

TO: City Council

FROM: Business Roundtable

DATE: August 29, 2017

SUBJECT: Business Roundtable's Work Plan and Public WiFi Project

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Approve Business Roundtable Work Plan for the next 24 months, from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2019.
2. Provide direction to staff regarding the Business Roundtable's proposed public WiFi project in the Thousand Oaks Boulevard downtown area.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

No Additional Funding Requested. Indirect costs associated with staff time in the preparation of this report are included in the Adopted FY 2016-17 General Fund Budget. Indirect costs associated with staff time in working with the Business Roundtable on its Work Plan are included in the Adopted FY 2017-18 and FY 2018-19 General Fund Budget.

BACKGROUND:

On June 23, 2015, City Council approved the Business Roundtable's Work Plan from July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2017. This Work Plan included four tasks which were assigned to Committee members and City staff to work on and come up with recommendation for either policy changes or amendments to current Municipal Code. Committee members tackled each task through existing subcommittees within the Roundtable

The four tasks were:

- (1) Entitlements and Permit Processing
- (2) Green Business
- (3) Economic Development
- (4) Signage

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On May 9, 2017, the Roundtable met to discuss its current Work Plan and recommended continuation of the four tasks into the next two-year Work Plan.

Members of the Roundtable's Economic Development subcommittee also discussed several proposals which would assist small businesses in the City. This subcommittee decided to evaluate the possibility of providing public WiFi services in the core downtown area of Thousand Oaks Boulevard.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

In support of the local business community, the Business Roundtable would like to continue addressing the four tasks, for the next two years, as follows:

1. Development and Planning:

- Continue working with City staff to make the City's overall entitlement, development, and permit process as efficient and user-friendly as possible.

2. Green Business:

- Review the current marketing and recruiting materials on the Green Business Program and provide any comments to City staff.
- Jointly develop and periodically review outreach tools to ensure they meet the expectations and engagement of small business owners.
- Improve outreach to the local business community to increase the number of participants in the Green Business Certification Program.
- Review and evaluate the City's progress on its environmental actions to ensure support of citywide goals and top priorities as published and provide any comments to City staff.

3. Economic Development/Small Business Support:

- Continue to examine and assess the City's business ecosystem for elements that are attractive or challenge formation of new businesses.
- Continue to examine and assess City processes and procedures that support or challenge small business operation and growth.

4. Signage:

- Evaluate existing allowances for the number, size, and location of on-building and freestanding signs.
- Evaluate the criteria/ratios used to determine the size of on-building and other signage.
- Allow more flexibility in the use of directory signs.
- Consider changes to sign permit requirements and processes.
- Create a task force to review and evaluate regulations pertaining to the use of temporary signs and provide comments to City staff for potential Municipal Code Amendment(s).

In the last two years, members of the Business Roundtable have made notable progress with these tasks by meeting with City staff from different departments, and gathering information on these topics. Additional recommendations shall be forwarded to the Council in the near future.

Public WiFi Project in Thousand Oaks Boulevard Downtown Area

Members of the Economic Development/Small Business Support subcommittee met several times in recent months and discussed several ways to help small businesses. Among the topics discussed were ways to attract startup businesses and companies to the City and assist existing businesses.

Knowing of the proposed Downtown Streetscape Improvement Project, members began exploring the possibility of providing public WiFi in public areas (sidewalks and outdoor gathering areas), as envisioned by the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Specific Plan, for the downtown area between Conejo School Road and Erbes Road. The public WiFi program would provide a useful lifestyle amenity to both residents and visitors in the downtown area.

The subcommittee conducted research on other cities and municipalities, where public WiFi is currently provided, and met with several WiFi providers to gain knowledge about such programs and the process to implement them. They also met with local businesses in the downtown area to gauge their interest in the concept. Most businesses welcomed the idea of providing this service, citing it as a way to attract customers to the downtown area.

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The subcommittee then contacted a local WiFi service provider, Frontier Communications, to obtain an estimated cost of the program. Frontier's priced the program at \$40,000 annually, a fee which includes installation, equipment rental, and support.

The subcommittee presented their proposal to both the Greater Conejo Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Association, and both groups support the project. The proposal was also presented to the rest of the Business Roundtable Committee and they unanimously recommended presenting the Public WiFi proposal to City Council.

COUNCIL GOAL COMPLIANCE

Meets Council Goal H:

- H. Maintain a strong local employment base geared toward retaining high quality businesses; Sustain a healthy business community; and, Diversify the local economy, with a specific emphasis on small businesses and high technology/biomedical jobs.

PREPARED BY: Haider Alawami, Economic Development Manager