



**A Guide to your City Government**

**Prepared by the City Clerk's Department**

Revised 2025

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## **Santa Cruz History and Background**

In 1769 the Spanish explorer Don Gaspar de Portola discovered the land area which is now known as the City of Santa Cruz. When he came upon the beautiful flowing river, he named it "San Lorenzo" in honor of Saint Lawrence, and he called the rolling hills above the river "Santa Cruz," which means holy cross.

Twenty-two years later, in 1791, Father Fermin de Lasuen established a mission at Santa Cruz, the twelfth mission to be founded in California. Across the San Lorenzo River, in what is now known as East Santa Cruz, Villa de Branciforte was established. It was founded by the Spanish as one of three civil settlements or "pueblos" in California. The other pueblos were San Jose and Los Angeles. Villa de Branciforte later merged with the Mission Santa Cruz community across the river.

By the 1820s, Mexico had assumed control of the area and within the next twenty years, Americans began to arrive in great numbers. California became a state in 1849, and Santa Cruz County was created in 1850 as one of the twenty-seven original counties.

By the turn of the century, logging, lime processing, agriculture, and commercial fishing industries prospered in the area. Due to its mild climate and scenic beauty, Santa Cruz also became a prominent resort community.

Santa Cruz was incorporated on March 31, 1866 as a town under the laws of the State of California and received its first charter as a City in April, 1876. At that time the City was governed by a Mayor and Common Council consisting of four members.

In 1907, the citizens voted for a new charter designating a Mayor as chief executive and a City Council consisting of seven members. Subsequent charters gave a Mayor and four Commissioners both executive and administrative powers. At that time the City was divided into five departments: Public Affairs, Revenue and Finance, Public Health and Safety, Public Works, and Streets and Parks.

In 1948, the City of Santa Cruz adopted a new City Charter. This charter established a Council/Manager form of government, with a Mayor and six Councilmembers setting policy for the City and a City Manager serving as the chief administrator of those policies. This Charter, with amendments, is still in existence today.

Today, information about the City can be accessed through its home page on the Internet. The website address is [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com).

## **City Statistics**

### **Population**

62,581 (approximate) 2024

### **Area**

11.05 square miles

### **Climate**

Mild

Average Temperatures: High—70 degrees; Low—45 degrees

Average Rainfall: 32 inches per year

### **Location**

Situated on the northern part of Monterey Bay about 74 miles south of San Francisco and 30 miles from San Jose

### **City Parks and Recreation Facilities**

Three open space reserves; twenty-six neighborhood parks; six tennis courts; one community center; one Civic Auditorium, one 18-hole golf course, one disc golf course; one skate park; one bike park, one lawn bowling green, two bocce ball courts, one+ miles of City beaches; municipal wharf; teen center; 15 beach volleyball courts; eight ball fields; one synthetic turf multi-purpose field

### **Public Library System (City/County)**

One main library and two branch libraries in the City; Branch libraries throughout the County; Bookmobile and other mobile services

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## **The City Charter**

A city charter is a city's "constitution." The Charter of the City of Santa Cruz, adopted in 1948, outlines the powers of the City, the form of municipal government (Council/Manager), and procedures for holding elections and developing City legislation. It also establishes the powers and duties of the City Council and Mayor, the appointive officers of the City, and appointive boards and commissions, and sets forth provisions governing the Civil Service rules and regulations, fiscal administration, budget and taxes, and other provisions. Charter amendments require the affirmative vote of a majority of City electors.

## **Council/Manager Government**

The City of Santa Cruz operates under a Council/Manager form of government. In this system the City Council, elected by the citizens of the City, is charged with setting City policy by passing ordinances and resolutions.

The Council determines the City budget, appoints and removes certain appointive officials, and generally oversees City functions.

The City Manager, appointed by the City Council, is responsible for administering the policies set by Council, recommending procedures, and conducting the day-to-day operations of the City. The Council/Manager form of government is popular throughout the United States and Europe.

## **Mayor and City Council**

The City Council, the legislative and policy-making body of City government, is composed of six Councilmembers and a Mayor. The Councilmembers are elected by City voters to Districts 1- 6 and the Mayor is elected at-large. The term of office for a Councilmember and the Mayor is four years and they may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.

The Mayor presides at all Council meetings and is recognized as the head of the City government for all ceremonial purposes.

Each year, the Council elects one of its members to serve as Vice Mayor for a one-year term.

If a Councilmember does not finish his/her term, the Council can either appoint a qualified registered voter to fill the vacancy until the next general municipal election or call a special election. If a special election is called, the person selected will serve the remainder of the unexpired term.

### Elections

(a) The Mayor and the by-district Councilmembers shall be elected using a Two Round Election System, also known as runoff voting. At the first round of elections, any candidate receiving a majority of the vote cast (i.e., 50% + 1) for all candidates for that office shall be declared elected.

(b) If, after the first round of elections, there is any office to which no person was elected, then the two candidates for such office receiving the highest number of votes for such office shall be the candidates, and the only candidates, for such office whose names shall be printed upon ballots to be issued at the second or General Municipal Election; provided that, in any event, all persons receiving a number of votes equal to the highest or second highest number of votes received by any candidate shall also be candidates at such second election. The candidate receiving the highest number of votes cast for all candidates for that office at the second or General Municipal Election shall be declared elected.

(c) For purposes of the election of a Mayor and Councilmembers in the year 2022, for timing reasons, only one round of elections will be held (i.e., the General Municipal Election on November 8, 2022), and the winner of said election shall be the candidate who receives the most votes from eligible voters in that election.

(d) Whenever practical, the first round of elections shall occur on the date of and be consolidated with the Statewide Primary Election.

### Council Meeting Procedures

Regular City Council meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in Council Chambers, 809 Center Street.

Four of the seven members of the City Council constitute a quorum to do business. If a quorum is present, the City Clerk, who is the official recorder of all Council actions, calls the roll. The Mayor presides over the meeting. In the absence of the Mayor, the Vice Mayor presides.

The items to be considered at a Council Meeting are listed on a published agenda. Copies of this agenda are available at the City Clerk's Division no later than the Friday preceding the Council meeting or at the main entrance of the Council Chambers during the meeting. The agenda is posted on a bulletin board on Church Street by City Hall. The agenda and supporting documentation is also listed on the City's webpage at [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com). The Council generally considers the business items according to the order listed on the agenda; however, the presiding officer at his/her discretion may reorder the agenda to hear other items of business first.

The Council provides the opportunity for public comment. Persons addressing the Council should give their names and addresses, but are not required, in an audible tone of voice for the record and sign their name on the Sign-Up sheet provided for that purpose. The time limit for speakers is set by the presiding officer. All remarks shall be addressed to the Council as a whole and not to any individual member.

When any group of persons wishes to address the Council on the same subject, it is proper for the presiding officer to request that a spokesperson be chosen by the group to address the Council. If additional matters are to be presented at that time by any other member of the group, the presiding officer may limit the number of persons addressing the Council to avoid unnecessary repetition.

The oral communications period is a time set aside for members of the public to address the Council on any matter concerning the City's business or any matter over which the Council has control and which is not scheduled on the Council agenda.

Generally, matters presented as oral communications which require further investigation or information shall be referred to staff, and if Council determines that action is required, the item may be placed on a future agenda. Agenda items may be continued to subsequent meetings when more information is needed or other circumstances require the item be delayed.

### **City Council Terminology**

The following are descriptions of terms commonly used during Council meetings:

#### **Agenda**

The agenda is a printed listing of the items that the City Council will consider during the Council meeting. Copies are available at [www.cityofsantacruz.com](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com), and in the City Clerk's Division at 809 Center Street, Room 8, no later than the Friday preceding the meeting or at the Council Chambers during the meeting. A sample agenda format is listed below:

#### **Afternoon Session (start time determined by Mayor):**

- Call to Order

- Roll Call

- Administrative Business (Presiding Officer's Announcements; Statements of Disqualification; Additions and Deletions; City Attorney Report on Closed Session)

- Oral Communications

- Presentations (If there are any)

- Consent Agenda

- Council Business (Public Hearings and General Business)

- Adjournment (if no Evening Session is scheduled)

- Recess to Evening Session (if scheduled)

Evening Session (start time determined by Mayor):

Call to Order

Roll Call

Presentations (If there are any)

Council Business (Public Hearings and General Business) Adjournment

## **Ordinances**

Ordinances are City laws. When approved and adopted, ordinances govern all aspects of City operations including fiscal matters, planning and zoning specifications, public works projects, and the health and safety of the community.

Following the introduction of an ordinance at a Council meeting, a summary of the ordinance is published in a newspaper of general circulation then resubmitted to the Council for final adoption at its next regular meeting. Most become effective thirty days after adoption.

If the City Council declares an ordinance to be an emergency measure, it may be introduced and adopted at the same meeting, provided it is accorded five affirmative votes; it takes effect upon adoption. Ordinances pertaining to elections and taxation are also dealt with in one meeting in accordance with the City Charter. Ordinances are numbered and are usually incorporated into a publication which is called the [Santa Cruz Municipal Code](#).

## **Resolutions**

Resolutions are formal written decisions which govern various aspects of City operations or express the opinion or intention of the City Council. Resolutions cover a wide range of subjects and may pertain to such matters as setting fees, establishing parking zones, and controlling and regulating traffic.

## **City Offices and Departments**

The following are brief descriptions of the duties and responsibilities of City offices and departments.

### **City Attorney**

The City Attorney is appointed by the City Council and represents the City of Santa Cruz in all legal proceedings, advising the City Council, City administrative staff, and City advisory bodies on a variety of legal matters. The City Attorney attends meetings of the City Council and frequently provides legal advice and opinions for items being considered by the Council. In addition, the City Attorney either prepares or approves for legal content proposed ordinances, resolutions, contracts, and other legal documents. The City Attorney does not provide free legal advice or service to private citizens.



## City Manager

The City Manager's Office is responsible for the overall administration of the City and for seeing that City Council policies are carried out. The City Manager reports directly to the City Council. The duties of the City Manager include coordinating the work of all City departments and advising the City Council on matters relative to the operation of those departments; preparing the annual budget and administering the budget after it is adopted by Council; appointing all department heads (except the City Attorney), and serving as the final administrative authority on personnel matters. The City Manager and his/her staff also handle special projects and Council assignments which do not fall within the jurisdiction of any other City department.

### ***City Clerk's (CC) Division***

In accordance with the Charter, the City Clerk Administrator is appointed by the City Manager and is the elections official for the City. Primary areas of responsibility carried out in the City Clerk's Division are Council meeting process and functions, information and records management programs, City advisory body matters, liability claims processing, and filings required under the Political Reform Act. The City Clerk Administrator and staff serve as the liaison between the Council and the community. All public records pertaining to official Council actions are available in the City Clerk's Division. These records include Council agendas, minutes, ordinances, resolutions, policy manual, and the published Municipal Code. The City Clerk's Division is also responsible for coordinating the cablecasting and webcasting of Council meetings. Recordings of all Council meetings can be found on the City's website at [www.cityofsantacruz.com/government/city-council/council-meetings](http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/government/city-council/council-meetings). DVDs are available in the City Clerk's Division at a charge of \$1.00 per DVD.

### **Economic Development and Housing (EDH)**

The Economic Development Department is responsible for preparing and implementing City redevelopment plans and providing other economic development services for coordinating the City's various earthquake recovery activities. To accomplish these activities, the City has formed the Merged Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Project, which encompasses the downtown area as well other areas within the City. This project provides the financial and administrative vehicle through which the City is coordinating the earthquake recovery activities. In addition, the Economic Development Department is responsible for administration of the Eastside Business Improvement Project, the San Lorenzo River Flood Control Improvement Project, and other special projects. The Department also provides funds for the development of low- and moderate-income housing.

The oversight and administration of the City's housing activities were moved from Planning and Community Development to Economic Development effective July of 2008. Also effective July

2008, staffing for the City's public art program was permanently created in the Economic Development Department. Previously, staffing for the City's public art program was provided through Parks and Recreation.

### **Finance Department (FN)**

Administration of the City's financial matters is the responsibility of the Finance Department. The director of finance is the chief financial officer of the City and advises the City Manager and the City Council on financial matters. This department maintains the City's accounting records, collects and invests City revenues, handles the purchasing functions of the City, provides information technology services to all City departments, processes parking citations, and reports on the City's financial status to the City Manager and City Council.

### **Fire Department (FD)**

The Fire Department's primary mission is to provide fire and life safety protection. This objective is accomplished by developing and enforcing effective fire prevention regulations and by utilizing effective fire suppression methods to mitigate the effects of fire and other emergencies. The department conducts ongoing commercial fire prevention inspections and fire safety inspections for residents upon request. Firefighters respond to approximately 4,200 requests for assistance on an annual basis. All suppression personnel are trained as emergency medical technicians.

There are three fire stations within the City: the headquarters station at 711 Center Street, the eastside station at 1103 Soquel Avenue, and the westside station at 335 Younglove Avenue.

### **Human Resources (HR)**

The Human Resources Department is responsible for employee recruitment and selection; maintenance of job specifications and compensation plans; coordination of equal employment opportunities, employee development, and safety programs; administration of the employee insurance and retirement benefit programs; and coordinating relations with employee labor organizations.

### **Information Technology (IT)**

The Information Technology Department's primary mission is to plan and promote the optimum use of current and future technology; provide a reliable and secure citywide network; provide citywide information processing services; and deliver value, quality service and support to all of our customers: the citizens, City Council, and City employees. The Information Technology Division includes data communication services, telecommunication services and the City's geographical information system (GIS).

## **Library (LB)**

The Santa Cruz City/County Library System serves all of Santa Cruz County except Watsonville that maintains an independent public library. The library system's principal mission is to meet the information needs of County residents. It does this through its collection of books, magazines, cassette tapes, videos, pamphlets, and other materials. It also offers extensive reference and information services at each branch and via its Telephone Reference Service. Computers are also available for free Internet access at all branches.

The library maintains a comprehensive database of information about local organizations and human and community services called INFOCRUZ, which is available via the library's website at [www.santacruzpl.org](http://www.santacruzpl.org). The library system's ten branches are linked by a computer system which gives people access to the entire library collection no matter where they live, or at which branch the item is located. Three branches are in the City of Santa Cruz and others throughout the County. The downtown branch in downtown Santa Cruz is the system headquarters.

## **Parks and Recreation Department (PR)**

The Parks and Recreation Department has two divisions. The Parks Division is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 2000 acres of parklands including eighty-five landscaped areas, twenty parks, fifteen miles of median strips, street trees, the DeLaveaga Golf Course, the Municipal Wharf, Ken Wormhoudt Skate Park, a bike park, world-class Lawn Bowling Green, soccer, softball, and baseball fields and bocce ball courts, as well the City Hall gardens, and Pacific Avenue. The Parks Division also includes the Parks Security Unit.

The Recreation Division provides the community with leisure-time activities based on the needs and desires of the community. These programs include sports leagues, special events, preschool, teen, and senior programs and classes, community gardens junior lifeguard programs, day camps, junior theater, and other special interest classes. The Recreation Division is also responsible for operating the London Nelson Community Center, the Teen Center, and the Civic Auditorium (including a full-service box office).

## **Planning and Community Development Department (PL)**

The Planning and Community Development Department is primarily responsible for guiding the physical development of the City in accordance with City Council policies. To accomplish this, the department performs five main functions. It prepares plans for the development of the City, including the General Plan and specific area plans, which deal with such issues as land use, transportation, housing, design, and environmental resources. It reviews proposed developments to ascertain compliance with state law, the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and other regulations of the City. Its building inspection division assures that structures are built in a safe manner and are in compliance with the Building Code and other regulations.

**Police Department (PD)**

The Police Department is responsible for protecting life and property, preventing crime, and maintaining law and order in the City of Santa Cruz. The department maintains mobile and foot patrol units; special traffic, juvenile, and investigations units; and has a community awareness program. The Police Department also performs license investigations, initiates traffic engineering recommendations, and carries out other tasks related to the protection of life and property in the City of Santa Cruz.

**Public Works Department (PW)**

The Public Works Department provides the City with a variety of services including engineering design, street maintenance, solid waste management, wastewater management, traffic control, and wharf maintenance. The Engineering Division provides engineering design services, City surveying, maintenance of maps and records, special assessment district administration, and all other basic engineering inspections and services. The Streets Division is responsible for constructing and maintaining City streets, sidewalks, storm drains, and flood control management duties. The Solid Waste Division is responsible for garbage collection and disposal, recycling programs, street sweeping, and City landfill operations. The Wastewater Management Division maintains and operates the Wastewater Treatment Plant facility, and the wastewater mains sewer collection system. The Traffic Control Division performs traffic engineering studies and projects including downtown parking facilities, parking control, street markings, street signs, and traffic signal maintenance.

The Facilities Maintenance Division is responsible for all city buildings including building maintenance and custodial needs. The Fleet Maintenance Division or “the Garage” is responsible for maintenance of the city vehicle fleet, acquisition of new vehicles, and two-way radio acquisition and maintenance. Both divisions are in Public Works, Operations Section.

## Water Department (WT)

The Municipal Water Department operates and maintains a regional water system which serves not only the City of Santa Cruz, but also a surrounding service area of thirty square miles, serving a population of approximately ninety thousand inhabitants. Water is obtained from a variety of sources, some of which have been in continuous use since the 1880s. These sources include north coastal stream diversions, the San Lorenzo River, Loch Lomond Reservoir (which is located on Newell Creek), and a number of wells. Water from these sources is treated and filtered in the modern Graham Hill Water Treatment Plant.

A fully staffed, state-certified water laboratory ensures the safety and purity of all water which is delivered to customers.

The Water Department also operates the scenic Loch Lomond Recreation Area, which is located in the Santa Cruz Mountains near Lompico. Loch Lomond offers a wide variety of recreational activities to the public, including fishing, boating, hiking, and picnicking. The park is open seven days a week from March 1 to September 15 each year.

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## **City Boards, Commissions, Committees,** **and Task Forces**

The City Council appoints citizens to serve on boards, commissions, and committees to assist and advise in formulating policy. These advisory bodies aid the Council in making decisions, but in the final analysis, it is the Council that sets City policy.

Boards and commissions are established by ordinance specifying the powers and duties of the appointive bodies. They are usually broader in scope than the duties of committees. Committees are established by resolution and are usually formed to handle more specific projects or areas of concern than those covered by boards and commissions. From time to time the City Council appoints task forces to handle specific responsibilities.

Citizens interested in further information about City advisory bodies may contact the City Clerk's Division. Applications are processed by that department and copies of advisory body lists, rosters, and handbooks are all available there.

It is the policy of the Brown Act that public boards, commissions, committees, task forces, and other multi-member bodies created by local agencies in this state exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of the State of California do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

Detailed information concerning Brown Act compliance pertinent to both regular and special meetings is included in the *City of Santa Cruz Handbook for City Advisory Bodies*. These open meeting regulations pertain to meetings of the City advisory bodies as well the City Council.

### **City Facilities**

#### **Civic Auditorium**

The Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium was built by the United States Public Administration during the years 1939 and 1940. The two-thousand seat Civic Auditorium has housed a variety of musical, cultural, and athletic events and has served all facets of the Santa Cruz community.

#### **Golf Course**

The municipal golf course, located at DeLaveaga Park, is a regulation 18-hole course. This par 72 course has an adjoining driving range and putting green as well as a pro shop and restaurant.

The course and its related facilities were constructed by the Santa Cruz Public Recreation Corporation and funds required for the development and operation of this golf course are derived completely from revenues generated at the golf course.

#### **London Nelson Community Center**

London Nelson Community Center, located at 301 Center Street, is a City facility designed to provide a wide range of social, cultural, and recreational services for the residents of Santa Cruz. The center is available to the community for meetings, classes, performances, and special events. In addition, many programs which provide social services and services to seniors and children have offices at the Community Center.

#### **Wharf**

The Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf is operationally maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department. Originally completed in 1914, with major renovations and construction improvement projects in 1984, ongoing improvements continue to be made to accommodate general operational concerns as well as additional business needs, as they are identified.

The wharf is primarily self-supporting, using revenues generated from parking meters, building

rental fees, and special events. These funds are used to rehabilitate, operate, and maintain all structures, including pilings, buildings, landings, roadways, and common areas on the wharf.

The municipal wharf is a major tourist attraction in Santa Cruz and the Monterey Bay area. It features restaurants, fishing areas, fish markets, tours, gift and curio shops, recreational activities, and other businesses. Over four million people use and enjoy the wharf each year.

### **Financing City Government**

#### **Revenues**

General government activities of the City are financed through seven major revenue categories:

##### ***Taxes (other than property taxes)***

This category contains the largest single revenue source—sales tax. Also included in this category are cigarette taxes, franchise taxes, utility tax, admissions tax, and transient occupancy taxes. Some of these revenue sources are collected by the state with a portion then remitted to the City; others are collected directly by the City.

##### ***Property Tax***

This category includes revenues which are assessed and collected by the County of Santa Cruz and forwarded to the City.

##### ***Revenue from Use of Money and Property***

This category includes revenue secured by investing the funds of the City and for rents of City-owned property.

##### ***Licenses and Permits***

This category includes revenue derived from the issuance of business licenses, bicycle licenses, special events permits, etc.

##### ***Fines and Forfeits***

This category includes funds collected and distributed by the County.

## Revenues (continued)

### *Revenue from Other Agencies*

This category consists of state license monies, taxes, and fees collected and distributed by the State.

### *Fees for City Services*

This category includes fees charged by Parks and Recreation, Planning, Police, Fire, and other City departments. These revenues, along with nonrecurring revenue (insurance refunds, donations, etc.) and transfers from various sources are used to support most aspects of City government. Enterprise funds (water, sewer, and refuse) are self-sufficient. The library is supported by the City and County on a shared basis determined by the percentage of books circulated to residents of each. Construction funds for City projects are also separately maintained. They are derived through bond proceeds and federal and state grants, as well as some of the revenue sources noted above.

### *Debts*

The City is allowed to issue general obligation bonds under Section 1418 of the City Charter with a limit that cannot exceed the sum of 15 percent of the total assessed property valuation for the purpose of the City's taxation. The limit has not been reached. A two-thirds popular vote is needed to pass general obligation bonds according to the terms of Proposition 13.

The City can also issue revenue bonds for enterprise funds such as the water fund. Revenue bonds can still be authorized by the City Council.

### *Auditing*

The Finance Department provides internal auditing services, and regular audits are made by an independent auditing firm hired by the City Council.

## **Summary**

The foregoing information is a brief outline of the structure of your City government. It is written in an effort to help you, the citizen, to better understand the background, functions, and facilities of your City and its government.

You are invited to attend City Council meetings, where policies are being formed, to visit City Hall, the library, parks, and the various other facilities in your City.



## City of Santa Cruz Organization Chart

