

**CITY OF SONOMA
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
March 12, 2015**

Community Meeting Room, 177 First Street West, Sonoma, CA

MINUTES

Chair Willers called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Roll Call:

Present: Chair Willers, Comms. Felder, Heneveld, Cribb, Wellander, McDonald (Alternate)

Absent: Comm. Roberson

Others Present: Planning Director Goodison, Administrative Assistant Morris

Chair Willers stated that no new items would be heard after 10:30 p.m. unless the Planning Commission so decides. Any decisions made by the Planning Commission can be appealed within 15 days to the City Council. Comm. Cribb led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Willers welcomed newly-appointed Commissioners Ron Wellander and Robert McDonald, Alternate to the Planning Commission and looked forward to serving with them.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC: David Eicher, Sonoma Valley resident, (1110 Loma Court) urged the Commission to restrict water usage for new developments since planning in the drought years is critical.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None

CHANGES TO AGENDA ORDER: None

CORRESPONDENCE: Late Mail was received on Item #2 from Vickie Bernou, John Marconi, Moira Watts and Diana Spry.

Item #1 – Consent Calendar – Request for a one-year extension of the Planning approvals allowing a mixed-use development at 165 East Spain Street (Applicant: Marcus & Willers Architects).

Applicant/Property Owner: Marcus & Willers Architects

Comm. Heneveld made a motion to approve the request for a one-year extension to the Planning approvals allowing a mixed-use development (Mission Square) at 165 East Spain Street. Comm. Felder seconded. The motion was adopted 4-0 (Chair Willers and Comm. Cribb abstained).

Item #2 – Public Hearing – Consideration of an amendment to the Development Code establishing a review and licensing process for limited short-term rentals within owner-occupied single-family residences.

Planning Director Goodison presented staff's report.

Comm. Felder confirmed with staff that there is no restriction prohibiting a homeowner from renting out a room in their home on a long term basis.

Chair Willers opened the item to public comment.

David Eicher, Sonoma Valley vacation rental owner, conducted a survey of the number of advertised vacation rentals and rooms currently offered for rent in Sonoma. He recommended that if the ordinance is changed to allow short-term rentals in a home that the property owner make sure there is adequate off street parking for guests. He wanted evidence of insurance before a license is issued and recognized it would be difficult to enforce the number of days that the home is rented. He suggested that the ordinance might impose a means test, whereby a homeowner's annual income must be under a certain level in order from them to rent a room on a short-term basis.

Chair Willers closed the item to public comment.

Comm. Felder is concerned that short-term rentals will disturb the residential character of the community and reduce the supply of available rental housing stock. He opposes the concept. In his view, the advantages that this would provide to some individual property owners who would benefit from the allowance, do not outweigh these concerns.

Comm. Cribb supported the allowance for an amendment to the Development Code because it would provide an alternative lodging experience and would generate supplemental income for homeowners many of whom are seniors on a fixed income. He suggested incorporating some of the suggestions made by David Eicher into the revised ordinance. The license process provides safeguards to protect neighborhood character and avoid compatibility issues.

Comm. Heneveld felt the City faced more pressing issues such as water and affordable housing units for residents at the low and moderate income level.

Comm. McDonald said the discussion for allowing short-term boarding room rentals is an important policy issue. He is concerned with its potential to change neighborhood characteristics for the worse. In his view, tourism-related activities should not intrude into residential neighborhoods and this allowance may not be consistent with the expectations of persons who purchase a single-family home. He is especially concerned about such an allowance in PUD's, since units are within a more constrained area than a typical single family home. He confirmed with Planning Director Goodison that a public hearing is required (500 ft. range notification) and the license is revocable.

Chair Willers is opposed to creating an economic incentive for residents to rent out a room on a short-term basis, rather than a long-term basis, as long-term room rentals have a clear community benefit. In addition, transient guest have a different impact on a neighborhood than long-term renters.

Comm. Cribb expressed the view that short-term room rentals should be allowed as long as safeguards are in place. In his view the level of activity would no greater than that of full occupancy of the residence with a household.

Comm. Wellander stated while he believes there is merit in the concept, he is concerned about enforcement and ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place to protect residential character. In general, however, the revocation option provided by license process leads him to remain open the concept.

A discussion ensued on the pros and cons of the Boarding Room concept. A majority of the Commission opposed the idea based upon concerns about neighborhood compatibility and the protection of residential character, increased conflicts between neighbors, parking, and the potential for such a use to crowd out long-term room rentals, which are more beneficial in terms of meeting housing needs.

Planning Director Goodison asked the Planning Commission to provide direction on additional changes to the draft ordinance. Through a straw poll, a majority of the Commission agreed on the following revisions:

1. Parking: Minimum requirement of three spaces.
2. Insurance requirement.
3. Water retrofit requirement.
4. 90 day annual limit (to avoid year-around activity).
5. Carbon monoxide detector.
6. Home Owners Association sign off, when applicable.

The Planning Director noted that in addition to a recommendation regarding the overall concept, the draft ordinance will be revised, as directed by the Planning Commission, and forwarded to the City Council.

Comm. Heneveld made a motion to forward to the City Council a recommendation that the amendment to the Development Code to allow boarding rooms not be adopted. Comm. Felder seconded. The motion was adopted 4-2, Comms. Cribb, Wellander opposed.

Planning Director Goodison reported the following:

The 2015-2023 Housing Element update will be discussed at the City Council meeting on March 2, 2015.

Commissioner comments: None

Comments from the Audience: David Eicher, Sonoma Valley resident, supported the recommended action by the Planning Commission about not allowing short-term rentals within owner-occupied single-family residences in Sonoma.

Moira Watts, resident (22 years), is disappointed with the decision and said that property owners have adequate homeowners liability coverage to cover claims from renting out a portion their home. In her opinion, Sonoma should be “progressive” like other Cities.

Maria Lobanovsky, resident, requested that the Commission revisit the San Francisco Vacation rental ordinance to verify the accuracy of the information given.

Adjournment: Comm. Heneveld made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m. to the next special meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 9, 2015. Comm. Cribb seconded. The motion was unanimously adopted.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes of March 12, 2015 were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Sonoma Planning Commission on the 9th day of April , 2015.

Approved:

Cristina Morris, Administrative Assistant