



STAFF REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE: Regular Meeting of November 12, 2025

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Dante Hall, City Manager

SUBMITTED BY: Christopher Roke, Parks and Recreation Director
Joe Vasquez, Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Fourth of July Celebration for 2026

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an update on the planning for the Fourth of July 2026 Celebration and provide direction to staff on whether to proceed with fireworks on a barge, a drone show, or pursue a co-sponsored parade and 5K Fun Run with community partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The plans for the City's regular fireworks celebration at the Waterfront have been affected by several changes. The local Rodeo Hercules Fire Protection District has been merged into the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, and the City is working with new management responsible for a larger area. The City has approved development plans for Blocks K, L, M, P, and O—land that has historically served as the staging area for the annual fireworks display. Recently, the site's owner informed staff of their intention to sell the property by May 2026 and indicated they cannot support its use for a 2026 fireworks event. Additionally, concerns have grown about the potential use of vehicles as weapons at large public gatherings at both local and national levels. The Hercules Police Department has also expressed worries about rising spectator numbers, which contribute to traffic congestion on City streets before and after the event, with limited access points. Therefore, staff recommends exploring viable options to move away from land-based fireworks for this year's Fourth of July celebration. Possible alternatives include a barge-based fireworks show, a drone display, or reintroducing the community parade and fun run from previous years.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS:

The City of Hercules has hosted an annual fireworks celebration at the Bayfront, along with food vendors, on the Fourth of July since the 2021-22 fiscal year. But even before that, the City of Hercules had a long-standing tradition of hosting a community-wide Fourth of July Celebration featuring family-friendly entertainment, food vendors, a parade, a fun run, and a fair at Refugio Valley Park.

July 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of our country (semi-quincentennial). This historic milestone presents a unique opportunity to celebrate community pride and showcase local culture while supporting national anniversary commemorative efforts. If the Council confirms the transition away from land-based fireworks, staff has identified three alternatives for consideration:

- **Barge-Based Fireworks Display:** Securing a barge is challenging, as they are limited in availability and typically booked a year in advance. The cost for the barge (only) is approximately \$85,000, which would more than double the cost of previous Fourth of July events. Also, hosting fireworks over water introduces complex permitting requirements and does not resolve existing crowd or traffic management concerns.

Additionally, because of the shallow waters along the bay front, the nearest a barge could get is 1.5 miles from shore, which would require larger shells to create a visually appealing display. Ultimately, this method could not accommodate the same number of shells and would shorten the show's duration unless more funding was provided.

- **Drone Display:** A drone show presents a modern and environmentally friendly alternative to traditional fireworks, but it comes with challenges. A large number of drones are required to create a visually impactful display, and each has a limited battery life of just 12 to 15 minutes. For a 12-minute show with 150 drones, the expected cost ranges from \$30,000 to \$40,000. As the number of drones increases, so does the cost, making this a potentially expensive option for a relatively short show.

Location feasibility also poses concerns. The Bayfront area is prone to strong winds that could disrupt drone performance and would still face the same crowd and traffic issues as past events. Refugio Valley Park is expected to be unavailable in 2026 due to ongoing shade structure installations and dredging work. While Hercules High School offers adequate space and seating at its football field and track, limited parking in the area could create accessibility and traffic challenges. Overall, while a drone show is an innovative idea, it would require significant planning, investment, and coordination to be a viable option.

- **Parade and 5K Fun Run:** The City could work with the budgeted funds to revive its tradition of hosting a community-wide Fourth of July celebration with food vendors, a parade, and a fun run. This type of event could serve as a meaningful step toward a more sustainable celebration. With potential support from local partners, it offers an opportunity to reassess the event and boost community participation. More planning is needed to finalize the logistics of such an event.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The City Council has allocated \$50,000 for the Fourth of July Celebration in the fiscal year 2025-26 Budget. It is recommended that the City Council authorize staff to engage in discussions with community partners regarding the reinstatement of the parade and a fun run in 2026. If the Council prefers an alternative option, additional resources may be required.

Financial Impact

Description: \$50,000 FY2025-26 Budget

Funding Source: General Fund #100-5510-611.90-00

Budget Recap:

Total Estimated cost:	\$50,000	New Revenue:	\$0
Amount Budgeted:	\$50,000	Lost Revenue:	\$0
New Funding required:	\$0	New Personnel:	\$0
Council Policy Change:	Yes ☐	No ☒	

ATTACHMENTS:

None