

BUSINESS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HALF MOON BAY

AGENDA REPORT

For meeting of: **November 4, 2025**

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

VIA: Matthew Chidester, City Manager

FROM: Karen Decker, Economic and Community Vitality Manager
Catherine Engberg, City Attorney

TITLE: INTRODUCTION OF AN ORDINANCE ADDING CHAPTER 7.65 “COMMERCIAL VITALITY ORDINANCE” TO THE HALF MOON BAY MUNICIPAL CODE

RECOMMENDATION:

Conduct a public hearing and introduce the first reading of an ordinance adding Chapter 7.65 “Commercial Vitality Ordinance” to the Half Moon Bay Municipal Code, establishing maintenance standards for commercial storefronts.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with introducing this Ordinance. Enforcement will be on a complaint and as-needed basis by existing staff.

STRATEGIC ELEMENT:

This action supports all the Strategic Plan Elements: *Infrastructure and Environment, Healthy Communities and Public Safety, Fiscal Sustainability, and Inclusive Governance.*

BACKGROUND:

At the March 2025 City Council Priorities Setting Workshop, following a series of community listening sessions, concerns were raised regarding neglected and vacant commercial properties. Such conditions contribute to urban decay, diminish property values, deter investment, discourage responsible property ownership, and pose risks to public health and safety. Currently, the City does not have a specific mechanism to regulate empty commercial properties, nor does it require any particular upkeep of commercial properties generally.

DISCUSSION:

City staff has developed a Commercial Vitality Ordinance (Attachment 1) to preserve the aesthetic, economic, and social vitality of Half Moon Bay’s commercial districts by establishing clear maintenance standards for commercial properties, with specific requirements for vacant storefronts. The ordinance builds on existing City and State codes, emphasizing a balance between property owner accountability and collaboration through education and compliance

assistance. The proposed ordinance would add a new Section 7.65 to the Municipal Code, and would require property owners to:

- Notify the City when commercial space becomes vacant.
- Maintain a vacant storefront property in a clean and orderly condition.
- Maintain all commercial properties, including occupied ones, in conformance with general upkeep standards, such as trash management and exterior maintenance.

Enforcement authority would rest with the City's Compliance Officer pursuant to Title 4 of the Code ("Code Enforcement"), with potential fines or nuisance abatement for noncompliance.

Staff reviewed comparable ordinances from other jurisdictions (including Saratoga, San Jose, Santa Cruz, Berkeley, and others) to develop a streamlined, scalable local approach. Outreach included input from the Downtown Association, Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses and real estate representatives, all of whom expressed general support for the initiative.

A study session was held on October 7, 2025, which provided additional community feedback and Council direction. There was general support for honoring the uniqueness of storefronts and avoiding overly prescriptive regulations, while also calling for more specificity around the Compliance Officer's role. Councilmembers also emphasized the importance of encouraging merchants and business operators to take pride and ownership in maintaining their storefronts. Education on proper maintenance practices (e.g., leaf blowing, power washing) was also recommended.

Following the study session, staff revised the draft ordinance to reflect feedback on the initial draft. In particular, staff added provisions to address cleanliness concerns on commercial properties in general:

1. Added a requirement for clean awnings and clear exterior lettering, where used.
2. Required that dumpsters and trash cans be enclosed at all times.
3. Prohibited trash or waste from being left outside trash receptacles.
4. Added general cleaning and maintenance requirements for property exteriors, interiors, and adjoining sidewalks or parking areas.

Instead of attempting to define "blight," the ordinance defines specific upkeep and maintenance obligations for commercial properties, supported by clear enforcement guidelines to ensure consistency. The ordinance also references compliance with the Code generally and applicable provisions of the State Health and Safety Code. This preserves enforcement leverage for the Compliance Officer while maintaining relevant sanitation, structural, nuisance, and safety requirements.

Staff also included examples to Section 7.65.040(B)(7) to provide property owners with options for temporary displays in street-facing windows that have been vacant for more than 90 days. The intent is to encourage storefronts to appear active and visually appealing while minimizing regulatory burden on property owners and limiting the need for extensive staff involvement.

A public notice announcing this first reading was published in the *Daily Journal* on October 24, 2025.

Environmental Review

The Ordinance is not subject to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment), under Section 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378), and under Section 15061(b)(3) (common sense exemption).

Next Steps

If the City Council introduces the Ordinance, a second reading will be scheduled for Council's next meeting. If adopted after that second reading, the Ordinance will become effective 30 days after adoption.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Ordinance adding Chapter 7.65 "Commercial Vitality" to the Half Moon Bay Municipal Code
2. Sample Empty Storefront Registration Form