

## Open for Business

As outlined within this brochure, the City of Sonoma has a formula business ordinance that applies to certain historic areas of the City. Areas outside of the City's Historic Zone are exempt from formula business regulations, unless the proposed business occupies a space of 10,000 square feet or more.

Moreover, the formula business requirements do not apply to the City's four largest shopping centers:

- Sonoma Marketplace Shopping Center
- Fifth West Plaza
- Sonoma Valley Center
- Maxwell Village Shopping Center

Regardless of whether a business is "formula," the City's regular permit requirements and design review process will apply.



*Sonoma's four largest shopping centers are exempt from the formula business ordinance.*

If you are considering opening a formula business in the City of Sonoma, you'll want to review a full copy of the ordinance (available at [www.sonomacity.org](http://www.sonomacity.org)). Talk to Planning staff at City Hall, who will be happy to help you.

For help in bringing your business to Sonoma Valley, including locations outside of city limits, the Economic Development Manager is here to assist you.

## A Strong Business Climate and a Healthy Local Economy

The City of Sonoma supports a business climate that fosters economic vitality in several ways, including a **Project Advisory Committee** that provides early-stage input from various City departments on private development projects, at no charge; a **FAST START** streamlined plan check option; and an **outreach program** to help businesses understand the permit processes that affect them.

The City also partners with the Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce in the **Sonoma Valley Economic Development Partnership**, a unique collaboration to support business retention, expansion, creation, and attraction.

For details, visit our economic development website at [SonomaValley4Biz.com](http://SonomaValley4Biz.com), or contact the Economic Development Manager at (707) 327-7338.

### City of Sonoma

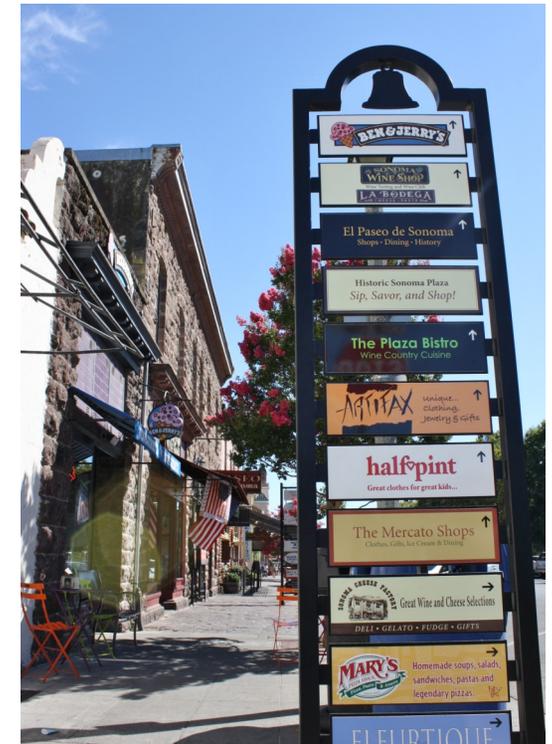
City Hall, #1 The Plaza, Sonoma 95476  
(707) 938-3681 phone; (707) 938-8775 fax  
[www.sonomacity.org](http://www.sonomacity.org)

### Sonoma Valley

**Economic Development Partnership**  
[www.SonomaValley4Biz.com](http://www.SonomaValley4Biz.com)

sonoma valley  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
PARTNERSHIP**  
city | chamber | county

## Information About Formula Businesses in the City of Sonoma



## About the Ordinance

Under rules adopted by the Sonoma City Council in 2012, new "formula" businesses locating in the Historic District need to meet Use Permit requirements relating to diversity, balance, and community character.

The Use Permit requirement also applies to new formula businesses in locations outside the Historic District if they are larger than 10,000 square feet.

In addition, the City's formula business ordinance specifically prohibits new large-scale formula restaurants, defined as having more than 250 existing outlets, from locating in the Sonoma Plaza area.

The primary intent of the regulations is to protect, preserve, and retain the local unique and attractive character and charm that Sonoma is internationally known for in its downtown Plaza and historic district.

*The only "prohibition" in the ordinance is on chain restaurants of 250 or more outlets in the area directly around the Plaza, called the Plaza Retail Overlay Zone (PROZ). A map of the PROZ is available at the Planning Department.*



## What is a Formula Business?

A formula business is defined as having a **"standardized array of services and/or merchandise, employee uniforms, decor, facade design, signage, color scheme, trademark or service mark, name, or similar standardized features; and which causes it to be substantially identical to ten or more other businesses in the U.S."** at the time of application.

The formula definition applies to most retail, restaurant, and personal service uses (such as salons), but not to uses such as offices, hotels, banks, and gas stations.

The ordinance does not apply to businesses in existence at the time it was adopted, but may apply if the business relocates or expands.



*Formula businesses located in the Historic District, or in spaces larger than 10,000 square feet, must meet certain use permit findings.*

*The formula business ordinance does not apply to office uses, hotels, banks, or gas stations.*



## Balance, Community Character, and Economic Vitality

To locate within the areas covered by the formula business regulations, the City's Planning Commission must grant a Use Permit that includes the following findings:

1. The Formula Business establishment will promote diversity and variety to assure a balanced mix of commercial uses available to serve both resident and visitor populations;
2. The proposed use, together with its design and improvements, is consistent with the unique and historic character of Sonoma, and will preserve the distinctive visual appearance and shopping/dining experience of Sonoma for its residents and visitors.
3. The Formula Business establishment will be compatible with existing uses in the zone and will promote the zone's economic vitality as the commercial, cultural, and civic center of the community. (Note: this finding applies only to locations within the Plaza Retail Overlay Zone, an area within the Historic Zone that surrounds the Plaza.)



*Sonoma is renowned for its unique and historic downtown, which is a popular destination for visitors to the Valley.*