



July 24, 2024

Mendocino County Planning Commission  
501 Low Gap Road  
Ukiah, California

**Re. Agenda Item 6A: Review and consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on proposed adoption of amendments to Division I of Title 20 of Mendocino County Code**

Chair Paulin and Mendocino County Planning Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and offer comments on Mendocino County's proposed amendments to Division I of Title 20 of Mendocino County Code, specifically the inclusion of Transient Habitation–Low Intensity Camping

We appreciate Mendocino County's attention to the benefits of rural recreation, the thoughtful conversations that have taken place on the Board of Supervisors on this topic to date, and Planning and Building Services' work on the proposed ordinance.

Hipcamp partners with landowners in all fifty states and across four countries to open access to private lands for public recreation. Our work is focused on increasing access to the outdoors and on enabling private landowners to participate in and benefit from their local recreation and tourism economies.

In Mendocino County, Hipcamp is proud to work with a community of landowners – from winery owners, farmers, and ranchers, to small business owners, rural residents, and conservation organizations – who are invested in seeing the county support small-scale, incidental camping on private property where appropriate. We have connected with a number of residents on this topic, many of whom have long been welcoming visitors to the community and for whom hosting campers is already a critical source of revenue. The individuals we partner with rely on the income they earn hosting to pay their property taxes, keep farms and ranches economically viable, finance innovative and sustainable land management practices, and generally invest in their properties and agricultural operations. Given this, we are excited to see the draft language before the Commission today.

Hipcamp is supportive of a policy that creates an accessible permitting pathway that lowers the barrier to entry for local landowners to utilize the Low Intensity Camping ordinance. To this end, we encourage the Commission to consider the following:

- **Vehicle length in Sec. 20.176.020(B)** – We ask the Commission to consider removing the requirement of a Use Permit for campsites that can accommodate vehicles, trailers, and RVs over 20 feet.
  - Self-contained RVs are often larger than 20 feet in length, and these larger vehicles would enable a landowner to host a dry campsite. Dry sites don't require infrastructure or additional development, making them the most accessible and low-impact option for many landowners.
  - Small trailers typically range from 15-30 feet in length. Many of these trailers (including pop-up trailers, teardrop trailers, expandable trailers, and single axle trailers) would be excluded by this length limitation.
  - RVs, trailers, and vans are an increasingly popular mode of transportation for campers, and especially for families. This length limitation would prevent individual landowners and Mendocino County from serving this demographic, which is consistently one of the fastest growing segments of the outdoor recreation and camping market.<sup>1 2</sup>
  - Mendocino County already allows temporary camping on private land for up to 10 tents or RVs and up to 30 non-paying guests. There are no size limits for vehicles and RVs that can be accommodated at these sites, and there are no permitting requirements for landowners ([20.168.035](#)).
  
- **Sanitation facilities in Sec. 20.176.020(D)(1)** – We ask the Commission to support dry campsites (sites for self-contained vehicles without any additional infrastructure), and to consider language that allows for portable restrooms and waterless waste facilities like composting toilets. For example –
  - San Benito County, California recently passed a “Low Impact Camping” ordinance that allows for “sanitation facilities that are fully self-contained or connected to a permitted sewage disposal system serving the property” ([25.08.031\(A\)\(5\)](#)).
  - Chaffee County, Colorado’s [“Camping on Private Land”](#) ordinance allows for sewage to be “disposed of off-site by way of personal waste facilities such as wag bags, RV holding tanks, or portable toilets”.
  
- **Permitting and costs** – Hipcamp supports the County’s proposed tiered permitting process for low intensity camping areas; an approval process that is proportional in cost to this lower-impact use will give landowners an affordable entry point into hosting campers. It will also give landowners the flexibility needed to determine what will work best for their unique property before making financial investments. This is especially important for farmers and ranchers for whom camping-based agritourism is a low cost way to diversify income and increase on-site sales while keeping their land in agricultural production. With this in mind, we ask the Commission to ensure this policy creates an

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation and Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> [KOA North American Camping Report](#)

affordable, accessible, and proportional process for local landowners who want to host a small number of incidental campsites.

We look forward to hearing your feedback on these ideas, and are happy to partner with the County and with community stakeholders throughout this process. Please don't hesitate to reach out if there's any additional information we can provide that would be helpful. Thank you for your work on this topic, and more broadly.

Sincerely,  
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