



City of Needles
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Vice Mayor Kirsten Merritt
Councilmember Tona Belt
Councilmember Ellen Campbell
Councilmember Jamie McCorkle
Councilmember JoAnne Pogue
Councilmember Henry Longbrake
City Manager Patrick J. Martinez*

MEMORANDUM

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PATRICK J. MARTINEZ, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 8, 2023

1. On Saturday, December 2, 2023, the eagerly anticipated Needles Holiday Fun Fair and Lighted Parade took center stage, proudly hosted by the Youth Development and Education Foundation in collaboration with Needles community partners and the City of Needles! We're immensely grateful to all who joined us in celebrating this joyous occasion (see attached image).

Highlights of the event:

- More than 60 vibrant vendors showcased their wares at the Holiday Fair.
 - Over 50 talented students from Dance Trax delivered captivating performances.
 - Enthusiastic residents gathered around the Chamber Tree Lighting Ceremony, marking the beginning of the festive season.
 - The Holiday Parade boasted a record-breaking 28 entries, making it the most spectacular parade in recent years.
2. The City of Needles hit a significant milestone by constructing the Needles Marina Beach Project at First Beach, opposite the Rivers Edge Golf Course (see attached image). Securing a \$2,179,702 Clean California Grant, this initiative aims to revamp an underused Colorado River area into a shaded park. The envisioned park includes seating, native flora, a walking path, and a children's play area. Moreover, it will incorporate educational signage highlighting tribal and natural history, emphasizing the importance of preserving the Colorado River's cleanliness. Additionally, in July 2022, the City Council unanimously renamed First and Second Beach to honor Robert "Bob" T. Belt, the esteemed former Director of Recreation and Parks for the city, acknowledging his significant ties to Needles.

3. Construction updates for two park projects totaling \$4.15 million:
 - **Duke Watkins Park:** Work has begun, highlighted by pouring the bicycle asphalt pump track, funded by a substantial \$3,965,400 grant from California's Proposition 68 Statewide Park Program (see attached image).
 - **Jack Smith Park:** A new 1,300-linear-foot walking trail, surpassing existing paths in scope and quality, has been completed, thanks to a \$181,000 grant from California's Proposition 68 Statewide Park Program (see attached image).
4. In May 2022, the City of Needles' administrative hearing officer declared the property at 1900 Needles Highway, known as the Best Motel, a public nuisance. Subsequently, the city filed a Petition for the Appointment of a Receiver in the San Bernardino County Superior Court. Earlier this year, the City partnered with the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe to address the property's issues. Recently, demolition of the property commenced, marking the start of cleanup efforts at the Best Motel (see attached image).
5. Mark your calendars! The 2024 Needles San Bernardino County Resource Fair, organized by Supervisor Rowe's Office in collaboration with City Staff, is set for March 20, 2024. El Garces will be the venue for this pivotal event, gathering key county agencies, including the Department of Public Health, County Recorder, and Workforce Development. Stay tuned for further details!
6. The California Strategic Growth Council and Local Institute for Local Government joined forces to empower local governments statewide in tackling crucial issues such as clean air and water accessibility, clean transportation, affordable housing, and economic opportunities. The City of Needles was chosen to participate in the 2021 cohort and completed an intensive 18-month technical assistance program with the BOOST Program (Build, Organize, Optimize, Strengthen, and Transform). Through collaborative efforts between the BOOST team and City Staff, Needles secured over \$6 million in grants, focusing on elevating the quality of life for its residents. The California Strategic Growth Council recognized the city's achievements in a blog post titled 'Giving the City of Needles a BOOST: Making Significant Impacts in a Small City' (see attached article).

1. Holiday Fun Fair



2. Bob Belt Beach Park Groundbreaking



Photo courtesy of Jeni Henderson News West Publishing

3. Duke Watkins Project Update



3. Jack Smith Park Project Update



4. Abatement of Best Motel



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4. Abatement of Best Motel



6. SGC Blog Article



Giving the City of Needles a BOOST: Making BIG Impacts in a Small City



California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) · [Follow](#)

6 min read · Nov 15



By: Chynell Freeman

“We were down to our last well; we just had a main break.” Without another way to bring in water, [we] didn’t have a plan, so that Saturday morning I submitted the BOOST application.” City of Needles Utility Manager, Rainie Torrance, recalls. In a city where the temperatures routinely peak at 120 degrees for six months out of the year, the last well failing would be devastating for Needles residents. The BOOST Program “helped with our water infrastructure. They helped us at a time when we were trying to get money and come up with answers.”

The City of Needles is a remote, rural community in San Bernadino County on the eastern edge of the Mohave Desert where California, Nevada, and Arizona meet. Needles faces drought, extreme heat, failing infrastructure, and water insecurity. During the scorching summer months, tourists and residents keep cool in the refreshing Colorado River. The small desert city depends on tourism revenues to manage the numerous challenges residents face, but Needles tourism does not generate enough economic activity to fund all the infrastructure projects that the city desperately needs.

With a team of under 60 people, the City of Needles staff wear multiple hats, doing their best to maintain and improve the city they love and call home. The City’s busy staff lack the capacity to track down and complete applications to compete for the historic amounts of State and Federal grant funding available. “[The City of Needles] being way out here, rural, isolated, and disadvantaged, there are not very many resources that we can reach out to. We’re trying to [apply for] funding as much as we can, [so] technical assistance is critical,” explains Torrance.

“[The City of Needles] being way out here, rural, isolated, and disadvantaged, there are not very many resources that we can reach out to. We’re trying to [apply for] funding as much as we can, [so] technical assistance is critical.” — Rainie Torrance, City of Needles Utility Manager

Advancing Affordable Housing Goals

Due to its stretched staff capacity, the City of Needles had not been able to update its General Plan since 1986, and it had not updated its Housing Element since 2005. This meant that the City was out of compliance with the

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city obtain a Prohousing Designation. This Program is only open to those jurisdictions that have a certified Housing Element, which was secured earlier this year.

In April 2023, the City of Needles became one of just a couple dozen local agencies, the first rural community, and the smallest city (so far) to receive the prestigious Prohousing Designation. The Designation will not only help Needles attract developers but also make the City more competitive for various State funding programs. It has already helped Needles receive a Prohousing Inventive Pilot Program award of \$445,000.

In March, the City of Needles assumed the responsibility of the Housing Authority of the City of Needles, which had acquired 30 vouchers through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. The VASH program combines the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with case management and supportive services for homeless Veterans.

Planning for Safer Rides to School

Before BOOST, the City of Needles had also been working for years to update its General Plan's transportation element, which would set the vision for how it will improve its sidewalks and roads. Needles needs more sidewalks in its school district as biking, using a wheelchair, or scooter riding to school in Needles often requires a hazardous trek along a path of dirt and rocks. To support the effort to update its transportation element, Needles City staff had previously applied for the CalTrans Active Transportation Planning Grant. "In 2020, we submitted the application ourselves. It was a very complex and challenging process. We did the best we could, ... but unfortunately, we were not selected," remembers Torrance. Although they had applied for the grant several times, they had never been awarded it. Needles staff had sought out technical assistance firms to help with the application, but the firms were too costly.

With the BOOST Program providing technical assistance in the most recent application for the CalTrans Active Transportation grant, the City of Needles was finally able to secure an award. CalTrans awarded Needles \$1.5 million to update its General Plan's transportation element. "That's a huge chunk of sidewalk you can get done with that amount of money," remarks Torrance about this planning grant. With an up-to-date transportation element in the City's General Plan, the children of Needles can look forward to smoother journeys to school.



Boosting Community Climate Resilience

“[Before the BOOST Program team came to Needles, no one had] stopped to get to know the needs of our residents... the disarray of our parks,” she adds, pointing to the City of Needles’s difficulty securing funding for infrastructure upgrades that would promote equity and climate resilience. Marina Park, one of Needles’s open spaces along the Colorado River, features sweeping vistas of sand-coated mountain ranges of the Fort Mojave

reservation; however, limited shade makes Marina Park inhospitable on hot days and the lack of indication of the significance of the mountainous view hinder passersby from fully appreciating it.

Thanks to the BOOST Program's technical assistance with the application, Needles and the Fort Mojave Native American Tribe won a \$2.2 million Clean California award to enhance Marina Park. The award will fund the addition of tree canopy, benches, and walking paths, increasing shade along the beach and park, allowing Marina Park to serve as a place of respite for residents and tourists seeking relief from extreme heat. The Clean California award will also fund a series of educational plaques lining walking paths celebrating the history and cultural contributions of the Fort Mojave Tribe.

The BOOST Program's Big Impacts

In a small city like Needles, the BOOST Program's technical assistance and capacity building makes a big impact. In 18 months, BOOST Program staff and technical assistance (TA) contractors helped the City bring in \$4.1 million dollars for essential infrastructure upgrades and climate adaptation projects. "The skills that our staff learned are priceless. [For] jurisdictions like Needles, there's not very many resources that we can reach out to, so this type of TA is critical," reflects Torrance.

"The skills that our staff learned are priceless." — Rainie Torrance, City of Needles Utility Manager

Community Assistance for Climate Equity

**The BOOST Program's
Second Cohort of Cities
Leveraged \$500,000
to secure \$25 million
in State and Federal Grants!**



Since the inception of the Program, BOOST has provided \$1.5 million in tailored support to local jurisdictions, with these investments helping the jurisdictions secure \$75 million in additional public and philanthropic investment. A recent [press release](#) announced that over the last 18 months, the second round of the BOOST Program helped a cohort of seven cities secure \$25 million in State and federal grants. Since the inception of the Program, BOOST has provided \$1.5 million in tailored support to local jurisdictions, with these investments helping the jurisdictions secure \$75 million in additional public and philanthropic investment.

About the BOOST Program

The California Strategic Growth Council created the BOOST Program in 2019 to help under-resourced local governments on the frontlines of climate change build resilience and accelerate climate action by providing intensive tools, trainings, and direct assistance to access grant programs. With California's \$48 billion climate budget offering unprecedented amounts of funding and the federal Inflation Reduction Act making available billions

more, the BOOST Program creates a pathway for under-resourced local governments to access funding opportunities.

If you work for a State agency or another funder seeking to design and implement effective and equitable technical assistance and capacity building programs, explore the Strategic Growth Council's Technical Assistance Toolkit.

About the Author

During her time supporting the California Strategic Growth Council as Student Assistant — Social Media, Chynell Freeman had the pleasure of interviewing Rainie Torrance about her experience of the BOOST Program. Chynell Freeman is a graduating senior at UC Davis, majoring in International Relations and minoring in Community Regional Development. Passionate about community engagement, Chynell finds joy in empowering individuals through the art of storytelling. After graduation, Chynell aspires to pursue a career that allows her to continue this meaningful work.



Written by California Strategic Growth Council (SGC)

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