

Permitting Standards

In order to operate a vacation rental, the property owner must obtain both a Vacation Rental Permit and a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) Certificate.

Exception: *Vacation rentals require a Vacation Rental Permit, unless the vacation rental is within the Coastal Zone. Vacation rentals in the Coastal Zone are not yet able to obtain Vacation Rental Permits, but are still required to obtain a TOT Certificate.*

If the vacation rental property is located in an area governed by a homeowners association or similar private entity, permission from that entity is also required prior to operating a vacation rental. Permit Sonoma staff do not enforce private CC&Rs and cannot deny a permit solely because a property has CC&Rs that prevent vacation rentals. All private agreements and restrictions must be upheld or resolved privately.

When do Vacation Rental Permits expire?

Vacation Rental Zoning Permits expire upon sale or transfer of the property. A new property owner is required to apply for a new permit regardless of whether or not the previous owner had a permitted vacation rental in the residence.

What type of Vacation Rental Permit will be required?

A Zoning Permit or Use Permit is required for all Vacation Rentals. Vacation Rentals with up to five (5) guest rooms require a Zoning Permit. Vacation Rentals with six (6) or more guest rooms require a Use Permit. Vacation rentals with more than five guest rooms may only be allowed if adequate sewage disposal capacity exists and neighborhood compatibility can be demonstrated. If a property contains more than two habitable structures or if the number of bedrooms between two structures is more than five, a Use Permit must be obtained prior to operation.

Zoning Permits do not allow special events including weddings, cultural events or other similar activity exceeding the allowable maximum occupancy. If a property owner is interested in providing such services, such activities may be allowed upon issuance of a Use Permit.

How does Permit Sonoma determine whether a property qualifies for a Vacation Rental Permit?

The Vacation Rental Code allows vacation rental use upon issuance of a Vacation Rental Permit in the following zoning districts:

- Single-family residential zoning districts AR, RR, and R1
- Commercial districts C2, LC, and K
- Agricultural and resources zones including LEA, DA, and RRD

The Vacation Rental Code does not permit vacation rentals in the following zoning districts:

- Higher-density residential districts R2 and R3
- Lands within an Agricultural Preserve that are subject to a Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) Contract
- Lands that are part of a Vacation Rental Exclusion (X) Combining District
- Lands within the LIA zoning district (this may change in the future).

What type of structures can be used for the vacation rental?

Vacation rentals may only take place in a single-family residence or in a legally permitted guesthouse.

Vacation rentals may not take place in the following structures:

- Second dwelling units
- Farm family units
- Agricultural employee units
- Non-habitable structures or non-habitable portions of structures