

Date: August 20, 2026

To: Honorable Chair and Members of the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee

From: Aram Chaparyan, City Manager

By: Jamie Le, Assistant to the City Manager | JLe@TorranceCA.gov

Subject: City Manager – Review and Provide Direction on Appropriated Resource Contributions and Cottage Food Ordinance Related to the Neighborhood Coordinated Seaside Ranchos Holiday Lights Display. Expenditure: None.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation of the City Manager that the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee:

1. Review and Provide Direction on the Appropriated Resource Contributions to the Neighborhood Coordinated Seaside Ranchos Holiday Lights Display; and
2. Provide Direction to the Cottage Food Ordinance as it relates to the Neighborhood Coordinated Seaside Holiday Lights Display.

DISCUSSION

The Seaside Ranchos Holiday Lights Display is a long-standing, resident-organized holiday tradition that attracts significant pedestrian and vehicle traffic to the Seaside Ranchos neighborhood each December. The display is not a City-sponsored or City-sanctioned event; however, the volume of visitors requires the City to deploy resources to address traffic management, public safety, sanitation, parking, code enforcement, and other impacts to the surrounding neighborhood.

Cottage Food Ordinance

On March 26, 2025, the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee reviewed the City's resource contributions and Cottage Food Ordinance as they related to the holiday lights. During the 2024 Holiday Season, Residents discovered a loophole in Torrance's Cottage Food Ordinance. Rules restricted the hours when residents could sell food directly, but did not clearly apply those same restrictions when food was technically given away in exchange for a "donation."

Public comments reflected differing perspectives regarding the City's involvement. Residents discussed the regional popularity and positive economic and community impacts of the display, concerns regarding roaming and unregulated vendors, the City's resource commitment, and opportunities for residents to assume a greater role in coordinating and financially supporting activities associated with the display. One neighborhood representative reported approximately 80,000 visits to the neighborhood's website during the prior holiday season.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee unanimously recommended closing the Cottage Food Ordinance loophole by applying operating-hour restrictions to food provided in exchange for "donations." The Committee also directed staff to continue working with interested community members regarding potential funding mechanism to offset City costs.

Following the Committee's direction and subsequent City Council action, the City's Cottage Food regulations were amended. Ordinance No. 3952 expanded the definition of cottage food activity, addressed food distribution and fundraising, prohibited residents from allowing non-residents to use their property for cottage food operations, and extended permitted December operating hours to 8:00 p.m.

Code Enforcement and Cottage Food Citations

The 2025 holiday season provided the City with an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes and the level of enforcement required. City records reflect 52 cottage food administrative citations totaling \$13,300, involving seven residential locations. In addition, warnings were issued to property owners who subsequently complied, and Code Enforcement documented 13 sidewalk vendors, including one repeat vendor.

2025 Code Enforcement Activity	Total
Residential locations receiving citations	7
Administrative citations issued	52
First violations – \$100	22
Second violations – \$200	13
Third/subsequent violations – \$500	17
Total value of citations issued	\$13,300
Sidewalk vendors documented	13
Repeat sidewalk vendors	1

The citation data demonstrates that enforcement was concentrated among a relatively small number of locations, with repeat violations accounting for a significant portion of enforcement activity. Of the 52 citations, 30 were second or subsequent violations, including 17 citations at the \$500 level.

The City's enforcement records also identify property owners who received warnings and complied without requiring citations. This distinction is important because the City's operational approach includes education and voluntary compliance in addition to formal enforcement.

City Resources

For the 2025 holiday season, Non-labor resources totaled approximately \$13,400. An anticipated cost of \$176,906 in labor resources was estimated to manage impacts incurred by the resident led event; however, due to staff availability, not all scheduled shifts were able to be filled.

Non-Labor and Operational Resources included:

- Approximately 20 trash bins with coordinated collection;
- Two illuminated message boards for traffic and parking information;
- Informational door hangers for Seaside Ranchos residents;
- Contract Code Enforcement support; and
- A dedicated City webpage providing information regarding City contacts, parking violations, County public health requirements, sanitation, traffic and signage, and Code Enforcement.

Staff anticipates continued deployment of:

Function	Staff Deployed	Deployment
Traffic control equipment – setup	1 Traffic Painter + 1 Maintenance Worker	3 days × 8 hrs
Daily signage/message board monitoring	1 Maintenance Worker	16 days × 1 hr
Linda Dr./PV Blvd. traffic closure	1 Traffic Painter + 1 Maintenance Worker	10 days × 6 hrs
Traffic control equipment – breakdown	1 Traffic Painter + 1 Maintenance Worker	2 days × 8 hrs
Police traffic control	2 Motor Officers + 1 Service Officer or Police Officer	22 days × 7 hrs
Police bicycle patrol	1 Police Sergeant + 3 Police Officers	22 days × 7 hrs
Code Enforcement	Senior Code Enforcement Officer + Code Enforcement Officers	Various days × 4 hrs
Traffic Control Plan preparation	Engineering Technician, Assistant Engineer, Associate Engineer, Engineering Manager, City Engineer	Various hours

The largest ongoing deployment is Police. On a typical fully staffed night, the deployment plan calls for 7 Police personnel: 2 Motor Officers, 1 Service Officer/Police Officer, 1 Sergeant, and 3 bicycle officers.

Public Works handles the physical traffic-control infrastructure—message boards, "No Stopping" signs, directional signage, traffic-control devices, and the Linda/PV Boulevard closure.

Code Enforcement provides evening enforcement coverage, while Engineering performs the advance traffic-control planning.

The 2025 experience indicates that traffic management, public safety, and enforcement continue to require a substantial City presence during the holiday season. Staff will continue to communicate with the Seaside Neighborhood Association and coordinate across departments in preparation for the 2026 holiday season while maintaining the City's longstanding position that the Seaside Ranchos Holiday Lights Display remains a resident-organized event and not a City-sponsored or City-sanctioned event.

Staff requests that the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee review the information presented regarding the 2025 Seaside Ranchos Holiday Lights season and

1. Provide direction on the appropriated resource contributions including:
 - a. City Resource Deployment – Continuing the City's anticipated public safety, traffic control, Code Enforcement, Public Works, Engineering, sanitation, and communication resources at generally the same service levels utilized during the 2025 holiday season; and
 - b. Neighborhood Coordination - Direction on the City's continued coordination with Seaside Ranchos residents regarding traffic, sanitation, parking, food operations, visitor communications, and other neighborhood impacts; and

2. Provide Direction on the Cottage Food Ordinance – Direction on continuing enforcement of the updated Cottage Food Ordinance, including the operating-hour requirements and enforcement of repeat violations.

Staff will incorporate the Committee's direction into operational planning for the 2026 holiday season and return to the City Council if additional authorization or resources are necessary.

ATTACHMENT

1. Cottage Food Operations FAQ

Cottage Food Operations – Frequently Asked Questions

The City's cottage food regulations allow residents to operate small food businesses from their homes while maintaining the residential character of neighborhoods and minimizing impacts on surrounding properties. The regulations implement **California's Homemade Food Act (AB 1616)** and establish local standards for where, when, and how cottage food businesses may operate.

1. What is a cottage food operation?

A cottage food operation is a small food business operated from a private residence. California law allows certain approved foods to be prepared in a home kitchen and sold to the public, subject to State, County, and local requirements.

The City treats cottage food operations as **limited home occupations rather than commercial storefronts**.

2. Why does the City regulate cottage food operations?

The regulations are intended to:

- Allow residents to operate small cottage food businesses from their homes.
- Implement California's Homemade Food Act.
- Protect the residential character of neighborhoods.
- Minimize parking, traffic, noise, odor, and other impacts on neighboring properties.
- Prevent residential properties from functioning as commercial storefronts.
- Establish clear operating standards and a predictable approval process.

3. What approvals are required?

Applicants must obtain both:

- A **Cottage Food Home Occupation Business License**; and
- A **Zoning Clearance** from the City.

Applicants must submit a site/floor plan showing that the business is limited to the kitchen and one additional room, including storage, and that adequate parking is available for the permitted employee.

Before a City business license can be issued, the applicant must also provide proof of the appropriate Los Angeles County Public Health approval:

- **Class A Registration**, or
- **Class B Permit**.

4. Who can operate a cottage food business from a residence?

The cottage food operator must be a **primary resident of the home** where the business operates.

If the operator is a tenant, written authorization from the property owner or apartment manager is required. HOA authorization is also required when applicable.

The business may have **one full-time equivalent employee**, excluding household or family members.

5. Can someone who does not live at the property use the home to operate or sell cottage food?

Under the City's current regulations, **no**.

The property cannot be sublet or otherwise made available to someone who does not reside there for the purpose of operating a cottage food business.

This requirement also helps ensure compliance with State cottage food requirements. State requirements generally provide that food sold as part of the cottage food operation must be prepared at the approved residence.

City staff has found that when properties allow outside individuals or groups to sell from a residence, there have been instances involving products that are not included on the State's approved cottage food list or products that do not comply with prepackaging and labeling requirements.

Allowing individuals who do not reside at the property to conduct cottage food sales from the property is one of the changes residents have requested that the City Council consider.

6. Where on the property can cottage food activities take place?

Operations must occur **inside the primary residence**.

The business is limited to:

- The kitchen; and
- One additional room, including any space used for storage.

Garages, attached or detached accessory structures, yards, and other outdoor areas cannot be used for the cottage food operation.

7. Can cottage food sales take place in the front yard?

Under the City's current regulations, **no**. Cottage food operations are required to occur within the primary residence, and outdoor areas cannot be used for cottage food operations.

Allowing sales from front yards is one of the changes residents have requested that the City Council consider.

8. What are the permitted hours of operation?

The City's current operating hours for sales, distribution, fundraising, and related cottage food activities are:

January 1 – November 30:

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

December 1 – December 31:

9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

A cottage food business cannot begin operating until all required State, County, and City approvals have been secured.

9. Why does the City limit evening operating hours?

The hours are intended to balance opportunities for cottage food businesses with potential impacts on residential neighborhoods.

Code Enforcement Officers work until **9:00 p.m.** Requiring cottage food sales to end by 8:00 p.m. during the December extended-hours period provides an opportunity for Code Enforcement to monitor and address potential issues before the end of the enforcement workday.

The limitation also helps prevent sales activities from continuing late into the evening and creating potential noise, traffic, parking, or other impacts for adjacent residents.

Allowing longer operating hours is one of the changes residents have requested that the City Council consider.

10. How many customers can be at the property at one time?

The City's current regulations allow **one customer at the property at a time.**

Additionally:

- On-site dining is prohibited.
- Customer loitering is prohibited.
- At least one off-street parking space must be available for customers and deliveries.

Allowing multiple customers at the property at the same time is one of the changes residents have requested that the City Council consider.

11. What are the parking requirements?

At least **one off-street parking space** must be available for customers and deliveries.

Required residential parking, including required garage parking, cannot be converted to or taken over by the business.

Delivery vehicles may not:

- Park illegally;

- Unnecessarily idle; or
- Interfere with traffic or neighborhood circulation.

12. Can customers eat food at the residence?

No. On-site dining is prohibited.

Cottage food operations are intended to function as limited home-based businesses and not as restaurants, cafés, or other food establishments where customers remain on the property to consume food.

13. What types of food can be sold?

Operators may only produce and sell foods authorized under California's cottage food requirements and must comply with applicable Los Angeles County Public Health requirements.

Operators are responsible for:

- Producing only foods on the approved cottage food list.
- Completing required cottage food operator training within three months of registration or permitting.
- Maintaining sanitary operations.
- Properly packaging and labeling cottage food products.
- Remaining within applicable gross annual sales limits.
- Maintaining the required County Public Health registration or permit.

14. What standards protect neighboring properties?

A cottage food operation must remain unobtrusive and compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.

Operations may not create:

- Unreasonable odors, fumes, or emissions detectable by a reasonable person beyond the property line.
- Noise exceeding applicable residential standards.
- Parking or traffic conditions that interfere with neighborhood circulation.
- Other impacts inconsistent with the residential use of the property.

15. What happens if a cottage food operation does not follow the rules?

The City may:

- Deny an application when requirements are not met.

- Require revisions before approving an application.
- Take enforcement action when an operation violates applicable requirements.
- Revoke an existing approval if the business no longer complies with City or County requirements.

Zoning clearances are **nontransferable**.

16. What changes are residents asking the City Council to consider?

Residents have identified several provisions they would like the City Council to reconsider, including:

1. **Allowing cottage food sales from front yards.**
2. **Allowing more than one customer on the property at a time.**
3. **Extending the permitted hours for cottage food sales.**
4. **Allowing individuals who do not reside at the property to conduct cottage food sales from the property.**

These requests would modify the City's existing standards.

17. Which proposed changes raise particular enforcement or compliance concerns?

Two areas present additional operational and compliance considerations:

1. **Extended Hours of Operation:** Extending sales later into the evening could reduce the City's ability to monitor activity during Code Enforcement operating hours and could increase the potential for noise, parking, traffic, and other neighborhood impacts.
2. **Sales by Non-Residents:** Allowing individuals who do not live at the property to conduct sales could make it more difficult to ensure that products were prepared at the approved residence and comply with State requirements regarding eligible foods, packaging, and labeling.

Maintaining these provisions provides safeguards intended to keep cottage food operations consistent with State requirements while minimizing impacts on residential neighborhoods.