Noise Related in Issues in Contra Costa County

OCTOBER 7, 2025

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Background

- Noise concerns are frequently raised with the County by members of the public, including at Municipal Advisory Council (MAC) meetings and in complaints to Code Enforcement and other County offices.
- Noise issues were expressed at community meetings convened by the Supervisors and the Department of Conservation and Development (DCD) as part of the Envision Contra Costa Process to gather input for the ongoing update to the County's General Plan.
- The County has existing regulations to address noise and in recent years has taken steps to strengthen regulations.
- In 2024, the Board directed staff to reach out the community, further examine what else can be done and report back to the Board with recommendations. That work has been completed and this presentation is the report back to the Board.

Summary of Current Regulations and Board Actions to Strengthen

- California Penal Code 415, Disturbing the Peace. Sheriff's Office utilizes this long-standing tool to report violations to the District Attorney for possible prosecution as a misdemeanor when a third-party witness is willing to attest to the offense.
- County General Plan includes noise standards appropriate for various land use designations. Land use permits must be consistent with these standards (1991).
- Temporary Events Ordinance (2005).
  - Established limitations on excessive noise for certain events.
- Increased fine amounts for violations of temporary event ordinance, Ordinance No. 2022-16 (2022).
- Urgency Interim Ordinance No. 2022-23 (2022)
  - Modified temporary event regulations to close down perceived "loopholes".
  - DCD staff and Sheriff's Office collaborated to increase enforcement efforts.
- Revised Temporary Events Ordinance No. 2024-07 (2024).
  - Incorporated the regulations established in Ordinance No. 2022-23 into the permanent ordinance.
- Board of Supervisors directs staff to conduct community outreach and develop recommendations on noise issues (2024).
- Board approved new General Plan, including noise-related Action item HS-A14.1to study the feasibility of a noise ordinance (2024).

Noise Concerns Review Timeline

- DCD was authorized by the Board of Supervisors on March 5, 2024, to evaluate noise related issues in Contra Costa County
- A survey on noise related issues was sent to all Municipal Advisory Councils on June 14, 2024.
- A working group meeting was held on September 16, 2024, to discuss the survey and solicit input on any additional noise concerns.
- Staff reviewed input and options with potential enforcement partners in the spring of 2025 to assess the feasibility of additional noise regulations.
- A follow-up working group meeting was held on July 8, 2025, to discuss potential new regulations and associated enforcement options.

Noise Issue Survey

- Survey on Noise-Related Issues in Contra Costa County sent to all Municipal Advisory Committees for distribution to members/constituents.
- Survey distributed on June 23, 2024.
- 100 responses received thru the survey close on September 17, 2024.

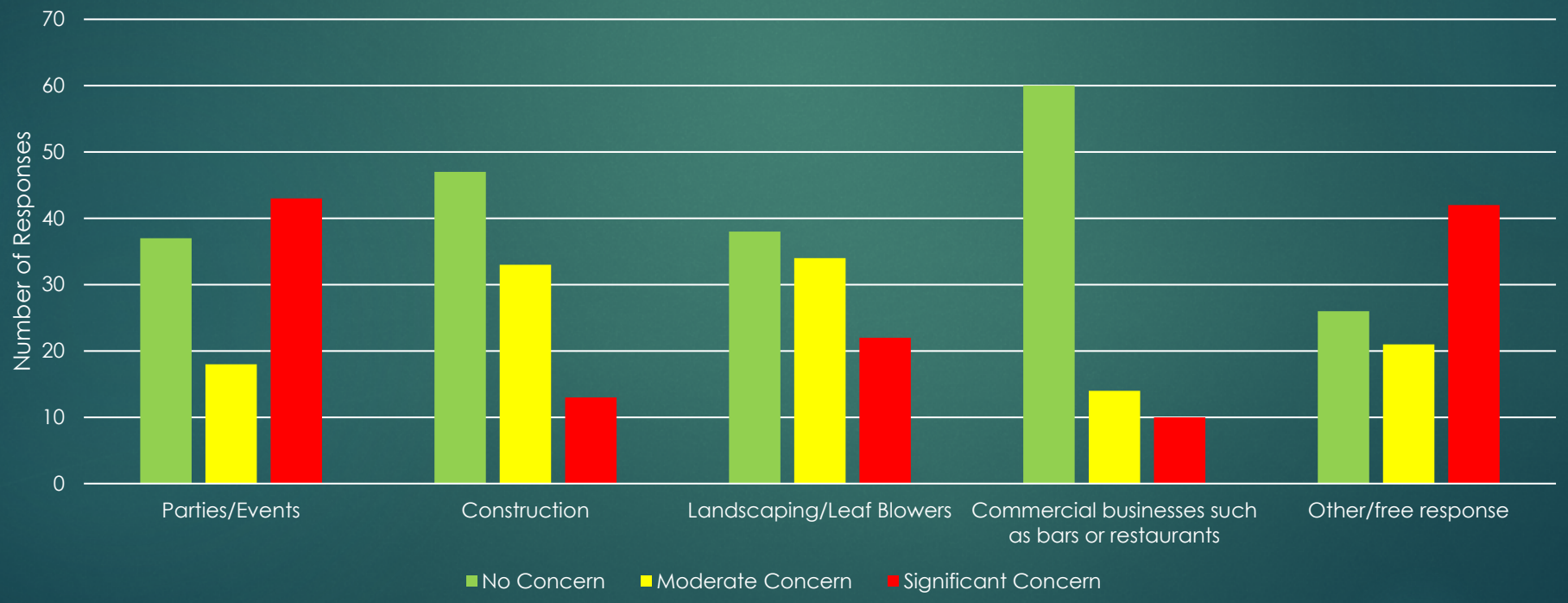
Summary of Noise Issues Survey Results

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest concern and 5 being the highest, how concerned are you with noise issues in the community?

1	13
2	4
3	19
4	26
5	38

Summary of Noise Issues Survey Results (continued)

Survey results below and informal show of hands at September 19, 2024 meeting indicate that party noise is the most significant concern of those providing feedback.



Working Group Meetings

Key Issues Discussed at September 19, 2024 and July 7, 2025 Meetings:

- Contra Costa County residents have strong concerns about existing noise-related nuisances within the unincorporated communities.
- Specific areas of concern include loud parties, construction, vehicular noise, leaf blowers, gunshots and fireworks. Loud parties were identified as the most significant concern.
- Staff provided details on existing regulations as well as limitations on our ability to enforce any potential new regulations.
- Following consultation with the Sheriff's Office between the first and second working group meeting, staff proposed possible new regulations for two key areas of noise concerns: loud parties and construction.
- Community residents in attendance at the second meeting generally seemed receptive to new regulations but some expressed concern that enforcement of current and proposed regulations be effective.

Enforcement

Challenges with Enforcement of Noise Regulations

- Excessive sounds or vibrations occurring outside of typical working hours when DCD staff may not be available, or Sheriff's staff resources may be limited.
- Some sounds and vibrations occur intermittently or irregularly.
- Sounds or vibrations can carry long distances.
- Many activities, including many common and necessary activities, can have noise impacts. It can be hard to reach consensus on which impacts are acceptable and which are not.
- Establishing and upholding a threshold for an unreasonable level of noise can be challenging to measure.
- The cost of enforcing new regulations, primarily with respect to increased demand for staff time, is not currently known but could be significant.

Clear-cut standards offer potential for effective enforcement of tightened regulations

- Sheriff's Office and DCD suggest that defining specific periods of time when readily observable activities cannot occur is a reasonable approach for further strengthening noise regulations.

Preliminary Proposal

DCD recommends new regulations be developed to address two specific areas of concern:

1) Outdoor Amplified Sound

- Propose regulations to prohibit all outdoor amplified sound after 10:00pm on Friday and Saturday and after 8:00pm on other nights.
- Proposed regulations would be consistent with existing prohibitions on amplified sound in the Temporary Events Ordinance but would apply whether or not there was a gathering or "event".
- Propose clarifying that amplified sound be considered outdoor if emanating from an indoor location but doors or windows are left open.

2) Construction-Related Noise

- Propose new regulations to apply construction work hours to all projects requiring a building permit. Precise limitations to be determined as regulations drafted. Currently, construction work hour limitations are only imposed on projects that require some form of discretionary approval. A process to provide limited exceptions and afford some flexibility should be evaluated for possible inclusion.

New regulations proposed to be enforceable by both DCD and Sheriff's Office. A wide range of enforcement options, including citations and administrative fines, would be explored for inclusion.

Additional Considerations and Observations

- Noise regulations to address general vehicular noise or leaf blowers are not recommended because such activities are prevalent, the noise is a byproduct of the activity, and fleeting or short-lived noises are difficult to regulate.
- Noise regulations to address gunshots or fireworks are not recommended because these activities are separately regulated.
- Additional specific regulations would strain enforcement capacity of Sheriff's Office and DCD.
- Any new regulations would only apply to the unincorporated areas of Contra Costa County.

Next Steps

- Board direction to staff is requested.
- Should DCD be directed to move forward with developing new noise regulations, staff will develop a draft ordinance pursuant to the Board's direction and present the draft ordinance and staff analysis to the County Planning Commission to receive public input and Commission recommendations.
- Following presentation to the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors would consider the draft ordinance, staff analysis, public input and Planning Commissions recommendations at a public meeting.

Thank you.

Public inquiries outside of the Board meeting may be directed to Grant Farrington at DCD.

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