



Office of the City Manager

01CONSENT CALENDAR

September 15, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Eleanor Hollander, Economic Development Manager

Subject: Grant Application: California Strategic Growth Council, Community Resilience Center (CRC) Planning Grant for Civic Center

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager or their designee to:

- (1) Submit a grant application under the California Strategic Growth Council's Community Resilience Centers (CRC) Program for a Planning Grant for an amount up to \$500,000 for planning activities to prepare the two historic buildings in Berkeley's Civic Center, the Maudelle Shirek Building ("MSB" or "Old City Hall") and the Veterans Memorial Building ("VMB") for future structural upgrades including capital improvements and seismic retrofits; and
- (2) Subject to award, accept the grant, execute any resultant revenue agreements and amendments, accept any additional funding allocations from the CRC Program and designate the City Manager or their designee as the applicant's authorized agent.

SUMMARY

This report requests City Council authorization for the City Manager or their designee to submit a planning grant application up to the maximum eligible amount under the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Community Resilience Centers (CRC) Round 2 program for the Berkeley Civic Center. If awarded, this action authorizes the City Manager to accept resulting grant funds and execute all related agreements. This grant program does not require a local cash match of funds.

The Berkeley Civic Center, comprising the historic Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park, and the Maudelle Shirek (Old City Hall) and Veterans Memorial buildings, currently faces seismic vulnerabilities and deferred maintenance. Securing CRC funding will allow the City to advance necessary pre-development, planning, design, environmental, architectural, engineering, and structural feasibility assessments required to transform these historic spaces into a modernized network of resilient public buildings for use by the community.

This grant application directly builds upon the City's foundational investments in the *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* (approved September 2020) and the *Civic Center Design Concept* (approved July 2023) previously funded by the Measure T1

Infrastructure Bond and the City's General Fund. Furthermore, it serves to support a larger pending federal grant application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (\$16M, submitted in late 2025). Authorization of this grant application ensures the City meets the CRC Planning Grant application deadlines in September 2026, positioning Berkeley to secure near-term planning resources while establishing eligibility for future multi-million-dollar Implementation Grant awards in subsequent CRC funding cycles.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

The anticipated amount of the Planning Grant from the CRC award could be up to \$500,000. This grant requires no matching funds from the City of Berkeley for the two-year grant duration. If awarded, the City would then be eligible to apply for other implementation grant funding that could underwrite a portion of the construction costs to seismically retrofit two historic Civic Center buildings, the Maudelle Shirek Building or "Old City Hall" and the Veterans Memorial Building. These retrofits will transform both seismically deficient structures into resilient community assets capable of withstanding design-level earthquakes with only limited, repairable damage, preserving their historic fabric, establishing a community resilience center in the heart of Berkeley, and ensuring continuity of essential civic and community functions in Berkeley's Civic Center.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Berkeley Civic Center represents an important, highly visible, yet severely underutilized municipal footprint that currently fails to meet local resilience demands. Both the historic "Old City Hall" or Maudelle Shirek Building (MSB) and the Veterans Memorial Building (VMB) do not comply with modern structural safety regulations. Because of the structural degradation and deferred maintenance, significant portions of these properties are locked, vacant, or highly constrained, depriving the city of dedicated community assembly spaces and forcing municipal bodies to pay annual leasing fees to host public meetings elsewhere in Berkeley. Concurrently, the regional landscape is experiencing an increase in climate-induced hazards, including hazardous air quality from seasonal wildfires and extreme heat events, which disproportionately threaten vulnerable urban populations lacking stable environmental refuge.

The *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* (approved September 2020) and the *Civic Center Design Concept* (approved July 2023) call to restore these two historic buildings located at the heart of Berkeley's Civic Center. MSB, built in 1909, predates seismic codes and last underwent major renovation in the 1970s, which excluded seismic upgrades and other modern resilient building features including energy provision (i.e. electric and solar), and heating, venting, air conditioning or HVAC systems. VMB, built in 1928, similarly lacks seismic design and last received rehabilitation in 1993 without structural strengthening. Both buildings lie less than two miles from the Hayward Fault. Both buildings pose life safety hazards and risk partial or total collapse in a major earthquake and keep the buildings from serving Berkeley's public on an everyday (non-emergency) basis. Failing to secure state funding or

delaying structural modernizations limits Berkeley's emergency response readiness and prolongs regional community displacement during environmental crises. Submitting this grant application activates the physical transition of these landmarks from deteriorating liabilities into strengthened assets capable of mitigating regional disaster vulnerabilities at the local level. Securing these funds enables safe community access to reliable climate respite during extreme conditions, protects invaluable local historical landmarks, and strengthens a vision and design framework that links continuous civic programming and engagement, with climate resilience and emergency preparedness.

In anticipation of the formal grant application deadline in September 2026, city staff initiated a series of structured pre-application activities including community engagement, partnership building and internal city coordination. These initial activities allowed city staff to review the vision and design concepts for the Civic Center buildings with the community, ensuring that planned HVAC, microgrid, and physical building modifications already meet the strict state definition of an emergency climate-refuge. In addition, the project will also advance Berkeley's Strategic Plan goals of (1) creating a resilient, safe, connected, and prepared city and (2) providing state-of-the-art, well-maintained infrastructure, amenities, and facilities.

If awarded, CRC Planning Grant funding would underwrite pre-development, engineering, and site assessment work including further structural feasibility studies, and environmental and site appraisals including funding for Phase I/II environmental site assessments, and geotechnical reports. CRC grant funding could also be applied to permitting and pre-design activities including covering the cost of local permitting coordination, regulatory zoning review, and initial environmental review and compliance. Fiscal and policy analysis and operations planning are also allowable activities under the CRC Planning Grant, though planning grant funding cannot be used to fund direct construction, building renovations, or land acquisitions.

Grant Award Timeline

CRC Planning Grant applications are due in September 2026, with application and review taking place through Winter 2027. After award announcements, selected lead applicants enter a mandatory two-to-three-month post-award consultation process with SGC staff to finalize the formal work plan, budget sheets, and tracking metrics before signing the final grant agreement. The official grant performance period will begin in Spring 2027 and conclude in 2029, establishing a two-year grant term. If awarded funding, this project will be co-managed by the City Manager's Office (of which the Office of Economic Development, or OED, is part) and the Department of Public Works (PW) which is charged with construction and maintenance of all municipal building facilities for the City of Berkeley.

BACKGROUND

Berkeley's Civic Center is a National Register-listed historic district in Downtown Berkeley, centering on Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park and featuring significant historic buildings including the Maudelle Shirek Building (formerly City Hall, or often referred to as "Old City Hall") and the Veterans Memorial Building. The area serves as a vital public space for community events, and government functions, encompassing civic buildings, green spaces, and educational facilities. Planning for the Civic Center is guided by two documents both shaped by extensive stakeholder engagement; the *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* (adopted September 2020) and the *Civic Center Design Concept* (adopted July 2023).¹

After the adoption of the *Civic Center Design Concept* in 2023, the project moved to a third phase, one that focuses on the rehabilitation of the buildings and the attainment of funding for advancing the *Civic Center Vision Plan* and *Design Concept*. The two structures, Veterans Memorial Building and the Maudelle Shirek Building, in the Civic Center were built in the first quarter of the 1900s and have not been updated to current seismic standards. The California Strategic Growth Council's Community Resilience Center (CRC) Planning grant would provide the City with necessary financial support to advance the project to a "shovel ready" state. Once rehabilitated, the buildings would become *community resilience centers*, providing refuge during severe climate hazards, such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke, while delivering year-round community programming.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Securing CRC Planning Grant funds directly advances the goals of Berkeley's *Climate Action Plan* (2009) and the *Berkeley Resilience Strategy* (2016), and related building electrification frameworks, safety & disaster preparedness, and environmental justice General Plan element updates (2025 & 2026) by improving energy and building resilience and expanding localized emergency response capabilities with the development of a community resilience center.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Applying for CRC Planning Grant funding allows the City of Berkeley to leverage state funds to advance the *Civic Center Vision* and *Design Concept* to a "shovel ready" state. Authorizing this grant application also positions Berkeley's Civic Center for future multi-million-dollar allocations in subsequent implementation grant cycles to execute physical construction, structural seismic retrofits, and microgrid infrastructure deployment.

¹ Civic Center Vision Statement: *Civic Center will be the heart of Berkeley's community. Civic Center will be the prime space for civic life, culture, and the arts. It will reflect the city's diverse identities, celebrate its history, and contribute to shaping its future. A place of shared resources and a platform for free expression accessible to all, Civic Center aims to manifest the city's values, advance social justice, and demonstrate the power of true public space.* (Adopted by the Berkeley City Council, September 2020).

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

No alternatives were considered.

CONTACT PERSON

Eleanor Hollander, Office of Economic Development, 510-981-7536

Attachment:

1: Resolution: Grant Application: California Strategic Growth Council, Community Resilience Center (CRC) Planning Grant for Civic Center

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

AUTHORIZING SUBMISSION OF A PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION TO THE STRATEGIC GROWTH COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY RESILIENCE CENTERS (CRC) PROGRAM FOR BERKELEY'S CIVIC CENTER

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley is committed to strengthening community resilience, emergency preparedness, and climate adaptation for all members of the community; and

WHEREAS, the Berkeley Civic Center plays a vital role as a community gathering space and designated location for local emergency response and disaster recovery services; and

WHEREAS, the State of California's Community Resilience Centers (CRC) Program provides grant opportunities to fund facility retrofits, energy independence upgrades, and community resilience hubs; and

WHEREAS, the adopted *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* (2020) and *Civic Center Design Concept* (2023) documents are both shaped by extensive community engagement and outline a proposal that will improve structural integrity, indoor air quality, clean energy backup systems, public access, and community programming at the Civic Center; and

WHEREAS, The California Strategic Growth Council's CRC Planning grant would provide the City with necessary financial support to advance the *Civic Center Vision* and *Design Concept* to a "shovel ready" state.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the City Manager, or their designee, is hereby authorized to submit a Planning Grant application under the SGC's CRC Program for up to \$500,000 for Civic Center.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Manager, or their designee, is authorized to accept the grant, and execute any resultant revenue agreements and amendments and administer the grant funds, if awarded.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Council shall retain final discretion to approve, impose mitigation measures, or disapprove the Strategic Growth Council's CRC-funded projects in light of any environmental impacts disclosed as a result of the CEQA/NEPA review or any other reviews conducted as part of this process.