

Occidental Outdoor Community Space Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the Occidental Outdoor Community Space Project?

A: The primary goal of the Occidental Outdoor Community Space Project is to create an outdoor public community gathering space in downtown Occidental that will provide greater opportunities for residents and visitors of all age groups to meet, connect and socialize. Currently, there is no public greenspace area to gather for local organized events or casual get-togethers.

Q: How was the need for the project determined?

A: In October 2022, the Occidental Community Council, a local non-profit organization, initiated a community-driven action planning process (CAP) to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors in the Occidental area. The focus was to develop an agreed upon plan for improvements in the downtown Occidental area, consistent with local community needs.

A group of key stakeholders including a dozen representatives from local businesses, Harmony Union School District, local non-profits, the Community Services District, residents and Sonoma County Regional Parks participated in ten meetings and developed a preliminary list of nine priority improvement areas which were included in the final CAP report.

A community survey completed by over 200 individuals was published to confirm the community priorities. *“Creating Gathering Spaces”* was a top-ranking priority for downtown Occidental in the Community Survey. More than half of all survey respondents said they would use an outdoor gathering space to socialize with family and friends.

Q: Where will the project be located?

A: The project will be located on a County-owned property at the center of Occidental, in the triangle area on the southeast corner of Bohemian Highway and Occidental Road. The site will provide a prominent and welcoming entry to the town that is accessible to anyone. The planned project will result in an improved public open space of approximately 5,000 square feet, including a natural playground area of approximately 500 square feet.

Q: What progress has occurred so far?

A: After the CAP process concluded, a Downtown Design sub-committee continued to meet with the intention of furthering identified goals related to downtown improvements. Subsequently, the sub-committee raised \$8,000 in local funds and engaged a professional design firm to develop a draft plan for the Outdoor Community Space Project. They also coordinated with the County of Sonoma District 5 office to secure partial funding through the Dept. of Public Infrastructure (PI). With assistance from PI, an application was submitted to the Ag & Open Space District *Community Spaces Matching Grant Program* to provide additional funding for Phase 1 of the project. Currently, project costs are estimated at roughly \$1 million. We expect to raise all the needed funds through a combination of public and private sources.

Members of the sub-committee have also been in discussion with the Occidental Community Services District to secure local support for long-term site management and maintenance

Q: What are the next steps for the project?

A: Finalizing the plans and securing funding for the project are the next immediate steps. The conceptual design is currently posted on the OCC website (www.occidental-ca.org) and comments are welcome through email sent to occinfo@sonic.net. The Downtown Design Committee will post updates as well as information on meetings and other opportunities for community input on the final project design on the OCC website. After construction plans and a final workplan are completed, the County Public Infrastructure Department will apply for permits and lead the project implementation. A service agreement for long-term maintenance will also be needed prior to commencement of the project.

Q: Does the project include a public restroom?

A: Phase 1 of the project, which is eligible for Ag and Open Space funding, includes seating and staging areas for family gatherings and community events, a small natural play area for children, and interpretive signage. The open community gathering area will be elevated to the height of the current public parking lot making the area safe and accessible to all.

Phase 2 will include the addition of a public restroom that is desperately needed for both visitors and residents since there are currently no public facilities available except for the two portable toilets placed at the northern and southern ends of town.

Q: Why are the County Public Infrastructure and Ag & Open Space Funds being directed to this project rather than the Community Center?

A: The Friends of the Community Center (FCC) sub-committee was also formed during the CAP process and this group is currently working on increasing usage of the existing facility and making minor site improvements, such as the recently installed water station. Long-term plans are also being developed in partnership with Harmony Union School District, current operator of the facility, the County Parks Department and other potential partners to completely renovate the building and grounds. Renovation of existing buildings and parking areas is not an eligible use of Ag & Open Space funding. Other sources of funding such as USDA Community Facilities grants could be pursued for this project.

Q: When will the proposed project be completed?

A: Implementation of Phase 1 will likely begin sometime in 2025 and the completion of both phases is to be determined.

Q: How can I help with the project?

A: Contributions to the project are welcome! <https://gofund.me/b2610c61> You can also stay informed and attend meetings or write letters of support to advocate for additional funding allocations from the County Board of Supervisors and Ag & Open Space District.

Q: Where can I get updates on the project?

A: A description of the project and updates are available on the Occidental Community Council website. www.occidental-ca.org

THANK YOU!