



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 09/02/2025

ITEM NO: 08

DATE: September 2, 2025

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Gabrielle Whelan, Town Attorney

SUBJECT: **Introduce an Ordinance Amending Chapter 14, "Licenses and Miscellaneous Business Regulations," Article V, "Police Alarms," of the Town Code to Require Alarm Permits for Residences and Render Residential False Alarms Subject to Penalties**
Ordinance Title: An Ordinance of the Town Council of the Town of Los Gatos Amending Article V, "Police Alarms," of Chapter 14, "Licenses And Miscellaneous Business Regulations," of the Town Code

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce an Ordinance Amending Chapter 14, "Licenses and Miscellaneous Business Regulations," Article V, "Police Alarms," of the Town Code to Require Alarm Permits for Residences and Render Residential False Alarms Subject to Penalties.

FISCAL IMPACT:

If adopted, the ordinance is expected to reduce avoidable public safety expenditures and generate revenue to offset the cost of responding to excessive false alarms. Staff time will be required for initial program setup and administration, which may be recovered through permit fees.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

Develop structure to ensure accountability of how funding resources move forward the Town's core goals and priorities.

BACKGROUND:

Town Code Sections 14.50.010 and following address alarm systems. Town Code Section 14.50.240 currently requires commercial properties with alarm systems to obtain and renew

PREPARED BY: Bridgette Falconio
Administrative Technician

Reviewed by: Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Finance Director

annual permits. Town Code Section 14.50.225 imposes a service charge on property owners with two or more false alarms within a six-month period. Residential alarm systems, however, are not currently regulated under this ordinance, despite accounting for a significant percentage of false alarm calls received by the Police Department.

Alarm responses require at least two officers to respond, and it can take officers 30 minutes or more to determine whether or not the alarm is false. This process typically involves a search of the home and property. In FY 2024-25, the Police Department received approximately 1,375 calls regarding alarm activations, provided a police response to over 910 determined false alarm calls, of which 40% (over 365 alarm responses) originated from residential properties. These responses diverted police, fire, and emergency services from higher-priority calls and imposed unnecessary operational costs on the Town, with no cost recovery discretion.

The purpose of the proposed amendment to the existing Town Alarm Permit Ordinance is to include residential alarm systems under the same regulatory framework as commercial properties. This means that residential property owners will be required to obtain alarm permits, pay a penalty in the event of two or more false alarms within a six-month period, and be subject to being placed on “no response” status in the event of more than five false alarms within a calendar year.

This amendment aims to encourage alarm users to maintain the operational reliability and proper use of alarm systems and to reduce or eliminate false alarms. False alarms require a considerable amount of time, resources, and expenses each year for the Town. They can also pose a safety hazard to police officers and the public.

DISCUSSION:

The primary proposed changes to the ordinance are to:

- Require residential alarm users to register their alarm systems with the Town.
- Provide that when the Police Department responds to a false alarm at a location without an alarm permit, the property owner shall pay a penalty of two times the annual permit fee.
- Provide that residential properties with more than five false alarms within a calendar year will be placed on “no response status.”

In addition to the primary changes, the following minor changes are proposed to the existing ordinance:

- Explain that permits are “virtual” rather than paper permits.
- Remove the requirement that alarm permits be displayed at the alarm site.
- Remove a duplicative penalty section.

The amendment is expected to have a moderate administrative impact on residential property owners, primarily requiring an annual alarm permit registration fee of \$95, consistent with commercial properties. In return, residents will benefit from improved emergency response prioritization and heightened awareness of alarm system maintenance.

Public outreach will accompany the rollout of the ordinance revisions to ensure homeowners are informed of the new requirements and the necessary steps to comply.

Municipalities across California have adopted false alarm permit programs as a strategy to improve operational efficiency, reduce wasteful dispatches, and recover associated costs.

CONCLUSION:

Staff recommends that the Town Council introduce an ordinance amending the Town's existing false alarm ordinance to reduce unnecessary emergency responses and support public safety and fiscal stability.

COORDINATION:

This report was in coordination with the Los Gatos Monte Sereno Police Department and the Town Attorney's office.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is not a project defined under CEQA, and no further action is required.

Attachments:

1. Draft False Alarm Permit Ordinance
2. Redline False Alarm Permit Code