scenarios, preparation of the updated General Plan (General Plan Sonoma), technical analysis and environmental review, and updates to the zoning database. The process is anticipated to conclude in February 2029.

Permit Sonoma has prepared a Draft Community Engagement Framework to guide continued engagement throughout the project. The Framework outlines engagement goals and guiding commitments to ensure the priorities, needs, and desires of Sonoma County's diverse communities are reflected in the updated General Plan. The Draft Vision and Guiding Principles were updated to reflect feedback from the Board of Supervisors

(August 12, 2025) and Planning Agency (March 19, 2026) to appropriately address the term and concept of city and community centered growth. The revisions remain consistent with input received during visioning where participants in the process reaffirmed support for focusing growth in and around cities and existing communities.

This informational item presents an overview of the project schedule, a summary of Planning Agency feedback, and the Draft Community Engagement Framework for Policy Development meant to outline the engagement strategy for the remainder of General Plan Sonoma.

Discussion:

Background

Permit Sonoma initiated an update to Sonoma County General Plan 2020, which has been in place since 2008, to satisfy current State law requirements, reevaluate community priorities, address changes in local conditions, and review existing policies in light of recent events, including flooding and wildfire recovery. The current General Plan update effort is called General Plan Sonoma.

In December 2023, the Board of Supervisors accepted staff's recommendation to proceed with community visioning for the General Plan update. Staff developed a Community Engagement Plan to guide outreach for visioning, which commenced after the public and decision makers had a chance to provide feedback on the plan in the fall of 2024.

Community visioning included extensive public engagement from January to July 2025, resulting in over 5,000 comments and over 4,000 participants through a variety of engagement activities, including in-person and virtual workshops, open houses in local communities, surveys, community events, stakeholder outreach, early communication with local tribes, and focus groups led in partnership with community-based organizations to reach underserved populations.

As part of this initial work Permit Sonoma Staff prepared a Draft General Plan 2020 Audit, which involved a detailed review of the existing General Plan policy guidance to identify potential changes to comply with State law, ensure internal consistency, eliminate redundancies, and reflect current conditions. Visioning concluded in August 2025 when the Board reviewed the Draft Vision and Guiding Principles and gave direction to staff to proceed with the remaining scope of work for the General Plan update.

This staff report presents the General Plan Sonoma Policy Development Schedule for the remaining work (Attachment 1), the Draft Community Engagement Framework (Attachment 2), and the Final Draft Vision and Guiding Principles (Attachment 3).

General Plan Sonoma Policy Development Schedule

The Board of Supervisors authorized Permit Sonoma to execute the consultant contract presented at the December 16, 2025, Board meeting. The remaining work for the General Plan update is a complex, multi-year

planning effort. The County contracted with a team of consultants led by PlaceWorks, the firm who supported the County's community visioning effort for General Plan Sonoma.

The remainder of the General Plan Sonoma project is anticipated to occur over approximately three years and includes several major tasks, including existing conditions analysis, community engagement, development of land use scenarios, preparation of the draft General Plan, environmental review, and adoption. Work commenced in January 2026, following the Board's approval of the contract execution, and is anticipated to conclude in early 2029.

The project team is currently focused on the early tasks of the update, including project initiation and the preparation of the Existing Conditions and Trends Analysis. This work will inform upcoming community engagement and discussions around key issues, policy priorities, and potential land use scenarios. Those engagement activities are expected to begin this fall.

A schedule showing the anticipated timing and duration of the major project tasks is included in Attachment 1.

Community Engagement Framework

Strong and meaningful community involvement throughout the development of General Plan Sonoma is critical to the preparation and implementation of the General Plan. The community engagement conducted to date and throughout the remainder of the effort is essential to develop a plan that speaks to the needs and interests of the community countywide, while also earning and building trust in the process.

The Draft Community Engagement Framework (Attachment 2) presents the approach for continued community engagement on policy development for General Plan Sonoma. The Framework lays the groundwork for engagement rather than detailing a fixed or exhaustive list of activities, allowing the approach to remain flexible and responsive to emerging community feedback and participation needs as the multi-year process unfolds.

Community Engagement Framework Contents

The Draft Community Engagement Framework describes the goals, commitments, audiences, and methods for engagement as well as tools for getting the word out. It addresses equity and accessibility, barriers to engagement, alignment with County equity and accessibility policies, and community-based organization engagement. The Framework also describes the roles and responsibilities for Permit Sonoma staff, PlaceWorks, the Advisory Councils/Commissions (CAC/MACs), Planning Agency, and Board of Supervisors during the update process. Finally, the Framework outlines engagement timing and adaptability and describes how the County will report back and promote transparency during the outreach process.

In preparing the Draft Community Engagement Framework, staff consulted the Community Engagement Toolkit, Community Engagement Plan, and Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan prepared by the

County's Office of Equity, working to ensure consistency with these existing community engagement plans.

Community Engagement Goals and Engagement Commitments

The Draft Community Engagement Framework seeks to gather input that reflects the priorities, needs, and desires of Sonoma County's diverse communities. The engagement goals for General Plan Sonoma will:

1. Ensure all Sonoma County residents are aware that the General Plan is being updated, and understand why the General Plan matters and how their input is valuable to the update process and the future of Sonoma County.
2. Ensure General Plan Sonoma reflects the needs of people who represent the full range of demographics, perspectives, and experiences in Sonoma County. This includes engaging with traditionally underrepresented and marginalized communities, including racial and ethnic groups and low-income communities for whom barriers such as language and cultural differences, lack of access to technology and transportation, time constraints, and lack of trust in government may impact participation.
3. Maximize participation in the process by offering a comprehensive range of engagement activities that can reach community members at their comfort level and removing barriers to engagement by providing accessible, culturally appropriate information and resources.
4. Provide flexibility in the planning process to adapt to what we learn along the way. This includes assessing and documenting progress on achieving engagement goals to identify needed refinements.
5. Build public trust and ownership in General Plan Sonoma and its planning process. This includes undertaking a transparent and accountable process in which community members can easily access engagement results and understand how their input is being used.
6. Foster constructive dialogue around competing priorities by creating opportunities to openly discuss conflicts, tradeoffs, and differing perspectives in a respectful and equitable manner, ensuring that diverse viewpoints are acknowledged and considered in decision making.
7. Collaborate with key stakeholders throughout the update process, including businesses, community and interest groups, Tribal governments, public agencies, and partner jurisdictions.

Community engagement for General Plan Sonoma will also adhere to the engagement commitments listed below, which were developed with consideration of the community visioning engagement and in alignment with the community engagement goals. Descriptions for each guiding principle can be found in Attachment 2.

1. Accessibility and Inclusion
2. Equity-Focused Engagement
3. Transparency and Follow-Through
4. Flexibility and Responsiveness
5. Respect for Community Time and Lived Experience

Community Engagement Methods

The Draft Community Engagement Framework presents a range of outreach methods that will be tailored to

different policy topics, audiences, and each task during policy development. Methods include in-person and virtual workshops, interactive online tools, community events, technical panels, tribal partnerships, and Advisory Councils/Commissions (CAC/MACs), meetings, along with public meetings before the Planning Agency and Board of Supervisors.

Targeted engagement will continue in partnership with community-based organizations to reach underrepresented communities initiated during the visioning process. The Framework also includes targeted youth engagement in collaboration with partners such as the local colleges, high school classroom or school-based programs, and community-based organizations.

In addition, the Framework incorporates creative engagement approaches including community art projects and partnerships with school media or art programs. Ongoing communications will include educational videos, email newsletters, social media posts, radio ads, and community-based organization (CBO) networks.

Community Based Organization Partners

To engage hard-to-reach communities, Permit Sonoma will partner with several local community-based organizations (CBO) that have strong connections with these communities. Based on the current budget and scope, staff anticipate establishing formal, compensated partnerships with up to eight CBOs. These partners are anticipated to help facilitate focus group discussions with these communities, support outreach through their networks, and assist with culturally targeted and multilingual engagement activities beyond the focus groups, such as community events and youth-focused efforts.

In addition to these formal partnerships, Permit Sonoma will continue to collaborate and coordinate with a broader range of community organizations throughout the process to support inclusive and effective engagement. Permit Sonoma Staff will work with each CBO to define a clear scope of work, and CBO partners will be compensated for their time.

Upcoming Community Engagement

Community engagement will be aligned with the major tasks of General Plan Sonoma so input is collected at the points when it can most meaningfully inform key decisions and refine General Plan direction. The next major round of engagement is anticipated to begin this fall, after completion of the existing conditions analysis. During this round of engagement, participants will review key issues, identify policy priorities, and provide input that will guide the development of land use scenarios. We anticipate there will be approximately 40 community activities during this round of engagement, including in-person and virtual workshops, an online interactive survey, community events, focus group meetings with underserved communities, educational video(s), storytelling through arts activities such as a digital or in-person art activity, and workshops at local schools and or colleges. We anticipate the initial workshops and focus group meetings will occur from September to October 2026, followed by the Advisory Councils/Commissions (CAC/MACs), Council meetings, along with Planning Agency/Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors meetings.

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

Based on the input gathered during community visioning, staff prepared a Draft Vision and Guiding Principles, which were presented to the Board of Supervisors on August 12, 2025. The Draft Vision and Guiding Principles capture the community's aspirations for the county's future and will be the foundation for the policy guidance in the updated General Plan.

During the March 19, 2026, Planning Agency workshop, Planning Commissioners and members of the public reviewed and provided feedback on the Draft Community Engagement Framework and the updated Vision and Guiding Principles. These updates were initially developed in response to Board of Supervisors feedback from August 2025.

Feedback at the March 19 workshop generally supported the direction of the revised Vision and Guiding Principles, while suggesting targeted refinements to improve clarity and alignment with longstanding General Plan policies. In particular, Commissioners commented on the importance of clearly conveying the County's approach to directing growth toward incorporated areas. While the draft language referenced growth within "urbanized areas" to reflect the range of locations where development may occur, including areas outside city boundaries, Commissioners and members of the public noted that the concept of "city-centered growth" remains an important and well-understood expression of the County's overall growth strategy and does not preclude development in appropriate unincorporated areas.

Additional feedback suggested clarifying the relationship between agricultural and open space lands to better reflect their distinct roles.

In response, minor revisions were made to refine the language, including clarifying the County's approach to growth in a manner that reflects both established policy direction and current planning considerations, and acknowledging both the distinction and interrelationship between agricultural and open space lands.

Board Discussion

This item requests that the Board of Supervisors hold a public workshop to review and provide feedback to Permit Sonoma Staff on the Draft Community Engagement Framework, review the Draft Vision and Guiding Principles, and receive updates on the project schedule.

Next Steps

Based on Board feedback, staff will:

1. Revise and finalize the Community Engagement Framework and Vision and Guiding Principles.
2. Implement the Community Engagement Framework through engagement activities occurring throughout the remainder of the General Plan Sonoma project schedule.

3. Implement the tasks outlined in the General Plan Policy Development Schedule.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency

Goal: Goal 5: Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies

Objective: Objective 1: By 2025, update the County General Plan and other county/special district planning documents to incorporate policy language and identify areas within the County that have the potential to maximize carbon sequestration and provide opportunities

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

Yes

A full racial equity toolkit analysis will be available once the plan update is completed and presented to the Board of Supervisors for adoption. Equity considerations are embedded in all stages of the project. The toolkit promptings will be used throughout the multi-year planning effort to guide community engagement, data collection and analysis, and development of policies, program, and accountability strategies.

The Community Engagement Framework presented to the Board with this item outlines the approach and commitments for equitable engagement and inclusivity throughout the life of the project. Later in 2026, staff will present the Board with an Existing Conditions Analysis that will leverage up-to-date demographic and socioeconomic data to identify disparities in areas like housing, employment, health, transportation, and education to inform subsequent policy development. The toolkit will then be used to evaluate how proposed policies, programs, and land-use decisions may affect different racial and socioeconomic groups within the community and refine them prior to adoption to minimize disparate outcomes.

Staff will continue to coordinate with the Office of Equity throughout the General Plan Update process to share information and seek input, as appropriate.

Prior Board Actions:

December 16, 2025: General Plan Update Project Phase 2 Contract Award

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7777748&GUID=53E76097-8FEE-4463-B5A4-AE6CA22FF4E3&Options=&Search=>>

August 12, 2025: Community Visioning Outcomes and General Plan Scope Recommendations

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7504927&GUID=27926E3D-BCC0-48BB-9A01-E2E6665AA026&Options=&Search=>>

October 15, 2024: General Plan 2020 Audit and Community Engagement Plan

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6888966&GUID=EE057F3A-26D3-47E2-A55F-60A80906DBE2&Options=&Search=>>

December 12, 2023: Sonoma County Comprehensive General Plan Update Kick-Off (

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6446395&GUID=04FE3E33-FB4D-44B4-A5A8->

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June 10, 2023: General Plan Update Project Phase 1 Contract Award (

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6720195&GUID=EA6AEAD9-96BC-4C3F-A9CE-0E18F3F3B28C>>)

FISCAL SUMMARY

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no direct fiscal or general fund impacts associated with this informational item.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1: General Plan Sonoma Policy Development Schedule (English and Spanish)

Attachment 2: Draft Community Engagement Report Framework (English and Spanish)

Attachment 3: Final Draft Vision and Guiding Principles (English and Spanish)

Attachment 4: Final Draft Vision and Guiding Principles - Clean (English and Spanish)

Attachment 5: Planning Agency Public Comments

Attachment 6: Public Comments Since March 19, 2026

Attachment 7: Presentation (English and Spanish)

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A