

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 resorts, hotels, campgrounds, Bed and Breakfast Inns, and vacation rentals. Vacation Rentals are the rental of an entire private residence for periods of 30 days or less and are allowed in most zoning districts. Renting one bedroom in your home for 30 days or less is considered a one-bedroom bed-and-breakfast inn and is allowed in certain zoning districts with a zoning permit under a separate program.

In January 2011, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted a Vacation Rental Program for areas outside the Coastal Zone (other restrictions apply in the Coastal Zone). The Vacation Rental Program requires a zoning permit for such rentals and includes performance standards to ensure compatibility with surrounding residential uses including:

- Maximum of 5 rooms in a vacation rental (depending on home size and septic)
- Limited of 2 people per room plus 2 for overnight stay
- Outdoor amplified sound prohibited
- Second dwelling units may not be used for vacation rental
- 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

Current Procedure – How to Apply for a Vacation Rental Permit

- Submit complete Vacation Rental Permit application to PRMD
- Register with the Sonoma County Treasurer-Tax Collector for payment of Transient Occupancy Tax
- Submit signed Vacation Rental Affidavits (2 forms) agreeing to comply with the Vacation Rental Performance Standards
- Submit a signed form with contact information for a responsible party (located within one hour of the vacation rental property), available 24-hours a day during all rental periods to respond to any issues or complaints
- 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 increasing popularity of Vacation Rentals and new internet hosting websites has resulted in increased numbers of vacation rentals. Some neighborhoods have experienced a high concentration of vacation rentals and more conflicts with noise, parking and safety. The Board of Supervisors directed staff to conduct a robust public outreach to review the existing program and enforcement procedures to better ensure neighborhood compatibility. Specific issues being

studied 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 April 16, 2015, there were approximately 822 approved Vacation Rental permits issued by PRMD. These facilities are registered for and paying taxes. The majority of these permitted Vacation Rentals are operating in conformance with the Performance Standards.

Vacation Rental Location	Number
Russian River area	340
Sonoma Valley	331
North Sonoma County	144
Other Sonoma County locations	7

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 websites are not registered or permitted by the County, and thus are operating without permits or compliance with performance standards, without notifying neighbors of 24/7 contact persons, and without paying taxes. The County is working to bring these properties into compliance with the rules and tax code.

If you are concerned about a vacation rental the following steps can be taken:

- 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/Permit-and-Resource-Management>
- If permitted, contact the 24/7 number for the property manager.
- 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 and will investigate and take appropriate action.
- 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 9th 2015</i>
<i>Public Workshop on Policy Options</i>	<i>May 18th 2015, 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm Santa Rosa Veterans Hall</i>
<i>Website Comment Submittal at www.sonoma-county.org/VacationRentals</i>	<i>Through June 30, 2015</i>
<i>Planning Commission Public Hearing(s) on recommended changes</i>	<i>August 13, 2015 1pm</i>
<i>Board of Supervisors Hearing(s) on recommended changes</i>	<i>Fall 2015</i>

*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*