City Council Memo

Crest Hill, IL

Meeting Date:	November 2, 2026
Submitter:	Daniel Ritter, Community Development Director
Department:	Community Development
Agenda Item:	Resolution Approving a Commercial Property Improvement Grant for Front/Entrance Landscaping at Merichka's Restaurant, 604 Theodore Street

Background:

The City of Crest Hill previously maintained a Façade Improvement Grant Program that was funded and available to commercial property owners for several years. However, the program had limited utilization, with only one successful application during the eight years preceding the program's revision. The most recent approved project was for a wall sign at Soprano's Pizza & Catering, which was approved in February 2026 and completed; however, the business subsequently closed in October 2026.

Recognizing the opportunity to encourage broader and more meaningful reinvestment in existing commercial properties, the City Council adopted a revised Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program in July 2026. The revised program expanded eligible improvements beyond traditional façade and signage projects to include permanent landscaping and site improvements, as well as additional permanent building and site improvements. The intent of these changes was to make the program more useful to existing businesses and property owners while ensuring that grant-funded improvements provide a lasting benefit to the commercial property and surrounding area, rather than improvements that primarily benefit a single business operation. The overall goal of the Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program is to stimulate high-quality exterior improvements to existing commercial properties that enhance the appearance of the community, encourage private investment, and support the continued success and reinvestment of local businesses.

Proposal:

Merichka's Restaurant (https://merichkas.com/) is one of Crest Hill's most recognizable and longstanding businesses. The family-owned and operated restaurant has been in business since 1933 and is the longest continuously operating sit-down restaurant in Will County. Merichka's is well known throughout the region for its steak poor boys, onion rings, house salad dressing, steaks, homemade dishes, and classic supper-club atmosphere. As one of the City's most established businesses and a prominent commercial property along Theodore Street, continued investment in the property provides a benefit beyond the individual business. Improvements to the site contribute to the appearance of one of Crest Hill's heavily traveled commercial corridors and help support the long-term viability of an important local business.

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The current grant request is for landscaping improvements primarily focused on the property's most visible frontage along Theodore Street and the primary west entrance to the restaurant. The existing landscaping areas have become dated and deteriorated over time. The proposed improvements will provide a refreshed appearance while also improving the long-term maintenance and functionality of the planting areas. The project includes updated planting beds with high-quality perennials and shrubs that provide a more modern appearance, require less maintenance, and create renewed visual interest along the property's frontage and primary entrance.

Given the visibility and location of the property, the improvements will provide an immediate enhancement to the appearance of the Theodore Street commercial corridor and the entrance to a highly visited and recognizable Crest Hill establishment.

The applicant has requested a waiver from the typical requirement to obtain multiple bids for grant-funded work. The proposed landscaping work would be designed, supplied, and installed by The Fields on Caton Farm, a local Crest Hill business with experience completing landscaping improvements throughout the community. The Fields also provides the City's street tree installation services and is planning additional tree improvements adjacent to the property. Utilizing the same local contractor provides an opportunity to coordinate the landscaping work and ensure a cohesive improvement to the site and surrounding area. Staff believes the proposed waiver is reasonable given the relatively limited scope and cost of the project, the use of a qualified local contractor, the contractor's existing experience working with the City, and the immediate need to complete the landscaping work while weather conditions remain favorable.

The applicant has indicated that additional exterior improvements may be pursued through the Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program in the future, including potential façade improvements. That work is currently being evaluated, and the applicant is in the process of developing the scope and obtaining bids.

The total proposed contract for the landscaping improvements is $5,624.56. Based on the reimbursement of up to 50% of the eligible costs, the total of $2,812.28 is requested. This amount would be reimbursed following completion of the work and all other requirements outlined in the grant program.

Financial/Budget Info	
Budgeted FY26	$12,750.00
Currently Used FY26	$1,098.91
Requested Grant Total	$2,812.28
Remaining Budget FY26	$8,838.81

Recommendation:

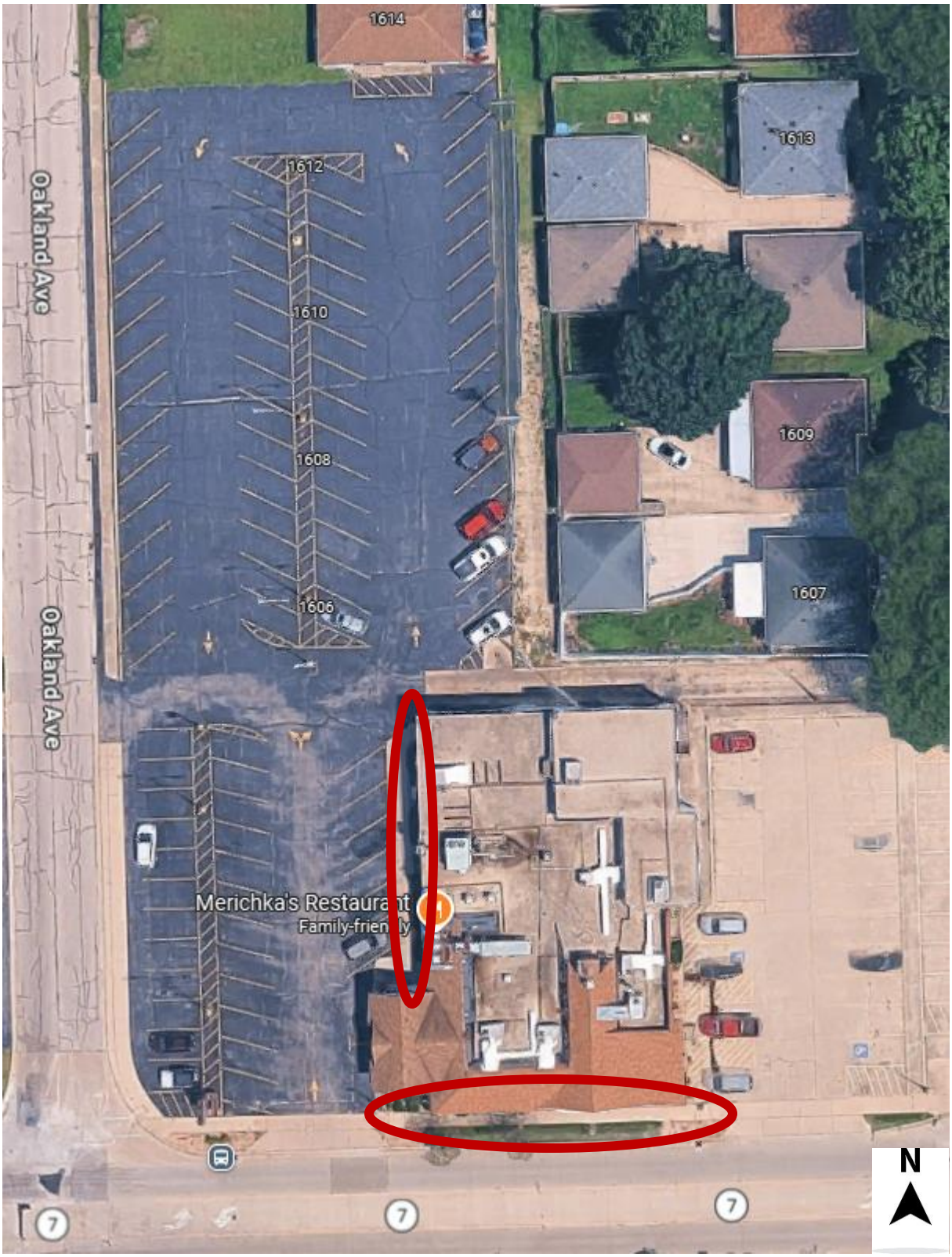
Staff supports the Commercial Property Improvement Grant request for Merichka's Restaurant. The proposed improvements are consistent with the purpose of the revised grant program by encouraging private investment in an existing commercial property and improving the appearance of a highly visible site along Theodore Street. The project also represents an opportunity to reinvest in one of Crest Hill's longest-standing and most recognizable businesses. While the proposed landscaping improvements are relatively modest in scope, they will provide a noticeable improvement to the property's frontage and entrance and establish a foundation for additional private investment in the property.

Recommended Council Action:

Approval of a Resolution Approving a Commercial Property Improvement Grant for Front/Entrance Landscaping at Merichka's Restaurant, 604 Theodore Street

Attachments: Draft Resolution with attachments

Exhibit 1 – Proposed Site and Landscape Areas



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