

TO: Andrew P. Powers, City Manager

FROM: Jonathan Serret, Cultural and Community Services Director

DATE: December 3, 2024

SUBJECT: East County Family Justice Center

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Receive report and provide direction related to City Council's interest in locating the County's East County Family Justice Center in the City of Thousand Oaks.
2. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LEVINE ACT ITEM: No

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

No Additional Funding Requested. Minimal staff time required to prepare the report is included in the Adopted FY 2024-25 General Fund Budget. If City Council provides direction to provide financial support for the acquisition of a property for a Family Justice Center in Thousand Oaks, staff will return with an item.

BACKGROUND:

Under the Ventura County District Attorney's Office (DA), the Family Justice Center (FJC) model is a multi-agency, under-one-roof service for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, dependent adult abuse, human trafficking, and hate crimes. After starting a pilot program in 2019 at the Ventura County Hall of Justice, the Ventura FJC opened at 3170 Loma Vista Road in Ventura. It serves nearly 3,000 crime victims and their families annually. Additionally, the Carmen Ramirez FJC is scheduled to open in Oxnard in 2026.

FJCs house a variety of agencies and non-profit organizations that collaborate to provide services in a welcoming and safe setting. Some of the services provided to victims include:

1. Emergency Assistance – Food, clothing, and basic necessities.
2. Safety Services – Safety planning, Hope Line cell phone program, and confidential address program.
3. Shelter and Housing Assistance – Emergency and transitional housing and developing a plan for long-term solutions.
4. Civil Legal Services – Assistance with civil domestic violence restraining orders, divorce, custody, and guardianship.
5. Mental Health Services – Individual and group therapy, behavioral health, and grief and bereavement counseling.
6. Career Guidance – Job, trade, or career counseling.
7. Financial Counseling – Guidance on money management and credit counseling.
8. Education – Pathways to furthering education and developing life skills.
9. Child Development – Enrichment programs for children and parenting skills.
10. Survivor Advocacy – Voices, community engagement, education, and resources to others.

In order to access and receive these vital services, East Ventura County victims have to travel to Ventura. As such, the DA is actively searching for a location to open an East County Family Justice Center (ECFJC) to better serve the residents of Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, Simi Valley, and surrounding unincorporated communities.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Thousand Oaks residents are not immune to the types of crimes that warrant the services of a Family Justice Center. According to the Thousand Oaks Police Department (TOPD), between January 1 and August 31, 2024, 469 calls for service were domestic-related and resulted in a report documenting that activity. During that same period, there were 145 crime reports for domestic violence violations, 11 sexual-related offenses, and 18 child abuse/endangerment reports. Without a regional location in the East County, some victims are unable or unwilling to travel 30 - 45 minutes each way to Ventura to access the services of the FJC.

If an FJC were sited in Thousand Oaks, it would include space for TOPD, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to provide services for victims in one location. This model does not replace or duplicate programs, but rather puts existing resources under one roof to eliminate runaround for victims. Additionally, with this model, victims aren't put through the experience of having to repeat their difficult stories multiple times.

On December 17, 2024, the DA will make a recommendation to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors on which East County city they will locate the ECFJC. There are several items that are being considered as part of the decision, but one of the factors that will be heavily weighted is a financial commitment from the City in which the East County FJC will be located. The City of Oxnard committed \$2 million toward the \$4.1 million purchase price of the Oxnard FJC. As indicated in the attached letter from the DA (Attachment #1), they are anticipating a similar commitment from the selected East County city.

At the City Council Goal Setting meeting on April 23, 2024, City Council set the top priorities for FY 2024-25. One of the priorities is public safety and includes support and advocacy for a potential Family Justice Center presence in Thousand Oaks. In acknowledgement of the City Council's stated priority, if the City Council wishes to consider a financial commitment to support an FJC in Thousand Oaks, staff can bring an item back with a recommended not-to-exceed amount for City Council consideration at a meeting in January. Upon City Council approval of a budget appropriation, staff would work with the County to draft a grant agreement to be brought forward to City Council for approval at a later date.

COUNCIL GOAL COMPLIANCE:

Meets the following City Council goals:

A. Create a more equitable, accessible, safe, welcoming, and inclusive government and community regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, language, education, and/or socio-economic status.

B. Provide municipal government leadership which is open and responsive to residents, and is characterized by ethical behavior, stability, promoting public trust, transparency, confidence in the future, and cooperative interaction among civic leaders, residents, business representatives, and staff, while recognizing and respecting legitimate differences of opinion on critical issues facing the City.

D. Maintain strong commitment to public safety (including Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, and Emergency Management) to ensure City remains one of the safest Cities in the United States with a population over 100,000.

PREPARED BY: Melissa Hurtado, Deputy Cultural and Community Services Director

Attachments:

Attachment #1 – District Attorney Cost Sharing Letter