



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Commission

DATE: April 22, 2026

DEPARTMENT: Community Development

PREPARED BY: Marie Jones Consulting

PRESENTER: Marie Jones

AGENDA TITLE: Receive a Report, Hold a Public Hearing, and Consider Adopting a Resolution Approving Coastal Development Permit 26-0009 (ENT 26-0009) establishing a community event area on the south Coastal Trail, adjacent to the parking lot, which may include large gatherings of people, an event tent, and/or amplified sound. Statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15304 Minor Alterations to Land.

APPLICATION NO.: Coastal Development Permit 26-0009 (ENT 26-0009)
Application submittal March 15, 2026.

APPLICANT: City of Fort Bragg

PROPERTY OWNER: City of Fort Bragg

REQUEST: Coastal Development Permit to establish an area on the south Coastal Trail, adjacent to the parking lot, for community events that may include a large gathering of people, an event tent, and/or amplified sound.

LOCATION: 955 Main Street, 654 W Cypress Street

APN: 018-430-11-00 (33.8 acres), 018-430-10-00 (28 acres)

ZONING: Parks & Recreation/ Coastal Zone

ENVIRONMENTAL

DETERMINATION: Categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15304 Minor Alterations to Land.

SURROUNDING

LAND USES:
NORTH: Coastal Trail
EAST: Mendocino Railroad Mill Site
SOUTH: Noyo River and Pacific Ocean
WEST: Coastal Trail and Pacific Ocean

APPEALABLE PROJECT: Appealable to the California Coastal Commission.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt a Resolution Approving a Coastal Development Permit 26-0009 (ENT 26-0009) a Proposed Event Location adjacent to the parking lot of the south Coastal Trail, located at 955 Main Street (APN 018-430-110) and 654 W Cypress Street (APN 018-430-10), subject to Special and Standard Conditions.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Over the years, various events have been hosted on the Fort Bragg Coastal Trail. The most common events are run/walk fundraisers such as the Whale Run and the Turkey Trot. These events do not include any amplified sound, but they do include small tent structures for sign-in and tables for rehydration, and a significant increase in the number of people utilizing the trail that day. However, the City has also held events with amplified music, a stage, and many attendees, such as the Coastal Trail Grand Opening Event in 2017.

In March, the City received an event application to host a three-day blues festival immediately to the west of the South Coastal Trail. This event is proposed for early May during the bird breeding season, which raised the need to complete a biological survey to identify appropriate mitigation measures to protect breeding birds.

This application presents an opportunity to thoughtfully balance environmental stewardship with the City’s broader goals of community activation and economic vitality. Consistent with the City of Fort Bragg’s Strategic Plan—particularly its focus on invigorating economic opportunity, enhancing community vibrancy, and supporting arts and cultural experiences—the proposed event aligns with ongoing efforts to expand programming, attract visitors, and create meaningful gathering opportunities for residents.

Additionally, this proposal reflects the City’s continued commitment to activating public spaces in a responsible and intentional manner. By leveraging assets such as the Coastal Trail for well-managed events, the City aims to foster a stronger sense of place, support local businesses, and contribute to a more dynamic year-round event calendar—particularly during shoulder seasons.

The City’s Coastal Land Use and Development Code allows events with a Limited Term Permit and no Coastal Development Permit, where no Coastal Resources will be impacted, as follows:

8. Temporary Events Criteria for Exclusion from Permit Requirements.

A. Except as provided in Section B. below, the Director shall exclude from coastal development permit requirements all temporary events except those which meet all of the following criteria:

- a. Are held between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day; and,
- b. Occupy all or a portion of a sandy beach area; and,
- c. Involve a charge for general public admission or seating where no fee is currently charged for use of the same area (not including booth or entry fees).

The proposed event location is not a sandy beach, so per the above section of the CLUDC, a CDP is not required for this event location.

C. Director Discretion to Require a Permit.

The Director may determine that a temporary event shall be subject to coastal development permit review, even if the criteria in Section A are not met, if the Director determines that unique or changing circumstances exist relative to a particular temporary event that have the potential for significant adverse impacts on coastal resources. Such circumstances may include the following:

- a. The event, either individually or together with other temporary events scheduled before or after the particular event, precludes the general public from use of a public recreational area for a significant period of time.
- b. ***The event and its associated activities or access requirements will either directly or indirectly impact environmentally sensitive habitat areas, rare or endangered species, significant scenic resources, or other coastal resources as defined in Article 10 of this Development Code.***
- c. The event is scheduled between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day and would restrict public use of roadways or parking areas or otherwise significantly impact public use or access to coastal waters.
- d. The event has historically required a coastal development permit to address and monitor associated impacts to coastal resources.

The proposed event area has the potential to impact breeding birds, which can be ESHA if they are rare or endangered species.

The recommended mitigation measures that the biologist (WRA) identified for this event area have been incorporated into the Blues Festival Limited Term Permit, and the City Manager has determined that with these protections in place, the event, as proposed, will not impact nesting cormorants or other migratory birds, therefore the Blues Festival is not required to obtain a Coastal Development Permit. See Attachment 2 to review the requirements of the Limited Term Permit.

Nevertheless, the City would like to obtain a Coastal Development Permit for future events at this location and has therefore submitted an application to allow the public and the Planning Commission an opportunity to weigh in on necessary Special Conditions for events in the identified area of the South Coastal Trail.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Coastal Development Permit to establish an area on the south Coastal Trail, adjacent to the parking lot, for community events that may include large gatherings of people, an event tent, and/or amplified sound.



Figure 1: Proposed Event Location

CONSISTENCY WITH PLANNING POLICIES

Land Use & Zoning Standards.

Setbacks. The proposed project is exempt from setback requirements as a temporary structure.

Use. Temporary events are a permissible use in all zoning districts with Limited Term Permit approval.

Coastal General Plan.

The project, as conditioned, is consistent with the following Coastal General Plan Policies.

Policy OS-1.7 Development in areas adjacent to Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas shall be sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade such areas and shall be compatible with the continuance of such habitat areas.

As conditioned, the project will not have any significant habitat or environmental impacts on the only identified ESHA, namely the bird nesting habitat.

Policy OS-14.3: Minimize Disturbance of Natural Vegetation. Construction shall minimize the disturbance of natural vegetation (including significant trees, native vegetation, and root structures), which are important for preventing erosion and sedimentation.

The proposed event location is a heavily utilized and mowed area, and no natural vegetation disturbance will occur as a consequence of holding events in this location.

COASTAL RESOURCES

This section includes an analysis of cultural resources and ESHA for the Coastal Development Permit.

Cultural Resources

The proposed event area consists of a developed parking lot, roadway, welcome plaza, bathroom, and mowed lawn. This area has been surveyed for cultural resources, and there are no known cultural resources in the proposed event area or within 200 feet of the proposed event area. Additionally, ground disturbance will be limited to pounding stakes in the ground to raise tents, and so holding events in this area is unlikely to impact cultural resources.

Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas.

Per the biological assessment (Attachment 3), the Study Area includes the following land cover types:

- Introduced perennial grassland, characterized by non-native grasses.
- Developed areas.

According to the Biological Assessment prepared by WRA in March of 2026, no special-status plants or wildlife were observed during the site assessment. Based on existing conditions, no special-status plants are determined to have the potential to occur in the Study Area.

Based on the Fort Bragg Coastal Trail Biological Report (WRA 2009), several special-status wildlife species were identified to have the potential to occur along the coastal trail project, which included the Study Area. However, per the 2026 Biological Assessment completed by WRA, the “Study Area is unlikely to support any special status wildlife due to low-quality habitat, regular land disturbance activities, and proximity to routine high levels of human activities associated with the parking lot and trail.”

The Biological Report identified one instance of “other wildlife ESHA”.

One cormorant rookery site is present on rocky coastal cliffs approximately 300 feet from the Study Area and is visible from the southwest corner of the Study Area. Additionally, native and migratory birds may nest outside the Study Area but in its vicinity, including in grasslands/shrublands or on coastal cliffs.

WRA recommended that the following Special Conditions be incorporated into any event that includes large numbers of people and/or amplified music for more than one day, to avoid and/or reduce potential impacts to sensitive biological resources.

Special Condition 1: A breeding bird survey is required if the special event is held after February 15th and prior to September 1st to ensure compliance with Fish and

Game Code sections 3503 and 3503.5. The Bird survey will be conducted by a qualified biologist. The survey must occur no more than 7 days prior to the start of music event-related activities and should include areas within 300 feet of the Event Area. If occupied nests are observed during the survey, the biologist would establish a “no disturbance buffer” surrounding the active nest, and project-related activities in the buffer zone would be prohibited until any young present have fledged. The buffer distance shall be established by the biologist based on factors such as the species observed, the type of adjacent disturbance, and the sensitivity of the nesting bird to disturbance.

Special Condition 2: If the special event is held after February 15th and prior to September 1st following components should be included in any live music event conducted in the Event Area:

- Structures associated with the events should be placed at least 300 feet from the cormorant nest, as illustrated in the image below, to avoid visual and auditory disturbance.
- The stage and speakers should be located within a walled tent to reduce visual and auditory disturbance.
- Sound producing equipment should be pointed to the east/southeast which is away from the rookery site.
- Sound reduction/buffering structures should be placed along the south and west perimeter of the tent, or where appropriate, to reduce sound in the direction of the rookery.
- The stage and associated event structures should be placed as far as feasible from the coastal cliffs.



Key: Event Area- Blue Outline, Event Structure Location – Red Outline

Alternatively, the Planning Commission could limit the timing of events in this area so that they do not overlap with the bird breeding season. An alternative special condition that can be considered includes the following:

Alternative Special Condition 1: Events on the Coastal Trail, which include amplified music and/or tents of more than 250 SF, may occur only between September 1 and February 15th to avoid the bird breeding season.

Additionally, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife reviewed both the biological report and a copy of this staff report and recommended the following additional special condition in case mowing is required for a specific event:

Special Condition 3: If an event requires additional vegetation to be mowed or grubbed between February 15th and prior to September 1st (beyond that which is currently mowed by the City), a breeding bird survey shall be conducted by a qualified biologist. The survey would need to occur no more than 7 days prior to the vegetation removal or mowing related and should include areas within 300 feet of the activity. If occupied nests are observed during the survey, the biologist would establish a “no disturbance buffer” surrounding the active nest, and project-related activities in the buffer zone would be prohibited until any young present have fledged. The buffer distance would be established by the biologist based on factors such as the species observed, type of adjacent disturbance, and sensitivity of the nesting bird to disturbance.

Visual Analysis. Visual Analysis as a part of the Coastal Development Review process is required for all projects located in “Potential Scenic Views Toward the Ocean or the Noyo River,” as shown in Map CD-1 of the Coastal General Plan. As shown on the map, the subject parcel is located in this area. However, the visual impacts of an event tent can be limited by limiting the length of time that an event tent is permitted on the headlands. Therefore, the following special condition is recommended.

Special Condition 4: Event tents on the coastal trail shall not be erected for longer than a 14-day period.

Public Access. The project is in an area used by the public to access coastal resources and, therefore, could interfere with public access to coastal resources.

Special Condition 5: Events on the coastal trail will direct event attendees to park on the runway to reserve parking for Coastal Trail visitors. Events shall not block or charge for public access to the coastal trail, coastal trail parking lot, bathrooms, picnic tables, open fields, etc., with signage or any other markings or materials. Applicants can only charge for access to the event itself.

Stormwater Runoff Pollution Control. An event on the Coastal Trail is unlikely to impact stormwater runoff from the site if the event takes place during the summer and

fall months. However, an event could impact runoff in the spring or winter months, which would be addressed by Public Works through the Limited Term Permit review.

Environmental Determination. The project is Categorical Exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), meeting the Public Resources Code exemption §15304 Minor Alterations to Land.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION

1. Hold a hearing on the *Coastal Development Permit*, close the hearing, deliberate, and make a decision regarding the permits at this Planning Commission meeting.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION

2. Hold a hearing, close the hearing, deliberate without a decision, and revisit the application at the next scheduled meeting for a decision and the addition of any new findings.
3. Hold the hearing and continue the hearing to a date certain if there is insufficient time to obtain all input from all interested parties. On the date certain, the Commission may then deliberate and make a decision.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution Approving a Coastal Development Permit 26-0009 (ENT 26-0009) for a Proposed Event Location adjacent to the parking lot of the south Coastal Trail, located at 955 Main Street (APN 018-430-110) and 654 W Cypress Street (APN 018-430-10), subject to Special and Standard Conditions.
2. Draft Limited Term Permit for Fort Bragg Blues Fest.
3. Biological Assessment