

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

TO: Office of Planning and Research
State Clearinghouse Unit
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Submitted via CEQA Submit online portal

FROM: City of Watsonville
Community Development Dept.
250 Main Street
Watsonville, CA 95076

Clerk of the Board
Santa Cruz County
701 Ocean Street, Room 520
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Project Title: Watsonville Metro Project

Project Location - Specific: ± 0.97 acre parcel at 475 Rodriguez St, Watsonville, CA 95076 (APN 017-011-56)

Project Location - City: Watsonville

Project Location - County: Santa Cruz

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: Approval of Design Review Permit with Environmental Review and Density Bonus Application (PP2025-8936) to allow the construction of the Watsonville Metro Project (Proposed Project). The Proposed Project involves a partnership between Santa Cruz METRO and MidPen Housing in redeveloping the existing Watsonville Transit Center into a new, 6-story, mixed-use development with integrated transit facilities, commercial space, and housing. The project aims to transform the site into a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented and transit-connected node consistent with the objectives of the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan (DWSP).

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: City of Watsonville

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Santa Cruz METRO and MidPen Housing

Exempt Status (check one):

- Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- Categorical Exemption. State type and section number:
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: PRC § 21155.4, GOV § 65457(a), and CEQA Guidelines § 15182.

Reasons why project is exempt: The Proposed Project qualifies for a statutory exemption from further environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21155.4, Government Code Section 65457(a), and CEQA Guidelines Section 15182. Public Resources Code Section 21155.4 and Government Code Section 65457(a) provide that CEQA does not apply to residential development projects, mixed-use development projects, or zoning changes that are undertaken to implement and are consistent with a specific plan for which an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was certified after January 1, 1980, and the conditions described in the Public Resources Code Section 21166 and the CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 (relating to preparation of a supplemental EIR) are not present. An EIR was prepared for the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan (DWSP) in accordance with CEQA (State Clearinghouse No. 2022100602) and was certified by the City Council on October 10, 2023. The DWSP EIR is a Program EIR; therefore, projects found to be consistent with the DWSP are eligible for exemption from additional CEQA review.

The Proposed Project has been evaluated under CEQA Guidelines Section 15182 and meets all applicability criteria for the exemption. The Project is consistent with the DWSP for which an EIR has been certified, and conforms to the general use designation, residential density, building intensity, and applicable policies for the

Project area. The proposed mixed-use development consisting of transit and commercial uses on the ground floor and housing above are permitted uses under the DWSP Regulating Plan, and the proposed residential density and building intensity conform with City standards in the General Plan. The Project is consistent with applicable policies and development standards in the DWSP, with requested modifications allowed per State Density Bonus Law.

The Proposed Project would be required to implement all applicable mitigation as adopted as part of the approval of the DWSP EIR. The Project would not increase the likelihood of the project to have a significant impact on an environmental resource.

Further, the City determines that the findings of CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 concerning the decision not to prepare a subsequent EIR or negative declaration and the findings of California Code, Public Resources Code Section 21155.4 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15182) concerning the decision to exempt the project from further CEQA review can be made in the affirmative. As supported by substantial evidence contained within this Notice of Exemption and associated consistency checklist, the City makes the following findings:

- No substantial changes are proposed in the Project which would require major revisions of the previous EIR.
- No substantial changes have occurred with respect to the circumstances under which the Project is undertaken.
- There is no new information of substantial importance which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of due diligence at the time the previous EIR was certified as complete.
- Neither the proposed Project nor changed circumstances will require major revisions to the previous EIR due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.


Overall, the Proposed Project would not result in new or more severe significant environmental impacts beyond those analyzed in the certified DWSP EIR, nor would it require new or substantially different mitigation measures. As all relevant impact areas and mitigation measures identified in the DWSP EIR that apply to the Proposed Project are adequately addressed and the Project does not trigger the conditions described in CEQA Guidelines Section 15162, the Project falls within the scope of the DWSP EIR and is exempt from further environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15182.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Matt Orbach

Telephone: 831.768.3075

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature:  **Date:** February 18, 2026 **Title:** Zoning Administrator

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____