



City of Needles, California Request for City Council Action

☒ CITY COUNCIL ☐ NPUA

☒ Regular ☐ Special

Meeting Date: October 28, 2025

Title: Direction Regarding Visitor Center Program and California Welcome Center Certification

Background: On October 20, 2025, the Visitor Center Committee, including representatives from the Needles Chamber of Commerce, met to evaluate the feasibility of pursuing California Welcome Center (CWC) certification and to assess the long-term costs and operational impacts.

After reviewing financial data and program requirements, the Committee determined that the costs associated with certification and expanded operations would not be financially feasible for the City at this time. The projected costs include approximately \$95,000 in the first year, covering one-time startup and branding expenses, and about \$71,000 annually thereafter to maintain seven-day-per-week operations and staffing. This represents an estimated total of \$379,000 over the initial five-year period.

As part of the financial review, staff also evaluated specific CWC program expenses, including a one-time application fee (\$1,000), welcome package (\$9,000) for required signage and displays, annual membership dues (\$5,000) for participation in statewide marketing and promotions, and Caltrans freeway signage (~\$7,000) for directional wayfinding. These costs, combined with the additional labor and operational requirements, contributed to the Committee's recommendation to defer the program.

The Committee recommended that the City focus on strengthening the capacity of the existing Visitor Center and leveraging the upcoming Route 66 Centennial to naturally attract increased tourism. With the Centennial expected to draw significant traveler interest statewide, Needles has a strategic opportunity to position itself as the gateway to the Colorado River Valley region, highlighting its heritage, recreation, and hospitality assets.

The City will continue to support tourism and visitor outreach through its ongoing partnership with Tripepi Smith & Associates, who provide professional marketing and public affairs services under a not-to-exceed \$40,000 annual contract. Their current scope includes attraction videos, social media and digital ad campaigns, and brand promotion tied to the Route 66 Centennial.

The Chamber of Commerce will maintain day-to-day Visitor Center operations under the existing \$24,000 annual agreement (expiring April 21, 2026), aligning messaging and outreach efforts with the City's broader marketing strategy.

Fiscal Impact: The Visitor Center Committee estimates the total cost of certification and expanded operations at approximately \$95,000 in the first year, including startup and branding expenses, and \$71,000 annually thereafter to sustain seven-day-per-week operations and staffing—about \$379,000 over five years. These figures include the existing \$24,000 annual payment to the Chamber of Commerce for Visitor Center operations. Deferring the California

Welcome Center initiative avoids these additional costs and keeps the program within the City's existing tourism and marketing budget.

Recommended Action: That the City Council:

1. Acknowledge the findings of the October 20, 2025 Visitor Center Committee meeting.
2. Defer pursuit of California Welcome Center certification due to cost and sustainability considerations.
3. Direct staff to focus on leveraging the existing Visitor Center and the City's marketing partnership to promote Needles during the Route 66 Centennial and attract visitors to the Colorado River Valley region.

Submitted By: Patrick Martinez, City Manager

City Manager Approval: Patrick J. Martinez

Date: 10/23/2025

Other Department Approval (when required): _____

Date: _____