1	Adopted: October 1, 2025				
2	Effective: October 24, 2025				
3	SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL				
4	Snohomish County, Washington				
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6	ORDINANCE NO. 25-047				
7					
8	RELATING TO NONCONFORMING STRUCTURES AND USES; AMENDING				
9	SECTIONS 30.28.070, 30.28.072, AND 30.91N.050, AND REPEALING SECTION				
10	30.28.075 OF THE SNOHOMISH COUNTY CODE				
11					
12	WHEREAS, a nonconforming structure is defined in Snohomish County Code				
13	(SCC) 30.91N.050 as a structure that met all the required development regulations,				
14	such as building height and setbacks, when it was first established, although it no longer				
15	does; and				
16	N/UEDEAO				
17	WHEREAS, a nonconforming use is defined in SCC 30.91N.070 as a use of land				
18	or a structure that was allowed when established, although is no longer allowed; and				
19	WHEREAS, the County Code has regulated pencenforming structures and uses				
20 21	WHEREAS, the County Code has regulated nonconforming structures and uses				
22	since the Code's adoption in 1966; and				
23	WHEREAS, the intent of such regulations has been and will remain to allow a				
24	nonconforming structure to continue for the life of the structure, and to allow for				
25	nonconforming uses to remain until abandonment and even expand under certain				
26	circumstances; and				
27					
28	WHEREAS, since the adoption of Title 30 SCC, the Unified Development Code,				
29	in 2002, regulations related to nonconforming structures and uses have only been				
30	updated twice; and				
31					
32	WHEREAS, state law does not regulate nonconforming uses and structures, so				
33	there is diversity in how local jurisdictions address the issue; and				
34					
35	WHEREAS, there are inconsistencies between the three nonconforming use				
36	provisions, there are issues with implementation of the provisions as identified by staff				
37	and the Snohomish County Hearing Examiner, and the current regulations lack				
38	important references to other provisions of Title 30 SCC; and				
39					
40	WHEREAS, the amendments contained in this ordinance reduce inconsistencies				
41	by repealing SCC 30.28.075, clarifying criteria for expanding nonconforming uses by				

amending SCC 30.28.072(4), and expressly requiring that any expansions of nonconforming structures or uses must comply with all development regulations; and

WHEREAS, a 21-day early public comment period on draft amendments occurred from January 22 through February 12, 2025, where comments received from staff as well as the Washington State Department of Ecology ("Ecology"), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and The Tulalip Tribes led to further amendments now contained in this ordinance; and

WHEREAS, on April 22, 2025, the Snohomish County Planning Commission (the "Planning Commission") was briefed by Snohomish County Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff about the code amendments contained in this ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on May 27, 2025, to receive public testimony concerning the proposed code amendments contained in this ordinance; and

WHEREAS, at the conclusion of the Planning Commission's public hearing, the Planning Commission deliberated on the proposed ordinance and voted to recommend approval of the code amendments relating to nonconforming structures and uses as shown in its May 28, 2025, recommendation letter; and

WHEREAS, on October 1, 2025, the Snohomish County Council ("County Council") held a public hearing after proper notice, and considered public comment and the entire record related to the code amendments contained in this ordinance; and

WHEREAS, following the public hearing, the County Council deliberated on the amendments contained in this ordinance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED:

Section 1. The County Council makes the following findings:

- A. The foregoing recitals are adopted as findings as if set forth in full herein.
- B. This ordinance proposes to amend SCC 30.28.070, 30.28.072, and 30.91N.050 and to repeal SCC 30.28.075 to increase consistency throughout Title 30 SCC and clarify criteria for expansion of nonconforming structures and uses.
- C. In developing the proposed code amendments, the County considered the goals of the GMA identified in RCW 36.70A.020, specifically those goals related to economic

1. GMA Goal 5 – Economic development. Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.

Many nonconforming uses are business related. These proposed amendments protect the ability to maintain and, under certain circumstances, expand nonconforming uses and structures to ensure business viability without compromising the welfare of neighboring properties.

2. GMA Goal 6 – Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.

The proposed amendments state that nonconforming uses and structures are permitted to be maintained and clarify how expansions can occur to ensure that the private property rights of the nonconforming use or structure owner as well as neighboring properties can be maintained.

3. GMA Goal 7 – Permits. Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

The proposed amendments better define ordinary maintenance, clarify expansion criteria, and increase consistency throughout Title 30 SCC allowing for more predictability and efficiency in permit processing.

D. The proposed amendments will better achieve, comply with, and implement the goals and policies of the Puget Sound Regional Council's Vision 2050 Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs), including the following policies:

1. MPP-DP-47: Streamline development standards and regulations for residential and commercial development and public projects, especially in centers and high-

2		range of project types consistent with the regional vision.			
4 5			The proposed amendments better define ordinary maintenance, clarify expansion criteria, and increase consistency across Title 30 SCC to allow for more		
6 7			predictability and efficiency in permit processing.		
8		2.	MPP-H-10: Encourage jurisdictions to review and streamline development		
9			standards and regulations to advance their public benefit, provide flexibility, and minimize additional costs to housing.		
10 11			minimize additional costs to nousing.		
12			The proposed amendments better define ordinary maintenance, clarify expansion		
13			criteria, and increase consistency throughout Title 30 SCC to allow for more		
14 15			predictability and efficiency in permit processing.		
16		3	MPP-Ec-17: Preserve and enhance the region's unique attributes and each		
17		0.	community's distinctive identity and design as economic assets as the region		
18			grows.		
19					
20			Nonconforming uses and structures can contribute to the uniqueness of		
21			neighborhoods and communities. Proposed amendments confirm the		
22			commitment to the retention of these uses and structures in Snohomish County.		
23 24	F	Th	e proposed amendments will better achieve, comply with, and implement the		
25	L .	goals and policies contained within the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs),			
26		_	sluding the following policy:		
27		1110	during the following policy.		
28		1.	CPP-ED-16: The expeditious processing of development applications shall not		
29			result in the reduction of environmental and land use standards.		
30					
31			The proposed amendments better define normal maintenance, clarify expansion		
32			criteria, and increase consistency throughout Title 30 SCC to allow for more		
33			predictability and efficiency in permit processing.		
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35	F.	Th	e proposed amendments will better achieve, comply with, and implement the		
36		goals, objectives, and policies of the Snohomish County GMA Comprehensive Plan			
37		(G	(GMACP), including the following:		
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39		1.	HO Policy 3.A.2: Development standards and building permit requirements shall		
40			be reviewed on a continual basis to ensure clarity and consistency while		
41			providing for a timely, fair, and predictable application processing outcome.		

capacity transit station areas, to provide flexibility and to accommodate a broader

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 2. ED Policy 2.A.3: To ensure timeliness, responsiveness, and increased efficiency, the county shall maintain a program of continuous review of the permitting process to eliminate unnecessary procedures that do not respond to legal requirements for public review and citizen input.

The proposed amendments better define normal maintenance, clarify expansion criteria, and increase consistency throughout Title 30 SCC to allow for more predictability and efficiency in permit processing related to nonconforming uses and structures.

- G. The proposed code amendments are consistent with the record:
 - SCC 30.28.070 is proposed to be amended to clarify that nonconforming structures may remain for the life of the structure and be improved or repaired if doing so is in full compliance with all requirements within Title 30 SCC including the fire code and critical area regulations.
 - a) Staff and the public are often confused about how many walls can be repaired or replaced and still be considered ordinary maintenance. Proposed amendments help define ordinary repair by specifying that up to 50 percent of the total number of exterior walls can be replaced. Amendments also clarify that all exterior walls cannot be removed and the entire structure cannot be replaced or rebuilt, even in the same footprint, under the banner of ordinary maintenance. This is not consistent with the intent of allowing a nonconforming structure to remain for the life of the structure, whereas ordinary repair and maintenance can be a part of the normal life of a structure.
 - b) Improvements and repairs cannot create or expand a nonconformity and any expansion must be done in compliance with all applicable code requirements. While nonconforming structures are allowed to be maintained, proposed amendments make it clear that any proposed expansion must comply with all applicable codes so that new nonconformities are not created. For instance, an expansion of an existing building could not be proposed within a critical area without compliance with critical area regulations like any other newly proposed structure in unincorporated Snohomish County.
 - c) If a nonconforming structure is accidentally destroyed, it may only be rebuilt if it complies with all of Title 30 SCC. An exception to this general

rule exists if it was a historic building. Even if the destroyed nonconforming structure is historic and could be rebuilt in the same footprint, proposed amendments require the restoration to be in compliance with the building and fire codes and receive an approved building permit.

- d) Some nonconforming structures, such as larger garages or accessory structures, could become conforming with the issuance of a conditional use permit. The proposed amendments require a conditional use permit in these situations if an applicant also applies for a building permit to do an improvement or repair. The intent is to require such structures to become conforming to current code when possible.
- e) This code section has not been updated to incorporate nonconforming uses and structures section within the County's Shoreline Management Program. SCC 30.67.450 supersedes the nonconforming use and structure provisions within Chapter 30.28 SCC, although there is no cross reference within Chapter 30.28 SCC. Proposed amendments add this reference to SCC 30.28.070 and SCC 30.28.072 to ensure staff and the public are aware of the requirements of the Shoreline Management Program.
- 2. Proposed amendments to SCC 30.28.072 clarify that all expansions of nonconforming uses must comply with Title 30 SCC and provide criteria for such expansions.
 - a) Proposed amendments specify that any expansion of a nonconforming use must obtain any required permits. For instance, a land disturbing activity permit is required for an expansion in ground area if 7,000 square feet or more of clearing is necessary or 2,000 square feet or more of new plus replaced hard surfaces is proposed. Similar to newly proposed text within SCC 30.28.070, there is also proposed language within SCC 30.28.072(4) to require a conditional use permit if the use would become conforming by obtaining such a permit. The intent of this amendment is to convert nonconforming structures to conforming structures whenever possible.
 - b) Without identifying quantitative and clear criteria for when a use can be expanded, it is difficult to ensure consistent review and application of County Code. The proposed amendments add clarity to existing criteria through measurable statements, illustrative examples, and definitions. For instance, an expansion cannot be approved under existing code if it is

"detrimental to surrounding properties," although existing code does not provide guidance allowing for consistent application of this criterion. To help staff implement this criterion, SCC 30.28.072(g) is proposed to include examples of expansion that are considered detrimental. Similarly, under current code, an expansion under SCC 30.28.072(h) cannot "result in a significant increase in the intensity of the use of the nonconformity" and proposed amendments are intended to provide quantitative measures for what is considered significant. These proposed amendments provide backstops for staff when applying the code to a given proposal, while still allowing for some flexibility. These proposed amendments are also similar to code provisions found in other jurisdictions' nonconforming codes such as King County, Kitsap County, and the City of Tacoma.

c) Proposed amendments also aim to clarify that the total sum of expansions in ground area and building area for nonconforming uses is limited to 100 percent of what existed when the use became nonconforming. This is to prevent multiple permit applications over time that result in a more than doubling of the nonconforming use. The proposed amendments also require that any expansion to a ground area or building area must comply with all applicable Title 30 SCC requirements.

d) Amendments add the restoration subsections from SCC 30.28.075 into SCC 30.28.072 as SCC 30.28.075 is proposed for repeal.

3. SCC 30.28.075 is repealed to both ensure consistency with SCC 30.28.072 and because requirements currently found in the section have been recodified in SCC 30.28.072.

4. SCC 30.91N.050 is amended to clarify that a nonconforming structure can be nonconforming to more than just bulk regulations. A nonconforming structure exists when the structure no longer complies with any of the requirements in Title 30 SCC.

H. The code amendments are consistent with the record as set forth in the PDS Staff Report dated April 22, 2025.

I. The amendments have been evaluated for the potential to create barriers to the implementation of low impact development (LID) principles and measures for stormwater management. The updates will not impact LID principles or measures as any expansion of any structure must comply with all development regulations including

those related to drainage and land disturbing activities. The amendments do not create a barrier to the use of LID techniques for stormwater management.

 J. The amendments will not have an impact on the demand for capital facilities and utilities. County and external service providers maintain long-range plans and financing strategies to meet projected service demands that will not be impacted by the amendments.

K. The amendments will not negatively impact housing and job creation in the County. Existing nonconforming structures and uses can remain in place, and nonconforming uses that may include businesses may increase under specific circumstances if the business need arose. By allowing modest increases in nonconforming uses, the amendments may result in a net gain in job creation.

L. Procedural requirements:

1. The proposal is a Type 3 legislative action under SCC 30.73.010 and 30.73.020.

2. As required by RCW 30.70A.106(1), a notice of intent to adopt the proposed code amendments was transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for distribution to state agencies on May 13, 2025.

3. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), Chapter 43.21C RCW, requirements with respect to this non-project action was satisfied through the completion of an environmental checklist and the issuance of a determination of non-significance on May 13, 2025.

4. The public participation process used in the adoption of the proposed code amendments has complied with all applicable requirements of the GMA and SCC.

 5. As required by RCW 30.70A.370, the Washington State Attorney General last issued an advisory memorandum in October 2024 entitled "Advisory Memorandum and Recommended Process for Evaluating Proposed Regulatory or Administrative Actions to Avoid Unconstitutional Takings of Private Property" to help local governments avoid unconstitutional takings of private property. The process outlined in the State Attorney General's 2024 advisory memorandum was used by the County in objectively evaluating the regulatory changes in this ordinance.

Section 2. The County Council makes the following conclusions:

2 A. The proposal is consistent with Washington State law and the Snohomish County Code.

B. The proposal is consistent with the GMACP and with the goals, objectives, and policies of the GMACP.

8 C. The County has complied with all SEPA requirements with respect to this nonproject action.

D. The regulations proposed by this ordinance do not result in an unconstitutional taking of private property for a public purpose.

E. The County complied with the state and local public participation requirements under the GMA and Chapter 30.73 SCC.

Section 3. The County Council bases its findings and conclusions on the entire record of the County Council, including all testimony and exhibits. Any finding, which should be deemed a conclusion, and any conclusion which should be deemed a finding, is hereby adopted as such.

Section 4. Snohomish County Code Section 30.28.070, last amended by Amended Ordinance No. 25-014 on March 19, 2025, is amended to read:

30.28.070 Nonconforming structures.

(1) *Continuance*. Any legally established nonconforming structure is permitted to remain <u>for the life of the structure</u> in the form and location in which it existed on the effective date of the nonconformance;

The following requirements apply to nonconforming structures:

(2) Improvements and repairs.

 (a) Nonconforming structures may be structurally altered or enlarged with the required permits only if the ((setback, height, lot coverage, and open space)) altered or enlarged portion of the structure complies with all current and applicable local, state, and federal regulations. ((requirements of the zone in which the structure is located are met; except when to:))

(((a))) <u>(b)</u> Repair <u>to</u> the existing <u>nonconforming</u> structure including ordinary maintenance or replacement of <u>up to 50 percent of the total number of exterior</u>

1	walls, fixtures, or plumbing shall be permitted so long as the exterior dimensions
2	of the structure, as it existed on the effective date of the nonconformance, are no
3	increased((; or)). Demolition and reconstruction of nonconforming structures is
4	not ordinary maintenance.
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6	(((b) Convert an existing nonconforming structure)) <u>(c)</u> <u>Nonconforming structures</u>
7	may be converted into an accessory dwelling unit pursuant to SCC
8	30.28.010(2)(d)(iv)((;)) <u>.</u>
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10	(3) Restoration. A structure that is accidentally destroyed may be fully restored only if
11	((the setback and yard)) all applicable title 30 SCC requirements ((of chapter 30.23
12	SCC)) are met ((unless)) . If the structure is listed on the National Register of Historic
13	Places, Washington State Cultural Resource Inventory, or Snohomish County Cultural
14	Resource Inventory, ((in which case,)) the structure may be restored and located in its
15	former location despite noncompliance with the bulk regulations:
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17	(a) Regardless of historical status, a building permit, compliance with subtitle
18	30.5 SCC, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act are required
19	to restore a structure that is accidentally destroyed;
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21	(b) To restore a destroyed nonconforming structure, a building permit application
22	must be submitted to the department within one year of the destruction; and
23	
24	(((b))) <u>(c)</u> A structure shall be considered destroyed for purposes of this section i
25	the restoration costs exceed 75 percent of assessed value of record when the
26	damage occurred.
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28	(4) If a nonconforming structure would become conforming by obtaining either a
29	conditional use permit or an administrative conditional use permit, such permit shall be
30	required to structurally alter, enlarge, or restore the nonconforming structure. The
31	conditional use permit or administrative conditional use permit is required in addition to
32	any other required permit, such as a building permit and land disturbing activity permit.
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34	(5) Structures that do not conform to the Snohomish County Shoreline Management
35	Program or the policies of the Shoreline Management Act shall comply with SCC

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30.67.450.

Section 5. Snohomish County Code Section 30.28.072, last amended by Amended Ordinance No. 13-007 on September 11, 2013, is amended to read:

30.28.072 Nonconforming uses.

(2) *Changes*. Nonconforming uses may only be changed to other uses that are allowed by ((this title)) chapter 30.22 SCC in the zone within which the nonconforming use is located.

(3) Abandonment. If a nonconforming use is abandoned or discontinued for a period of 12 consecutive months or more, the nonconforming status of the use is terminated, and any future use of the land or structures shall be in conformity with the provisions of ((this)) title 30 SCC. The mere presence of a structure, equipment, or material shall not be deemed to constitute the continuance of a nonconforming use unless the structure, equipment, or material is actually being occupied or employed in maintaining such use.

(4) Expansion. A nonconforming use may be expanded upon approval of <u>required</u> <u>permits.</u> ((an)) An administrative conditional use permit ((-)) <u>shall be required whenever</u> <u>an expansion of a nonconforming use is proposed; provided, however, if obtaining a conditional use permit would make such use conforming, a conditional use permit shall <u>be required instead.</u> The department may impose conditions upon the expansion of the use to minimize impacts and ensure compatibility with nearby existing and potential uses. A nonconforming use may be expanded if the department determines that the following criteria are met:</u>

(a) The area proposed for expansion is contiguous to the nonconforming use;

(b) The area is held under the same ownership as the land with the nonconforming use and has been so owned since immediately prior to the time the use ((has become)) became nonconforming;

(c) The area for expansion is an area where the use would have been allowed immediately prior to the time the use became nonconforming;

 (d) ((The expansion)) For a nonconforming use located outside of a structure, the cumulative total of all expansions shall not increase the ground area devoted to the nonconforming use by more than 100 percent of that in use at the effective date of the nonconformance((, except that within)) . Within the UC ((zone)) and MUC zones the ((expansion)) cumulative total of all expansions shall ((not increase the ground area devoted to the nonconforming use by more than)) be limited to a maximum increase of 10 percent of ((that existing)) ground area from what existed at the effective date of the nonconformance. The increase in ground area must comply with all current and applicable title 30 SCC provisions;

(e) ((The expansion)) For a nonconforming use located inside of a structure, the cumulative total of all expansions shall not increase the ((ground area covered by the structural portion)) building footprint of the structure or portion of the structure housing the nonconforming use by more than 100 percent of that existing at the effective date of the nonconformance((, except that within)). Under this subsection, expansion of the building footprint can include utilizing more of an existing building than the nonconforming use previously occupied, additions to existing buildings, and construction of new building(s) that house the nonconforming use. Within the UC ((zene)) and MUC zones the ((expansion)) cumulative total of all expansions shall not increase the ((ground area covered by the structural portion)) building footprint of the structure or portion of the structure housing the nonconforming use by more than 10 percent of that existing at the effective date of the nonconformance. New and expanded buildings that house an expanded nonconforming use must comply with all current and applicable title 30 SCC provisions;

(f) Any expansion in ground area or building footprint shall not create a new nonconforming use or structure. If the structure housing the nonconforming use is a nonconforming structure, any expansions shall also comply within SCC 30.28.070;

(((f))) <u>(g)</u> The expansion shall not be approved if it is found to be detrimental to surrounding properties((, or to the implementation of the adopted comprehensive land use plan for the area;)). Detrimental in this section is defined as, but is not limited to, increased hours of operation or increased light, glare, or noise;

(((g))) (h) The expansion shall not be ((granted)) approved if it would result in a significant increase in the intensity of the use of the nonconformity. A significant increase is a 10 percent or greater increase in average daily trips to the site, or an increase of 10 percent or greater required minimum parking spaces. If multiple expansions are proposed over time, the aggregate increase related to criterion (h) shall not exceed the 10 percent limit as calculated from when the use became nonconforming;

(((h) Within the UC zone reconstruction of a destroyed nonconforming use is not permitted unless it complies with the requirements of chapter 30.34A SCC; and))

 (i) ((For purposes of this section "ground area" includes, but is not limited to, building footprint, paved surface parking, enclosed outdoor storage area, and enclosed outdoor service areas.))

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The expansion shall not be approved if it would result in a net loss of critical area functions or values as demonstrated by a critical area study if required pursuant to chapter 30.62A SCC; and

- (j) To be approved, the applicant must demonstrate that the expansion will further the goals, objectives, and policies of the Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan, including the Land Use Element.
- (5) Uses that do not conform to the Snohomish County Shoreline Management Program or the policies of the Shoreline Management Act shall comply with SCC 30.67.450.
- (6) A structure housing a nonconforming use that is accidentally destroyed may be restored under SCC 30.28.070(3).
- Section 6. Snohomish County Code Section 30.28.075, added by Amended Ordinance No. 02-064 on December 9, 2002, is repealed.
- Section 7. Snohomish County Code Section 30.91N.050, last amended by Amended Ordinance No. 13-007 on September 11, 2013, is amended to read:

30.91N.050 Nonconforming structure.

- "Nonconforming structure" means a structure which was lawful when established and which no longer conforms to the ((setback, height, or lot coverage requirements of the zone in which it is located)) provisions of title 30 SCC.
- **Section 8.** Severability and Savings. If any section, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance shall be held to be invalid by the Growth Management Hearings Board (Board), or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity or unconstitutionality shall not affect the validity or constitutionality of any other section, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance. Provided, however, that if any section, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance is held to be invalid by the Board or court of competent jurisdiction, then the section, sentence, clause, or phrase in effect prior to the effective date of this ordinance shall be in full force and effect for that individual section, sentence, clause, or phrase as if this ordinance had never been adopted.

1	PASSED this 1st day of October 2025.	
2		CNOLIOMICH COUNTY COUNCIL
3		SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
4 5		Snohomish County, Washington
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7		Council Chair
8	ATTEST:	
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10	Lise Highly	0
11	Asst. Clerk of the Council	
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14	(X) APPROVED	
15	() EMERGENCY	
16	() VETOED	DATE: October 14, 2025
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20		County Executive
21	ATTEST:	
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23	<u>Melíssa Geraghty</u>	
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25 26	Approved as to form only:	
27		
28	J- /23/25	
29	Deputy Prosecuting Attorney	
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