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City Manager's Report
October 24, 2023, City Council Meeting
Prepared by: Terry Zeller, Director of Community Services
Item #: 12.1

Subject: Receive presentation on Hometown Holidays event (formerly the Festival of Lights) scheduled for Friday, November 24th, 2023 and Approval of Alternative to Historic Tree Lighting.

Recommendation: Receive Presentation and approve Hometown Holiday Program and Staff's Recommendation of a Cut Tree and Recommended Location as an Alternative to the Historic Christmas Tree for the Tree Lighting during the Event.

Purpose: To provide a summary of the annual special event that normally takes place on the day after Thanksgiving, detailing the program changes from last year, and to request Council approval for use of a cut tree and its location for the Christmas tree lighting.

Strategic Plan Strategy: Maintain/Improve Quality of Life (3a.)

Background: The City has been sponsoring special events since 2022 and worked with an association of local churches in 2020, 2021 and 2022 to produce an event centered around lighting the City Christmas Tree each year on the day after Thanksgiving. Prior to 2020 the event was produced by the Placerville Downtown Association (PDA). This year, the event is being co-sponsored and produced by the El Dorado Community Foundation, and seeks to bring back a more 'hometown' feeling in its event, but still with participation of the local schools and many local groups, associations and nonprofits.

There is also a major change to the lighting of the Christmas Tree at the end of the event. The Coastal Redwood at the NE corner of Bedford and Main which has been the city's official holiday tree for many decades sustained heavy storm damage this Spring and has been determined by a Certified Arborist as being unable to hold lights without further damage. A suitable alternative to lighting that tree has been discussed for several months, and an option has been settled on for presentation to the council for its review and approval.

Discussion: Representatives of the El Dorado Community Foundation will provide the Council the planning and program that has been firmed up so far for this event and take questions on the content and focus of this year's event. This year, our tree lighting event has been renamed "Hometown Holidays" to reflect the effort at bringing out the best our community has to ring in the holiday season, at a more intimate scale than previous years' events. Bill Roby, Executive Director of the El Dorado Community Foundation, will speak on what the community can expect this November 24th, followed by a discussion by staff of the alternate for lighting a tree downtown. (Move to oral presentation by Bill Robie, 5-10 minutes).

As the historic Christmas tree is not able to be strung with lights due to its condition, multiple discussions among staff have taken place on what a fitting alternative would be for this iconic tree. Staff's recommendation is to provide a large cut tree in a downtown location as the most practical choice for the 2023 holiday season. A 25-foot cut tree has been identified and will be provided by Sierra Pacific Industries. Four different options have been considered this year for the Tree.

SR Update Hometown Holidays Presentation/Tree Discussion 10-24-23

1. Light and decorate the Bell Tower as this year's tree. Through the use of garland and other decorations, the tower could look similar to a tree.
2. Place a cut tree in the front landscaped area of the Courthouse on Main Street. This would be in close proximity to the previous tree.
3. Place a cut tree in the Commercial parking space on the East side of the Bell Tower. Major concerns have been raised with this location due to how heavily it is used for commercial loading and unloading for downtown businesses.
4. Place a cut tree in the street/parking area on the North side of the Bell Tower, between the tower and businesses. This would have an impact on parking and street closure through that area.

Staff is in discussions with the County and with the Courts and permission is being sought to install the tree in the eastern front planter bed of the County Courthouse, just across Bedford Street from the historic tree. Option #1 has not been received well in discussions by the Foundation with downtown businesses. The recommendation of those businesses was Option #3. However, as noted above, there are concerns with that location and its effect on deliveries. Option #2 also received negative comments from downtown businesses, and it also takes away needed parking during the holiday season. If approved by the County and the Court, staff feels Option #2 is the best option for the tree.

Options Regarding Proposed Program:

1. Approve the program as outlined by the Community Foundation.
2. Approve the program outlined by the Community Foundation with changes.
3. Do not approve the program and provide other direction to staff.

Options Regarding Holiday Tree Lighting

1. Approve the location for a cut tree at the front of the Courthouse.
2. Approve the location of a cut tree on the East side of the Bell Tower in the Commercial parking space.
3. Approve the location of a cut tree on the North side of the Bell Tower in the parking and street area.
4. Approve the decorating and use of the Bell Tower for this year's holiday tree.
5. Approve other options for the tree.

Environmental: The presentation, nor the temporary installation of a cut tree are not considered "projects" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and therefore are not subject to environmental review.

Cost: The event and tree are being funded through donations, and the city expenses are covered under the Community Services operating budget for 2023/2024.

Budget Impact: City costs will be managed by existing line items in the city's operating budget for 2023/2024

M. Cleve Morris, City Manager

Terry Zeller, Dir. of Community Services