



CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

TO: City Council

DATE: April 13, 2026

DEPARTMENT: City Manager's Office

PREPARED BY: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

PRESENTER: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

AGENDA TITLE: Adoption of the “First Year Free: Downtown Activation Initiative” Including Waiver of Limited Term Permit Fees

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a resolution establishing the “First Year Free: Downtown Activation Initiative”, including a 12-month pilot program waiving Limited Term Permit (LTP) fees for qualifying events within the Central Business District (CBD), and authorizing staff to implement supporting activation measures.

BACKGROUND

Downtown Fort Bragg is the heart of our community—and its continued vitality is essential to our local economy, small business success, and overall quality of life.

Over the past two years, the City has made meaningful investments in revitalization, including the launch of the Entertainment Zone, required vacancy registry, façade improvement programs, public space enhancements, and increased focus on economic development. These efforts are beginning to build momentum. The next step is to accelerate activation—making it easier, faster, and more affordable for people to bring energy, events, and new ideas into downtown.

Across California and the nation, cities are shifting toward activation-focused strategies that reduce barriers and encourage participation. A consistent theme has emerged:

When cities reduce friction—cost, complexity, and uncertainty—activity follows.

Permitting costs, even when modest, can disproportionately impact small businesses, nonprofits, and first-time event organizers. More importantly, the perception of complexity can discourage participation altogether.

This initiative also reflects a broader organizational shift underway at City Hall. The City is intentionally evolving from a traditional regulatory approach to a more proactive, facilitator-

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oriented model—one that focuses on helping ideas move forward rather than identifying reasons they cannot. By reducing barriers and improving the customer experience, the City is positioning itself as a partner in bringing community-driven activity and economic opportunity to life.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Staff recommends launching a coordinated pilot program designed to lower barriers, encourage experimentation, and increase downtown activity.

1. Limited Term Permit Fee Waiver (Core Action)

- Waive all or a portion of Limited Term Permit (LTP) fees and Technical Advisory Committee fees for qualifying events within the CBD
- Applies to community events organized by local nonprofits and pop-ups and temporary activations which support local businesses or activate underutilized spaces
- Removes a key financial barrier to entry

2. Streamlined Event Permitting

To complement the fee waiver, the City Manager will work with Staff to streamline the event permitting process in a way that improves efficiency while maintaining appropriate review standards.

As part of this effort, staff will:

- Continue to simplify and clarify application requirements to make the process more user-friendly
- Enhance coordination across departments to reduce redundancies and improve internal communication
- Work toward improving overall processing timelines, with a general target of approximately 10–15 business days for City of Fort Bragg review of qualifying events, where feasible

This timeframe reflects the City’s internal review process and may vary depending on the scope and complexity of the event. Applicants may also be subject to additional timelines associated with external agencies, such as County Health and Environmental Health, which are outside of the City’s control.

3. Downtown Activation Support (Program Elements)

In addition to fee waivers, staff will initiate supportive measures to make activation easier:

- Marketing Support: Promotion through City channels, Visit Fort Bragg, and community calendars

- Event Templates & Guidance: Pre-designed event formats (e.g., live music, night markets, EZ Zone activation, outdoor gatherings) to simplify planning
- Pop-Up Flexibility: Encourage temporary use of vacant or underutilized storefronts, consistent with the City’s vacant property strategies
- Business Engagement: Direct outreach to downtown businesses and entrepreneurs to encourage participation

Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for the program, events must:

- Be located within the Central Business District
- Comply with all applicable safety, insurance, and operational requirements
- Be consistent with community standards and compatible with surrounding uses

Priority will be given to public-facing and community-oriented events, first-time event organizers, and activities that support local businesses or activate vacant or underutilized spaces.

For events that are primarily fundraising in nature, the City may limit fee waivers to up to 30% of applicable permit costs, ensuring the program remains focused on broad community activation while still providing partial support for fundraising efforts.

Pilot Program Duration and Performance Metrics

The proposed program will be implemented as a 12-month pilot period from the date of adoption, allowing the City to test, evaluate, and refine the initiative over time. Throughout the pilot, staff will monitor program effectiveness and track key performance indicators, including the number of events facilitated, attendance and participation levels, business engagement and feedback, and observed impacts on downtown foot traffic and overall economic activity. Staff will report back to the City Council at the conclusion of the pilot period with findings and recommendations regarding the program’s continuation, modification, or expansion.

CONSISTENCY

This proposed program directly supports multiple adopted City priorities, including:

- 2025–2028 Strategic Plan – Economic Development Goal: Revitalize the Central Business District by reducing vacancies and encouraging active use of commercial spaces.
- City Council Goal – Downtown Vitality: Improve the pedestrian experience, strengthen the business climate, and attract investment by addressing visible vacancies.

- Public Safety and Quality of Life Initiatives: Reduce vandalism, illegal dumping, and nuisance activity in vacant properties, thereby improving neighborhood appearance and safety.

By focusing on commercial zones, this ordinance targets the most visible and economically critical areas of Fort Bragg, ensuring a cleaner, safer, and more vibrant downtown for residents, visitors, and investors.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact of the proposed fee waiver is expected to be minimal.

- Current LTP fee (without TAC Committee Review): approximately \$165 per permit
- TAC Committee Review- Minor: \$750
- TAC Committee Review- Major: \$750+/Cost incurred
- Estimated revenue loss: modest and dependent on participation levels

This initiative is intended as a targeted economic development investment, where increased activity is expected to generate broader economic benefits, including increased sales tax, Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT), and local business revenue.

IMPLEMENTATION/TIMEFRAMES:

The Downtown Activation Initiative will be implemented immediately upon City Council approval. Staff will begin outreach and program rollout in coordination with existing economic development and downtown revitalization efforts.

Key implementation milestones include:

- Immediate (May 2026):
Program launch, internal coordination, and outreach to downtown businesses, property owners, and community organizations
- Short-Term (June-August):
Initial events and activations, promotion through City and partner channels, and early program participation
- Mid-Term (September-December):
Continued program expansion, increased frequency of events, and alignment with seasonal programming and downtown initiatives
- May 2027:
Staff evaluation and report back to City Council with recommendations for continuation, modification, or expansion

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement will be a key component of the program’s success. Beginning in May and continuing throughout the pilot period, the City will conduct targeted outreach to

downtown businesses, event organizers, nonprofits, and property owners to encourage participation and gather feedback.

Engagement efforts will include:

- Direct outreach to downtown stakeholders
- Promotion through City communication channels and Visit Fort Bragg
- Collaboration with community partners and local organizations
- Ongoing feedback collection to inform program improvements

These efforts will ensure the program remains responsive to community needs while building momentum and participation over time.

ATTACHMENTS

Resolution