



COUNTY of VENTURA

Board of Supervisors

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Second District

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May 23, 2023

Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Recommendations of Supervisor Gorell to direct the County Executive Office (CEO) to: 1) Complete the research on establishing an East County Family Justice Center (FJC) in Thousand Oaks with an initial report back to the Board within 30 days, 2) Pursuant to ongoing efforts between the second district and the CEO, solidify the most optimal funding sources available for property acquisition, development, staffing, and ongoing operations of the FJC including work with the City of Thousand Oaks and the District Attorney's office to seek local, federal, and state funding, 3) Work in partnership with the City of Thousand Oaks to determine a suitable location, including a due diligence evaluation of 625 W. Hillcrest in the City of Thousand Oaks, 4) Bring forth a notice of intention to purchase pursuant to Government Code 25350 upon selection of a suitable location, 5) Work with the District Attorney's office to evaluate a victims and survivors Resilience Center as a potential component to the Thousand Oaks East County Family Justice Center including identifying funding sources that were utilized by other Resilience Centers across the country, 6) Work with the District Attorney's office to find and secure grant funding for the purchase of a mobile Family Justice Center vehicle and make recommendations to integrate all areas of the East County.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Direct the County Executive Office to:

1. Complete the research on establishing an East County Family Justice Center (FJC) in Thousand Oaks with an initial report back to the Board within 30 days.
2. Pursuant to ongoing efforts between the second district and the CEO, solidify the most optimal funding sources available for property acquisition, development, staffing, and ongoing operations of the FJC including work with the City of Thousand Oaks on potential cost-sharing concepts, and work the District Attorney's office to seek any additional local, federal, and state funding.
3. Work in partnership with the City of Thousand Oaks to determine a suitable location, including a due diligence evaluation of 625 W. Hillcrest in the City of Thousand Oaks.
4. Bring forth a notice of intention to purchase pursuant to Government Code 25350 upon selection of a suitable location.

5. Work with the District Attorney's office to evaluate a victims and survivors Resiliency Center as a potential component to the Thousand Oaks East County Family Justice Center including identifying funding sources that were utilized by other Resilience Centers across the country.
6. Work with the District Attorney's office to find and secure grant funding for the purchase of a mobile Family Justice Center shuttle and make recommendations to integrate all areas of the East County.

DISCUSSION:

Breaking the cycle of family violence - Family Justice Centers (FJC) were created to support and improve the lives of those impacted by family violence and trauma under one roof. Instead of directing impacted families to several different facilities throughout the County, families can instead come to one location to meet a compassionate, collaborative team from multiple public agencies and community-based organizations. This unique concept reduces trauma, eliminates repeat victimization, mitigates future risks, and makes a lasting, positive difference in the lives of those the FJC serves and their families. Through the Family Justice Center's welcoming community and comprehensive, holistic services that focus on the whole person, Family Justice Centers empower and support survivors of all ages and their families. Most importantly, FJC's help break the heartbreaking cycle of violence that plagues so many families for generations.

Today, the residents from the East County who would benefit from the services of a Family Justice Center are required to make a 45-minute to one hour trek each way to the City of Ventura to seek out assistance during what is undoubtedly one of the most difficult periods in their life. These individuals must overcome many mental, physical, financial, legal, and other hurdles to achieve support – if they are able to overcome the hurdles at all. A two-hour roundtrip drive to the Ventura (or the Oxnard FJC when it opens) is an undue additional hardship when they need the help the most.

In recent review of the last five years of 9-1-1 calls for service, domestic violence was tagged as the original reason for the call in the Conejo Valley (Thousand Oaks and unincorporated Conejo) more than any other City or area in the East County. This data troubled me. Data doesn't show that a similar percentage of Conejo residents were making the trek to the FJC in Ventura. I can only surmise that residents in TO/Conejo who called 9-1-1 to report domestic or family violence did not thereafter seek resources they so desperately needed because they were unable or unwilling to travel to the West County.

Over the last several months, I have been working to secure financial support for a Thousand Oaks-based FJC from about a dozen different philanthropic foundations. Each foundation indicated strong interest in dedicating funds to support the initiative; but in total, the potential funds received wouldn't be enough to purchase a building in Thousand Oaks. After speaking with the CEO's office about the substantial unmet need in my district, funds (including grant funding that the County has already received) were identified that could be used to purchase a property for use as an FJC

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Preliminary discussions with the Thousand Oaks Police Department, the City of Thousand Oaks and the City of Camarillo staff and elected leaders have indicated strong support for a Family Justice Center in Thousand Oaks. Following Thousand Oaks City Council discussion, a Council recommendation of funding support is likely to come as part of their two-year budget consideration on June 6, 2023. TO City Councilmembers with whom I have spoken indicated strong support and a desire to recommend a budget allocation prioritization at their May 23, 2023 City Council meeting.

As we understand from the Sheriff and from the District Attorney's office, an ideal building would be easily accessible near a freeway exit, near the existing Thousand Oaks-based County clinic and Los Robles Hospital, close to a bus stop, has a dedicated parking lot that can be secured, and has private rooms with separate exits should clients wish to exit discreetly.

Resiliency Center – If funding can be identified, it may make sense to explore co-locating a Resiliency Center with the FJC. Resiliency Centers are places of healing and support dedicated to serving as a resource and referral center for survivors, families of victims and responders affected by a mass shooting. The center is staffed by knowledgeable and caring professionals and community partners to help people access resources to help them build strength and resiliency in the aftermath of an incident. Counseling, spiritual care referrals, as well as information about financial assistance is made available.

In evaluating space for an FJC in Thousand Oaks, we have been reminded of the historical significance of the building at 625 W Hillcrest Drive property which acted as a Incident Command Center for the Borderline shooting in 2018, and later served to assist the loved ones of those impacted by the shooting. This specific location fulfills each of the needs addressed by the District Attorney and could be an ideal location in Thousand Oaks if property due diligence suggests that outcome. Notwithstanding, there are other identified locations in Thousand Oaks that can be evaluated as well.

On behalf of the survivors and victims in and around my district who so desperately need a Family Justice Center, I respectfully submit this request. Please contact my office at (805) 214-2510 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jeff Gorell
Supervisor, 2nd District

Attachments:

- Five Year Area Comparison of 9-1-1 Calls for Service tagged as Domestic Violence from the Ventura County Sheriff & the Simi Valley Police Department

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- Ventura County Council of Governments (VCOG) Report: When Home is Not a Safe Haven: Domestic Violence in the Wake of Covid-19 and an Acute Needs Assessment of the Ventura County Family Justice Center
- Table 1.4 from VCOG report highlighting Domestic Violence trends within Ventura County, Among it's Cities and the State of California per 1000 population. Thousand Oaks has a higher concentration of Domestic Violence Calls vs Simi Valley.
- District Attorney Nasarenko's May 15, 2023 Family Justice Center Guidance Letter to the Board of Supervisors