

TO: Andrew P. Powers, City Manager

FROM: Akbar Alikhan, Deputy City Manager

DATE: May 20, 2025

SUBJECT: Downtown Thousand Oaks Project (CI 5540) – City Council Workshop #1

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Provide feedback on the proposed program for the Downtown Project in preparation for entitlement submittal.
2. Authorize City Manager to explore potential terms of disposition for 401/403 Hillcrest Drive property with Conejo Recreation and Park District (CRPD).
3. Find that this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15061(b)(3).

LEVINE ACT ITEM: No

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

No Additional Funding Requested. Minimal staff time and costs to prepare this report are included in the Adopted FY 2024-25 General Fund Budget. The Project is currently in preliminary design and the Proposed CIP Budget includes funding for anticipated design costs over the upcoming two fiscal years. The Project will be brought before City Council at a future date for a design contract.

BACKGROUND:

Since its adoption on June 5, 2018, the Downtown Core Master Plan (DCMP) established a vision for the downtown core and identified the initiatives the City should pursue to create an active, pedestrian friendly area. The DCMP built upon some of the policy goals outlined in the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Specific Plan and refined by a robust public outreach campaign. Over the past several years, advancing the creation of a Downtown Thousand Oaks has consistently been one of the City Council's Top 10 Priorities, including for FY 2025-26.

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In March 2023, the City retained RRM Design Group (RRM) to develop the next iteration of the conceptual site plan, using a concept from 2020 designed by AECOM as a foundation. On November 14, 2023, staff and RRM presented an updated site plan to City Council. Additionally, City Council approved a First Amendment with RRM to test the assumptions made in the development of the site plan including a geotechnical analysis of the Westside Parcel, a structural analysis of the existing buildings, and a market feasibility.

On May 7, 2024, staff and the Ad Hoc Committee presented the findings of the analysis along with updated visuals of the conceptual site plan (Attachment #1) to the full City Council. At that same meeting, City Council authorized staff to issue a request for proposals for Preliminary Design, Design, Entitlement, and Environmental services, with the objective of advancing the project from a concept to a defined project in preparation for entitlement hearings to be held in Spring 2026.

After a competitive request for proposals process, RRM and SmithGroup were awarded an agreement on December 3, 2024, to complete preliminary design of the Downtown Project. Additionally, HR&A Consultants were retained for financial planning and public-private-partnership (P3) advisory services.

The scope of work identified in the agreement with RRM contained several opportunities for community engagement, bi-monthly discussions with the Ad Hoc Committee, and two City Council workshops. This session is the first of the two City Council workshops, with a second workshop slated for the June 24, 2025, City Council Meeting. The agenda for each of the workshops is shown below.

City Council Workshop #1 Agenda

- I. Review of Project Milestones
- II. Summary of Community Feedback
- III. Changes from 2024 Concept to 2025 Design (Attachment #2)
 1. Proposed City Hall location converted to hospitality use
 2. Targeted reconstruction of east wing
 3. Relocation of Public Market
 4. Town Square and Restaurant pad
 5. Culvert Realignment
- IV. Program Diagram
- V. Introduction of Funding Options

City Council Workshop #2 Preliminary Agenda

- I. Discussion on Funding Strategy
- II. Follow up Items from May 20

- III. Updated Visuals
- IV. Phasing Plan
- V. Project Timeline
 - 1. Pre-entitlement
 - 2. Post-entitlement/Construction

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Community Input

This current stage of the project contained several opportunities for community engagement throughout the design process. In January and February 2025, staff and the design team hosted five community conversations on the following topics regarding the Downtown, followed by two wrap-up sessions.

Session Topic	Date
Arts & Entertainment	January 15, 2025
Landscape Architecture and Oak Tree Preservation	January 22, 2025
Business Mix and Visitor Experience	January 29, 2025
Sustainability	February 5, 2025
Accessibility & Disabled Access	February 12, 2025
Community Conversations Wrap Up Session #1	February 19, 2025
Community Conversations Wrap Up Session #2	February 22, 2025

This workshop will go into detail on the takeaways from each of the five sessions. Across all five sessions common themes emerged that helped shape the program design. The common themes below will also be discussed in detail at the upcoming City Council workshops.

- The Downtown will serve as the cultural hub of the City. Food, music, and art is likely to be the economic driver / differentiator for the site as opposed to general merchandising.
- Desire to diversify the definition of art within the City and promote inclusivity for other media, styles, and preference.
- Mature oaks should be celebrated responsibly, with safety for both visitors and the tree in mind.
- The town square can host outdoor gatherings and pop-up events that may help and fulfill community requests for space that may not be available indoors.
- Desire for improved bike lanes leading to the Downtown and a willingness to explore other modes of transportation.

Real Estate Disposition (401/403 Hillcrest Drive)

As part of the Project funding evaluation, staff, in conjunction with HR&A, reviewed City-owned real estate holdings. The former City Hall site at 401/403 Hillcrest Drive was identified as a property for potential disposition by the City. CRPD is currently the only tenant with its headquarter office and Hillcrest Center for the Arts (HCFA) in the building at 403 Hillcrest Drive. National Parks Service (NPS) vacated the building at 401 Hillcrest Drive one year ago. At the March 20, 2025 CRPD Board Meeting, City staff presented an update on the Downtown Project and the possible disposition of 401/403 Hillcrest. Through subsequent discussions, the CRPD Board expressed an interest in remaining at 403 Hillcrest as the permanent home for its headquarters and HCFA; and also expanding into the vacant building at 401 Hillcrest Drive.

In light of the Board preference to contemplate acquisition, staff engaged CRPD leadership on a general framework for a potential transaction of 401/403 Hillcrest to CRPD. Staff recommendation authorizes the City Manager to explore disposition terms with CRPD leadership. Any deal terms regarding the sale of real property would be brought before the full City Council for consideration.

Top Ten Council Priorities FY 2025-26

The recommended City Council action and staff efforts are in alignment with one of City Council's top ten priorities – Contemplate funding strategies for project design and construction and provide direction | Consider key design and engineering decisions for phased development of Downtown Project | Consider targeted alterations to Thousand Oaks Boulevard within the downtown core | Complete environmental review and prepare for public hearing | Continue robust ongoing community engagement.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

The action recommended tonight seeks feedback from City Council that will direct staff to take additional steps in preparing a future project for consideration at a later date. The action will not create any direct or indirect impact on the environment. Therefore, the common-sense exemption set forth in CEQA Guidelines, Section 15061(b)(3) applies to this action and no further environmental analysis is needed.

The entitlement submittal for the Downtown Project, which will be evaluated in compliance with CEQA in preparation for public hearings, will be included in a future staff recommendation for City Council consideration.

COUNCIL GOAL COMPLIANCE:

Meets the following City Council goals:

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 City staff, while recognizing and respecting legitimate differences of opinion on critical issues facing the City.

C. Operate City government in a fiscally and managerially responsible and prudent manner to ensure that the City of Thousand Oaks remains one of California's most desirable places to live, work, visit, recreate, and raise a family.

J. Implement high quality revitalization projects within Thousand Oaks Boulevard and Newbury Road Areas; Develop a pedestrian-oriented, viable, and self-sustaining "Downtown;" and, continue to support production of long-term affordable housing.

Attachments:

Attachment #1 – RRM Downtown Site Plan (2024 Concept)

Attachment #2 – RRM Downtown Site Plan (2025 Proposed Design)