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HIPCAMP

July 31, 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

Dear 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 the Planning Commission's attention to the benefits and impacts of rural recreation, the thoughtful questions and conversation at the Planning Commission meeting last week, and Planning and Building Services' work on the proposed changes.

We ask that you support a low intensity camping policy that makes it easy for landowners to host a small number of campsites on their properties, for the purpose of creating income diversification opportunities for rural residents and expanding access to the outdoors in Mendocino County.

Hipcamp is proud to partner with a group of landowners in Mendocino County who are invested in seeing the county support small-scale, incidental camping on private property where appropriate. Private landowners have long been welcoming visitors to the county and rely on the income they earn hosting responsible campers to pay their property taxes, make mortgage payments, keep farms economically viable, and invest in stewardship and sustainable management practices on their properties.

Hipcamp is supportive of a policy that would support and manage these activities and ensure county oversight, and we would like to see more landowners able to participate in and benefit from it. With this in mind, we offer the following comments and questions:

Permitting requirements: Low intensity, incidental camping is an impactful but supplemental source of revenue for landowners in Mendocino County. Please support permitting requirements that are financially accessible for landowners and proportional to the low-impact nature of these activities.

- Allowing for a single site with a business license, for example, would give landowners an accessible entry point.

Number of campsites: We recommend considering a one campsite per acre density limit to ensure this is a truly low intensity use. This would still allow for clustering of campsites on a property (which can be particularly important for agricultural operators) but would, for example, limit a 2 acre parcel to 2 campsites and a 3 acre parcel to 3 campsites.

- The proposed setback requirement of 250 feet from an off-site residence will also limit the number of sites on smaller parcels and address the concerns raised last week about impacts to neighbors.

Occupancy: We recommend that the county align their occupancy requirements with those found on public lands and ask that the Planning Commission consider an update to the proposed limit of one tent per campsite.

- The US Forest Service and CA State Parks typically allow group sizes of up to 8 at individual campsites.
- The drafted occupancy limit of 10 campers is not compatible with the proposed limit of one tent per campsite. Even with a lower occupancy limit, only allowing one tent per site would likely exclude families. It would also – when combined with the density limitations and permitting requirements listed in item (A) – prevent landowners who are limited to a single site from hosting, for example, two families that want to camp together.
- From an economic perspective, a limit of one tent per site combined with the updated permitting requirements for even a single site may mean the economic value added by hosting campers will not be enough to cover the start-up costs. These restrictions stand to significantly limit the number of residents able to benefit from this policy.

Hosted sites: We agree that supervision and accountability are important here, and are supportive of the proposed updates to this section.

Site map: Would the site map need to be drawn by an engineer? That may be cost prohibitive for many interested landowners. If the site map does not need to be drawn by an engineer, it may be helpful to clarify that and specify what details need to be included in the plan.

Zooming out, private landowners have an important role to play in connecting people with nature and protecting landscapes and habitat – and the state of California agrees. That is why Governor Newsom’s first-of-its-kind [Outdoors for All Strategy](#), aimed at increasing outdoor access across California, specifically recommends in Priority 1.10 (page 23) that local planning departments partner with private landowners to “implement simple, clear, and accessible permitting pathways to allow for low-impact camping on private property...” We applaud Mendocino County for aligning with this key state strategy to increase outdoor equity.

It is in the spirit of our shared goals and vision for outdoor access, rural economic development and land preservation and stewardship that we offer the above comments. Please let us know if we can answer any questions or be supportive of this process in any way.

Thank you,
Cassandra

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