



Community Development Agency

Planning Department

Planning@nevadacountyca.gov
www.nevadacountyca.gov/Planning

950 Maidu Avenue, Suite #170
PO BOX #599002
Nevada City, CA 95959

PH: (530) 265-1222 ext. 2
FAX: (530) 265-9854

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

APPLICANT: County of Nevada

Hearing Date: November 13, 2025

FILE NO: PLN25-0084; ORD25-1: Recreational Vehicle Dwelling Ordinance

PROJECT: Public hearing to consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to adopt an Ordinance to add Section 12.03.151 to the Nevada County Code Title 12 Zoning Regulations to establish health and safety standards, permitting and certification requirements, and site development standards allowing for recreational vehicles as an additional residential unit on developed properties subject to the permitting and standards outlined in the draft Ordinance.

LOCATION: Unincorporated Nevada County

PROJECT PLANNER: Brian Foss, Planning Director

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Ordinance, adding Nevada County Code Title 12: Zoning Regulations, Chapter 3: Specific Land Uses, Section 12.03.151 - Recreational Vehicle Dwelling; amending the definition of Recreational Vehicle in Section 12.06.010; and amending Tables 12.02.220.B and 12.02.030 to allow recreational vehicles as dwellings in the Rural and Residential Agriculture zoning districts with zoning compliance and building permit approval.
2. Redline Version of Draft Ordinance showing changes from Public Review Draft based on comments.
3. Public Comments Received.

RECOMMENDATION:

- I. **Environmental Action:** Recommend that the Board of Supervisors find the project categorically exempt pursuant to Sections 15303, and 15305 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines as the project does not increase density and permits recreational vehicles as dwellings within those zoning districts that would otherwise allow traditional built housing of the same type.
- II. **Project Action:** Recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Ordinance, (*Attachment 1*), adding Nevada County Code Title 12: Zoning Regulations, Chapter 3: Specific Land Uses, Section 12.03.151: Recreational Vehicle Dwelling, to establish health and safety standards, permitting and certification requirements, and site development standards to allow Recreational Vehicles as dwelling units within those zoning districts that would otherwise allow traditional built housing of the same type; amending the definition of Recreational Vehicle in Section 12.06.010; and amending Tables 12.02.220.B and 12.02.030 to allow recreational vehicles as dwellings in the Rural and Single-Family zoning districts with an Administrative Development Permit.

BACKGROUND:

At the 2024 Board Workshop, the Nevada County Board of Supervisors directed the Community Development Agency to identify updates to the Nevada County Code to allow for the development of alternative housing types in support of the Housing Board Objective. Specifically, the Board of Supervisors directed the Planning Department to develop an Ordinance to allow Tiny Homes on Wheels (THOWs) and to reestablish and redefine the County's Title 25 Limited Density Rural Owner-Built Housing Regulations. Both Tiny Homes on Wheels and Title 25 regulations were adopted by the Board on January 14, 2025.

Throughout the Tiny Homes on Wheels project, the most consistent comment received was that the Tiny Homes on Wheels ordinance did not go far enough and that the County should consider additional alternative housing. As a result, the Board directed staff to follow up with a review and a potential ordinance that might allow alternative housing types that are not traditionally considered permanent housing.

This direction is in alignment with a 2025 Nevada County Board of Supervisors Objective to adapt to the needs of the community to provide innovative housing opportunities to Nevada County's low income and most vulnerable resident populations.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE: The definition of a "recreational vehicle" (RV) is established under State law. The definition would include: "A motor home, travel trailer, truck camper, or camping trailer, with or without motive power, designed for human habitation for recreational, emergency, or other occupancy that is structurally sound, safe to occupy and protect occupants from the elements." The proposed ordinance would require residential RVs to maintain valid registration with the Department of Motor Vehicles and comply with ANSI/NFPA safety standards. Permitting requirements would be similar to the existing standards for Tiny Homes on Wheels.

Residential use of an RV would be authorized through a Zoning Compliance and Building Permit review and a Certificate of Use permit. This permit would be required to be renewed every two years and would involve inspections from applicable Community Development Agency departments. Additionally, building permits for grading and electrical work, as well as Environmental Health permits for well and septic systems, would be required as part of the review and approval.

Residential RVs would be permitted only as additional dwelling units on a developed site, as they are required to connect to existing infrastructure. Eligible parcels would be at least three acres in size to ensure adequate space for both well and septic systems. Only one residential RV would be allowed per parcel, and all units would have to comply with the setback requirements of the applicable zoning district. Residential RVs would be allowed in RA Single-Family zoning districts, as well as all rural zoning districts (AG, AE, FR, TPZ).

In addition, residential RVs would be subject to specific design and construction standards including the following:

- The undercarriage, including wheels and axles, would be required to be screened from view with fixed, solid materials at all times during habitation.
- RV Units would be placed on a paved or graveled surface, and wheels would have to remain on the vehicle and the tires would have to remain inflated. The RV would have to be properly tied down, anchored, and/or stabilized.
- At elevations above 3,200 feet, RVs would have to be either constructed to meet snow load requirements or placed beneath a ramada that meets these standards.
- All residential RVs must meet the minimum requirements for habitable structures, including functional heating, lighting, hot and cold water, kitchen facilities, a toilet, and a sink. Fire extinguishers and provisions for solid waste disposal would also be required.
- Any modifications to the RV would require a American National Standards Institute (ANSI) inspection.

- As part of the application process, applicants would be required to submit a Fire Protection Plan that identifies evacuation routes and includes a fuel management strategy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMENTS RECEIVED: The County recognizes the importance of community engagement and the benefits of collaborative efforts with the public to ensure the amendments are transparent and easy to understand. To facilitate community engagement, the Planning Department presented the alternative housing work plan to the Board of Supervisors on April 22, 2025, and held a community meeting on May 27, 2025, to receive community input to shape the Recreational Vehicle Dwelling Ordinance. To further engage the community, a survey was conducted from July 11, 2025, to August 10, 2025, which resulted in approximately 1,900 responses which were used as guidance for developing the ordinance. As an example of the survey results, 72% of respondents believe that RVs, motorcoaches, cabover campers, converted buses (etc.) should be considered a viable solution to the ongoing housing crisis in Nevada County, so long as they meet all applicable health and safety standards. The public review period of the draft ordinance commenced on August 20, 2025, and closed on September 22, 2025. Another public workshop was held at the Grass Valley Veterans Memorial Hall on September 9, 2025. Meetings were held with the South County Municipal Advisory Council on September 15th and the Penn Valley Municipal Advisory Council on September 23, 2025. The comments received varied widely from support of the ordinance to full opposition of the ordinance and some suggested revisions to the proposed standards. The comments received are attached.

ORDINANCE MODIFICATIONS BASED ON PUBLIC INPUT:

Staff made modifications to the Ordinance based on comments received and include the following:

- Removal of the Administrative Development Permit requirement for initial approval. Instead, the RV's are proposed to be permitted through a site plan and building permit review process that will reduce costs.
- The R1 zone district was eliminated from the allowable zoning districts. In reviewing the potential properties in the County that met the criteria within the R1 zone district only 87 parcels were eligible and 27 of those were developed with residences. This modification addresses some of the concerns about RV dwelling use in more dense neighborhoods.
- Clarification that RV's must have dedicated access separate from the primary dwelling to hot and cold potable water, kitchen, toilet and lavatory facilities.
- Prohibit storage of combustible materials under the RV unit.

A redline version of the Ordinance is attached illustrating the modifications to the Ordinance based on public input.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: Pursuant to Section 15305 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines "Minor Alterations to Land Use Limitations", the draft Ordinance is not anticipated to result in potential physical impacts to the environment as the project does not increase density and permits recreational vehicles as dwelling units within those zoning districts that would otherwise allow traditional built housing of the same type. These units will be subject to the same site development and resources protection standards as any other housing unit allowed in the unincorporated area of Nevada County. Furthermore, the ordinance provides for the ministerial approval of recreational vehicles as permanent housing. The RV residences authorized by the ordinance qualify as small structures and are therefore exempt under CEQA Guidelines §15303.

Furthermore, while the adoption of a new ordinance is typically considered a discretionary action subject to CEQA, this ordinance is statutorily except because it implements the County's Housing Element to address the critical need for affordable housing. Specifically, the ordinance is exempt under the provisions of recent state laws (such as AB 130 and SB 131) that streamline the approval of housing projects and actions. AB 130 reinforces

the policy that an ordinance directly tied to implementing the Housing Element and meeting RHNA numbers is a key part of the state's solution to the housing crisis. SB 131 exempts rezoning actions that implement the schedule of actions in an approved housing element, such as RC-8.4.7 which states “The County shall annually review its land use regulations, policies, practices and development review process to determine areas where constraints can be removed on the development of housing for lower-income, senior citizen and households with persons with disabilities.”

SUMMARY: The Nevada County Board of Supervisors directed staff to develop an ordinance to allow recreational vehicles (RVs) as residential dwelling units to expand affordable housing options. The ordinance would require DMV registration, compliance with ANSI/NFPA safety standards, and approval through a renewable Certificate of Use permit with inspections. RVs would be limited to one per parcel of at least three acres in size, allowed in specific single-family and rural zoning districts, and subject to design, safety, and habitability standards, including snow load compliance and fire protection planning. Community input guided development of the ordinance, which has been found exempt from CEQA review.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission take the following actions:

- I. **Environmental Action:** Recommend that the Board of Supervisors find the project categorically exempt pursuant to Sections 15303, and 15305 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines as the project does not increase density and permits recreational vehicles as dwellings within those zoning districts that would otherwise allow traditional built housing of the same type.

- II. **Project Action:** Recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Ordinance, (Attachment 1), adding Nevada County Code Title 12: Zoning Regulations, Chapter 3: Specific Land Uses, Section 12.03.151: Recreational Vehicle Dwelling, to establish health and safety standards, permitting and certification requirements, and site development standards to allow Recreational Vehicles as dwelling units within those zoning districts that would otherwise allow traditional built housing of the same type; amending the definition of Recreational Vehicle in Section 12.06.010; and amending Tables 12.02.220.B and 12.02.030 to allow recreational vehicles as dwellings in the Rural and Single-Family zoning districts with an Administrative Development Permit.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian Foss, Director of Planning