County Of San Diego

Board Of Supervisors

1600 Pacific Highway, Room 335, San Diego, California 92101-2470

Agenda Item

Date: **October 7, 2026** **04**

To: Board of Supervisors

Strengthening Community Revitalization and Economic Development in Jacumba by Initiating a Zoning Ordinance Amendment Process (Districts: 2)

Overview

The County of San Diego General Plan recognizes that communities throughout the unincorporated area have different development patterns, characteristics, and needs. Villages accommodate the greatest intensities of development and a broad range of residential, commercial and civic uses. Jacumba Hot Springs (Jacumba) is designated as a Rural Village, reflecting its role as a community center whilst recognizing its rural, historic, and small-town character and has been experiencing much needed revitalization in recent years through private investment, restoration of historic buildings, and renewed interest in the community as a regional destination.

When the General Plan Update Implementation Programs were adopted in August 2011, direction was given to staff to conduct a Zoning Ordinance Amendment to "ensure that a range of housing types and densities can be achieved and that the designators facilitate development at the maximum density allowed by the general plan."

Other communities have received zoning ordinance amendments and other planning mechanisms that have helped streamline permitting. For example, communities such as Alpine, Bonsall, Fallbrook, Lakeside, Ramona, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, and Valley Center utilize community-specific Design Guidelines to ensure that new development is compatible with each community's established character and identity. Today's recommendations would build on similar efforts in other unincorporated communities by proposing zoning ordinance amendments intended to resolve what many stakeholders view as long-standing inconsistencies between Jacumba's Rural Village policies and its outdated zoning regulations.

The recent revitalization of the Jacumba Hotel and Hot Springs area, construction of the JVR Energy Park, and under construction Jacumba Fire Station #43 projects are located on Old Highway 80, and therefore are recent catalysts for a zoning ordinance amendment to implement the General Plan Chapter 3 Land Use Element Village Designation policies, and Mountain Empire Subregional Community Plan policies, which state the following:

- The Community Character Elements encourages the "development of land in a manner that reinforces the unique identity of the Jacumba Subregional Group Area is unique in both its natural and manmade settings and has a long history of human occupation. These natural attributes - hot springs, desert environment, and clean air - attracted many residents and brought about the town's development."

- The Land Use Element's Residential Goal Policy #3 recommends the "existing rural lifestyle by continuing the existing pattern of residential and agricultural uses on large lots outside of the Rural Villages."

- Current Zoning Discrepancies:
    - Jacumba's historic, visitor-serving hot spring hotel is being successfully restored and thereby creating economic opportunities on its historic main street, Old Highway 80. However, the existing zoning, such as RR - Rural Residential, C31 – Residential-Office Professional, and C36 General Commercial Use Regulations are impediments to further restoration of the resort hotel, despite its Mountain Empire Subregion policy conformance.
    - The hot springs area is designated large lot residential (RR) zone that does not allow for Jacumba's historic and original tourist-oriented recreational opportunities, and the RR zoning district is located within the Rural Village designation.

- The Conservation Element's Environmental Resources Goal to prevent wasteful exploitation of natural resources policy recommendation #6 states that, "the Jacumba Hotel should be restored, if at all possible."

Sponsor Group Recommendation: On Monday, August 12, 2024, the Jacumba Community Sponsor Group (JCSG) unanimously approved a request for PDS staff to initiate a Zoning Ordinance Update using Part Eight: Village Regulations zoning format within the designated Rural Village of Jacumba to implement the County of San Diego's 2011 General Plan, Mountain Empire and Jacumba Subregional Plan (JSRP) policies. JCSG requests that Planning Development Services (PDS) staff amend Jacumba's zoning districts along Old Highway 80 to meet the intent of its Rural Village designation (General Plan Land Use Element Chapter 3), to continue the restoration of the hotel as a catalyst for socio-economic development.

This action is both urgent and a benefit to both the rural village of Jacumba and the overall county. Right now, the town is on the precipice of an economic revival led by the Jacumba Hot Spring Hotel revitalization and new fire station facility. This important action is a minor investment in this historic town encumbered by out-of-date regulations, an immediately adjacent 1,356-acre solar field (under construction), placement of more sex offenders than any other community in the state, and a poverty rate nearly 2.5 times higher than the county average that perpetuates its ongoing poverty cycle.

Through collaboration with the community, the County can advance zoning uses and development standards, establish objective design requirements, accommodate appropriate historic visitor-serving uses, and identify other planning mechanisms that support continued revitalization while preserving Jacumba's unique historic rural village identity. No additional dwelling units than

allowed by the existing General Plan and Mountain Empire Community Plan Area will be proposed with this development standards/zoning regulations update to comply with existing (General Plan and Climate Action Plan) Environmental Impact Report Project Descriptions and Implementation Programs.

The 2011 Jacumba Subregional Group Area: Mountain Empire Subregional Plan recognizes that Jacumba Village Regulations will enable development standards and land uses that are consistent with Jacumba's vision and states, "The community supports new development that is compatible with, and preserves the natural and historical environment, including water resources, and protects existing neighborhoods, manages growth to reinforce the rural small-town character of the area, which includes agriculture, open space, and trails as important elements of the community." And "We hope someday to become the jewel of the backcountry."

Recommendation by Supervisor Joel Anderson and Chair Pro Tem Paloma Aguirre
Direct the CAO to undertake the following efforts in collaboration with the Jacumba community:

1) Advance zoning and development standards consistent with the County General Plan and Mountain Empire Subregional Plan to further the Community's vision for Jacumba. This includes, but is not limited to, new Village Regulations in Jacumba.

2) Host community engagement and public outreach with the Jacumba community to gather public input on the content of the Village Regulations and Objective Design Standards. As part of this outreach, gather community input on pathways to restore historic commercial uses, including outdoor recreation and entertainment services (ZO Sect. 1545c) for the community revitalization and economic development of Jacumba, per the Mountain Empire Subregional Plan.

3) Return to the Board within 12 months with findings and recommendations.

Equity Impact Statement
Supporting organizations such as Jacumba Sponsor Group with this project promotes equity by providing crucial resources and a sense of community for rural villages inhabited by citizens and residents of diverse backgrounds. These rural villages serve as vital hubs where residents can access housing, shops, jobs, places of worship, education and training, and social services. By fostering an inclusive environment, this commitment to equity not only empowers local residences but also strengthens our rural village communities.

Sustainability Impact Statement
The proposed amendment to the San Diego County Code aligns with principles of sustainability by fostering community resilience as directly quoted from the recently adopted Climate Action Plan Introduction, on page 11: "Housing location and type (e.g., detached single family housing, townhome, apartment, condominium) have a significant impact on reducing GHG emissions and creating complete communities. Strategically planning for new housing that meets housing demand and is located in or near places with existing infrastructure services, such as in the County's rural villages, will provide opportunities for residents to live closer to where they work or frequently visit and making walking, bicycling, rolling, or taking transit viable transportation

options. In turn, these communities will have the added benefits of conserving undeveloped open space, protecting environmental and agricultural resources, increasing access to public services and community amenities, and improving quality of life.

Fiscal Impact
There is no fiscal impact associated with today's recommendations. The proposed updates to the zoning and developments standards for the Jacumba community and associated outreach and engagement are included in the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Operational Plan as part of the existing Planning & Development Services (PDS) long range planning workplan based on existing General Purpose Revenue in PDS. The proposed updates can be completed within these existing resources. There would be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Business Impact Statement
The project would simplify and create more streamlined permitting processes resulting in reduced processing times and costs to increase commercial and supportive housing markets and stimulate further economic growth in Jacumba.

Advisory Board Statement
N/A

Background
The County of San Diego General Plan recognizes that communities throughout the unincorporated area have different development patterns, characteristics, and needs. Villages accommodate the greatest intensities of development and a broad range of residential, commercial and civic uses. Jacumba Hot Springs (Jacumba) is designated as a Rural Village, reflecting its role as a community center whilst recognizing its rural, historic, and small-town character and has been experiencing much needed revitalization in recent years through private investment, restoration of historic buildings, and renewed interest in the community as a regional destination.

When the General Plan Update Implementation Programs were adopted in August 2011, direction was given to staff to conduct a "Zoning Ordinance Cleanup" to "ensure that a range of housing types and densities can be achieved and that the designators facilitate development at the maximum density allowed by the general plan."

Other communities have received zoning ordinance amendments and other planning mechanisms that have helped streamline permitting. For example, communities such as Alpine, Bonsall, Fallbrook, Lakeside, Ramona, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, and Valley Center utilize community-specific Design Guidelines to ensure that new development is compatible with each community's established character and identity. Today's recommendations would build on similar efforts in other unincorporated communities by proposing zoning ordinance amendments intended to resolve what many stakeholders view as long-standing inconsistencies between Jacumba's Rural Village policies and its outdated zoning regulations.

The recent revitalization of the Jacumba Hotel and Hot Springs area, construction of the JVR Energy Park, and under construction Jacumba Fire Station #43 projects are located on Old Highway 80, and therefore are recent catalysts for a zoning cleanup to implement the Geneal Plan

Chapter 3 Land Use Element Village Designation policies, and Mountain Empire Subregional Community Plan policies, which state the following:

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An important principle included in the County of San Diego General Plan is to promote health and sustainability by locating growth near existing and planned infrastructure, services, and jobs in a compact pattern of development (Guiding Principle 2). The General Plan establishes a framework for this desired pattern of development through the Community Development Model. As illustrated in the Community Development Model, the "Village" contains the highest intensities of development, including the densest neighborhoods and a broad range of commercial and civic uses. Outside of the Village are areas of lesser intensity, including "Semi-Rural" and "Rural" lands.

The Village Regulations proposed as part of this project facilitate the development and implementation of sustainable and livable communities as envisioned by the General Plan. General Plan Policy LU-9.3, Village and Community Core Guidelines and Regulations, specifically calls for development and implementation of design guidelines and Village-specific regulations for roads, parking, noise, and other planning and regulatory mechanisms that recognize the unique operations and character of Villages. Furthermore, development of Focused Area Plans, or in this case FBCs, is an implementation measure described in the General Plan Implementation Plan to achieve compact, sustainable communities.

Strengthening Community Revitalization and Economic Development in Jacumba by Initiating a Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Jacumba Rural Village (District 2)

Since the General Plan was adopted in 2011, other communities have received zoning ordinance amendments and other planning mechanisms that have helped streamline permitting. For example, communities such as Alpine, Bonsall, Fallbrook, Lakeside, Ramona, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, and Valley Center utilize community-specific Design Guidelines to ensure that new development is compatible with each community's established character and identity. Updating Jacumba's zoning regulations and developing an Objective Design Standards Checklist would provide an opportunity to address this gap.

The Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation is directing cities and counties across the State to implement Objective Design Standards with streamlined permit processing regulatory tools. These are used to enable more predictable built outcomes in exchange for more streamlined permitting that results in reduced processing times and costs to build more attainable housing. Enhanced design requirements within the villages will foster a rural village sense of place for Jacumba, making roadways and building facades more attractive when applied to new renovation projects.

To promote sustainability, according to the County's recently adopted Climate Action Plan, vehicle trips are captured within the rural village by allowing for a wider mix of uses that enable walking and biking to access everyday needs, stemming suburban sprawl into the rural and natural lands. More flexible regulations enable the rebuilding of historic structures that reuse existing buildings. And more flexible regulations provide for a wider variety of housing types within the village, enabling market rate housing to be built in the rural village, beyond what is currently allowed under existing zoning regulations (large lot single-family homes). Another element of this project is the adoption of design review checklists for specified areas of Jacumba that will allow applicants to comply with a ministerial design review checklist provided specific requirements are met.

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with Jacumba's vision and states, "The community supports new development that is compatible with, and preserves the natural and historical environment, including water resources, and protects existing neighborhoods, manages growth to reinforce the rural small-town character of the area, which includes agriculture, open space, and trails as important elements of the community." And "We hope someday to become the jewel of the backcountry."

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Linkage To The County Of San Diego Strategic Plan
This subject links to the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan with the following strategic initiatives: 1) The importance of community engagement; 2) Create policies to reduce and eliminate poverty, promoting economic sustainability for all; 3) Utilize policies, facilities, infrastructure, and finance to provide housing opportunities that meet the needs of the community; 4) Dismantle barriers to expanding opportunities in traditionally underserved communities and businesses, especially communities of color and low income; 5) Advance opportunities for economic growth and development to all individuals and the community; 6) Facilitate meaningful conversations, shared programming, grant opportunities, or other opportunities to maximize resources through community partnerships to benefit the region, and; 7) Contribute to a system of restorative justice that strives to repair harm to victims and to the community at large, as well provide inclusive opportunities for justice involved individuals to contribute to the region (for example, JVR Energy Park, pedophile relocation, and Parks and Recreation not maintaining Jacumba Community Park).

Respectfully submitted,

Joel Anderson
Supervisor, Second District

Paloma Aguirre
Supervisor, First District

Attachment(s)
N/A