



COUNTY OF NEVADA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

950 MAIDU AVENUE, SUITE 170, NEVADA CITY, CA 95959-8617
(530) 265-1222 ~ FAX (530) 478-5799 <http://nevadacountyca.gov>
Trisha Tillotson, Agency Director

Agricultural Commissioner

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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Memo

MEETING DATE: April 8, 2025

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Trisha Tillotson, Community Development Agency Director

SUBJECT: Resolution accepting the Nevada County Courthouse Highest and Best Use Study

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the attached Resolution accepting the Nevada County Courthouse Highest and Best Use Study.

FUNDING: Funding was provided by the American Rescue Plan Act per Resolution 24-246.

BACKGROUND: The Judicial Council of California (JCC) plans to build a new courthouse in Nevada City, starting in 2027 with completion in July 2031. As such, the existing Nevada County Courthouse is expected to be vacated in 2031. To proactively plan for the future use of the current courthouse site, the Board of Supervisors, per Resolution 24-246, engaged Nelson, an architectural firm, to conduct a "highest and best use" study to inform future discussions and decisions.

The current courthouse site includes the courthouse building, its annex, and the adjacent satellite parking lot. Originally constructed in the late 1850s, the courthouse was rebuilt in the 1860s and expanded in 1900, with a series of architectural modifications over time. The most prominent change came in the 1930s with a significant remodel, giving the building its current Art Moderne-style façade.

Currently, the County shares joint responsibility for the courthouse site with the State, holding a 49% interest. As the County assumes responsibility for the site's future, the Highest and Best Use Study will help ensure a smooth and timely transition from the courthouse's judicial function to new uses, while also preventing the building from standing vacant and deteriorating.

The Nelson team collaborated with the County, Nevada City, local businesses, special interest groups and the at-large community to develop the study. Two community meetings were held where feedback ranged from housing proposals to potential non-profit or governmental uses of the site (see project webpage for additional information: <https://www.nevadacountyca.gov/3952/Nevada-City-Courthouse-Re-use-Study>).

Research included the current market, market patterns, and architectural characteristics of the site to develop the Study. Market research shows housing is the most viable solution for the area. The team studied many different configurations and housing types and determined that apartment housing clearly provided the best opportunities to be successful. Other housing types were not viable. Cost estimates, architectural test fits, and a proforma indicated that reusing or demolishing the existing courthouse was not viable. The costs far outweighed the potential financial returns. However, using the same approach, the Annex building showed promise as either an adaptive re-use or to be demolished and replaced with apartment housing.

The Highest and Best Use Study (see attached) final recommendations include:

- 1) Split the site into two (2) parcels, the Courthouse site and the Annex Building site.
- 2) Stabilize the Courthouse building and retain it as a future community or non-profit facility.
- 3) Use a solicitation process to determine how the Annex building could be reused or redeveloped for housing.

Going forward, the content of the study can be used by the County in negotiations and in reaching out to potential users and developers of the site. If a future governmental need of the site is not identified, the County will likely issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) and sell the site, aiming for its development in a way that benefits the community. In line with California's Surplus Land Act (SLA), housing will be prioritized as the primary use due to the state's ongoing housing crisis.

Attachments:

- 1) Resolution, proposed
- 2) Nevada County Courthouse Highest and Best Use Study
- 3) Resolution 24-246

**Item Initiated and Approved by: Trisha Tillotson, Community Development
Agency Director**

Submittal Date:

Revision Date: