

County of Sonoma

Permit and Resource Management Department



Vacation Rental Program Review



Sonoma County's Existing Vacation Rental Program

Sonoma County provides a variety of visitor-serving rentals including hotels, Bed and Breakfast Inns, and vacation rentals. Vacation Rentals are the rental of a private residence for periods of 30 days or less and are allowed in some zoning districts. Other types of visitor accommodations such as Bed and Breakfast Inns may be allowed under a separate program. In January 2011, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted a Vacation Rental Program that includes performance standards to ensure compatibility with surrounding residential uses. Outdoor amplified sound is prohibited in vacation rentals. Parties, weddings, and similar activities involving more than 18 people are not allowed in vacation rentals unless a special permit has been issued and neighbors given notice. The existing Vacation Rental Program does not apply in the Coastal Zone.

Current Procedure

To apply for a Vacation Rental Permit, the applicant submits a complete Vacation Rental Permit application to the Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD). Each applicant must sign a Vacation Rental Affidavit which is an agreement to comply with the Vacation Rental Performance Standards, and to register with the Sonoma County Treasurer-Tax Collector for payment of Transient Occupancy Tax. The applicant must also designate and provide contact information for a property manager, or for a responsible party who is available 24-hours a day during all rental periods to respond to any issues or complaints. The responsible party must be located within one hour of the vacation rental property so that they can respond to the vacation rental site promptly should any problems arise. The applicant must also provide neighbors located within a 100-foot radius with the responsible party information and a 24/7 telephone number.

Why is the County Reviewing the Vacation Rental Program?

The County's existing program has been effective in reducing the number of complaints and improving neighborhood compatibility. However, the increased popularity of Vacation Rentals and new internet hosting websites have resulted in increased numbers of vacation rentals, many of which lack permits and are not paying taxes, creating an unequal playing field. Some neighborhoods have experienced an overconcentration of vacation rentals and more conflicts with noise, parking and safety. The Board of Supervisors directed County staff to conduct an extensive public outreach to review the existing program and enforcement procedures to better ensure neighborhood compatibility. Specific issues that will be investigated include neighbor notification, noise, parking, events, health and safety,

loss of housing stock, and others that may be identified through the public outreach process.

Current Permitted Vacation Rentals

As of February 7, 2015 there were a total of 773 approved Vacation Rental permits issued by PRMD. These facilities are registered for and paying taxes. The largest numbers of vacation rentals are found in the Russian River area (330 rentals), followed by the Sonoma Valley (301 rentals) and the north county (136 rentals). The vast majority of these permitted Vacation Rentals are operating in conformance with the Performance Standards. Proposed revisions to the Vacation Rental program will not apply to properties with permits issued prior to the effective date of any revisions.

Leveling the Playing Field

In September, 2014, the County Assessor conducted an internal audit of the Transient Occupancy Tax program. The audit results estimate that over half of the Sonoma County vacation rental properties listed on AirBnB are not registered or permitted by the County, and thus are operating without performance standards, without notifying neighbors of 24/7 contact persons, and without paying taxes. Efforts are underway by the County and by property management groups to identify these properties and require compliance with the rules and tax code.

Complaint Process

- 1) Check PRMD website to determine if the vacation rental property is permitted. Use the “Permit History Lookup” option on the left hand column of the PRMD website <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/PRMD>
- 2) If permitted, contact the 24/7 number for the property manager
- 3) If no response, or if not permitted, please contact Code Enforcement at 565-2471, or file a complaint online at www.sonoma-county.org/VacationRentals. The Code Enforcement Division will review your complaint and any supporting documentation, such as photos or video recordings. Depending on the available information and the nature of the complaint, Code Enforcement may provide an informal warning, issue a violation notice, impose penalties, or schedule a hearing to revoke the Permit.
- 4) In an emergency, contact the Sheriff or call 911. Do not put yourself in harm’s way.

Next Steps

Opportunities for input in review of the Vacation Rental Program include the following:

Opportunities for Public Participation	Timeframe (tentative)
<i>Community Forms</i>	<i>February 9 through March 9, 2015</i>
<i>Website Submittal at www.sonoma-county.org/VacationRentals</i>	<i>Through April 15, 2015</i>
<i>Public Workshop on Proposed Changes</i>	<i>Early Spring 2015</i>
<i>Planning Commission Public Hearing(s) on Proposed Changes</i>	<i>Spring 2015</i>
<i>Board of Supervisors Hearing(s) on proposed Changes</i>	<i>Summer 2015</i>

For more information please visit our website at www.sonoma-county.org/VacationRentals

You may send email to PRMD-VacationRentals@sonoma-county.org, or mail to: Permit & Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403 (707) 565-1932