



Ojai Outlook

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER OF THE CITY OF OJAI

WINTER 2025

Ojai 2025 Year in Review

In Ojai, 2025 was a year of progress, partnership, and perseverance. From repaved streets and new public safety measures to investments in climate resiliency, the arts, and affordable housing, each milestone reflects the City's ongoing commitment to enhancing quality of life while preserving Ojai's small-town character.



Infrastructure Improvement

Public Works crews installed major upgrades throughout Ojai. The Street Rehabilitation Project brought new life to 22 streets, totaling 18 lane miles. Cyclists and pedestrians gained a 1.5-mile shared path along Highway 33 through the Active Transportation Program, the first phase of a network that will eventually extend to Highway 150.

In downtown, parking lots were resurfaced, sidewalks repaired, and the Arcade's signature red tiles restored. Kent Hall, home to the City Council Chamber, gained new bathrooms, and the Arcade Plaza was repainted and landscaped to maintain its historic charm.



Focus on Climate Resiliency

Sustainability advanced alongside infrastructure improvements. More than \$800,000 was invested in clean energy projects, including replacing gas systems with electric alternatives and adding battery backups at City facilities. 20% of the City's vehicle fleet is now electric, with more expected as older vehicles are retired.

Public Works also added electric landscaping tools, reducing emissions and noise in neighborhoods. Crews planted more than 100 trees, helping maintain Ojai's 95% healthy tree canopy and its Tree City USA distinction.



Commitment to Public Safety

To address concerns about speeding, distracted driving and e-bike safety, the City added to its existing law enforcement contract with the Ventura County Sheriff's Department to include a motorcycle deputy. Deputy Eric Burnett, who started motorcycle patrol this summer, focused on education and awareness, helping residents understand the importance of safe driving. In addition to the new motorcycle officer, deputies also increased patrols on foot and by e-bike.



Investment in Fire Hardening

Fire hardening was affirmed as a top priority through a new City partnership with the Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council (OVFSC). The City entered into a \$386,000 contract with the OVFSC to support community-based wildfire risk mitigation efforts, assist and coordinate in emergency preparedness planning, improve neighborhood capacity building and implement aspects of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, which the City previously adopted in 2024. As part of this contract, a City-specific fire-hardening information source will soon be developed on the OVFSC website.

Continue on page 2

Ojai 2025 Year in Review, Continued



C.A.R.E. Policy Adoption

In response to community concerns about federal immigration actions, the City Council adopted the Ojai C.A.R.E. Policy, short for Community Autonomy, Rights, and Equality. The policy reaffirms Ojai's commitment to inclusivity and protections for immigrant and LGBTQ+ residents.

A new webpage at Ojai.CA.gov/606/Ojai-CARE provides policy details, legal aid links, and information about upcoming workshops. The City invites residents to explore and share the page as it continues to expand available resources.



General Plan Update

The City Council made the General Plan Update a top priority in 2024. In 2025, staff focused on two new components: a Climate Action Plan and an Economic Diversification Element. To increase local input, the City shifted from small focus groups to community-wide engagement, including surveys, open houses, and pop-up events launching in winter 2025–26. Work continues on the Land Use, Circulation, and Safety Elements.



Modernizing Public Meetings

To improve accessibility and efficiency, the City Clerk's Office implemented new agenda management software from Granicus, replacing manual processes. Residents will continue to access agendas and recordings at the same website but with better search functions, comment tools, and archive access.



Increased Commitment to the Arts

The City Council increased the Arts Commission's annual grant budget from \$30,000 to \$100,000 in 2025–26 to expand opportunities for local artists and cultural programming. The Commission also increased outreach to ensure diverse creative voices are represented in community projects.



Impactful Housing Initiatives

After extensive community input, the City adopted a Movable Tiny Homes ordinance in June 2025. The ordinance, based on a previous pilot program, allows composting toilets, alternative foundations, and land leasing while removing redundant inspections and excessive deck requirements.

In August, the City adopted the Flexpath ordinance, providing a flexible framework for homeowners undertaking major renovations. The policy allows property owners to meet energy performance goals through a menu of energy and electrification measures. It will take effect Jan. 31, 2026, following an educational campaign.

To address housing affordability, the City allocated \$100,000 to HELP of Ojai to expand rental and utility assistance programs. The funding supports residents at risk of losing housing and helps individuals transition into permanent homes.

The City also went out to bid for its Permanent Supportive Housing Project in collaboration with DignityMoves. The successful bid is expected to be awarded in February of 2026, with project construction commencing shortly after bid award, for an estimated construction completion date of July 2027.



Recreation and Community Connection

Ojai's Recreation Department continued to create opportunities for residents to gather, learn and play. Under the leadership of Recreation Manager Kristy Rivera, an Ojai native who continues to reside in town, programs for all ages grew in popularity.

For seniors, the new Thursday Social Club offered activities such as paint-and-sip sessions and pumpkin carving, while Senior Line Dancing with Ms. Stacy remained a favorite. Youth programs flourished as more than 260 young athletes joined the Youth Basketball League, and Summer Day Camp once again filled up with trips to the Santa Barbara Sea Center, Red Door Escape Room, and Lake Casitas. The camp earned The Ojai Valley News Gold Award for the third consecutive year.

Community traditions continued as Ojai Day, the Fourth of July Picnic and Family Night Out brought residents together for music, games, and celebration. In 2025, the City's Parks and Recreation Commission was also reconstituted after two years of dormancy, providing a community forum for recreation activities and updates.

Ojai 2025 Year in Review, Continued



Supporting our Local Businesses

In alignment with the City Council's goal of Diversifying Economy/Tourism Management, the City of Ojai launched a three-month pilot contract with the Ojai Valley Chamber of Commerce this summer. Following its success, the program transitioned into a one-year agreement to continue supporting local businesses and managing community events. Under this new contract, the Chamber is serving as a business ombudsperson, providing direct assistance to current and prospective businesses with permitting, licensing, and general inquiries. This hands-on support helps streamline communication between entrepreneurs and City departments, making it easier to navigate startup and expansion processes.

Additionally in 2025, the City finalized a contract with HdL Companies to implement a new online system for business and cannabis licensing application and renewal. This secure, user-friendly platform makes it easier for local businesses and cannabis operators to apply for, renew, and manage their licenses.



Customer Service and Technology

The City improved customer service through the ["My Ojai" mobile app](#), which allows residents to report street, tree or sidewalk concerns directly from their phones. In addition, a new online permitting system simplified the construction process for homeowners and contractors.



Looking Ahead

As 2026 begins, the City of Ojai remains focused on ensuring a high quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses, strengthening of community partnerships and protecting Ojai's unique and enduring small town character. Working together, the community is able to achieve impressive results through teamwork, transparency, and heart.



City of Ojai Appoints Aleshire & Wynder, LLP as New City Attorney

The City of Ojai has appointed Aleshire & Wynder, LLP as its new legal counsel following a comprehensive and competitive selection process. After interviewing several highly qualified firms, the Ojai City Council selected Aleshire & Wynder for its municipal expertise, collaborative approach and proven record of public service.

The firm began work on Dec. 2, 2025. Co-City Attorneys Bethany Burgess and Sunny Soltani will lead the new legal team. Burgess will focus on municipal law, public works and complex transactional matters, while Soltani will handle specialized legal issues and housing. Assistant City Attorney Carrie Raven will represent the City at Planning Commission meetings and manage California Environmental Quality Act and litigation matters.

"It's a privilege and an honor to serve as Ojai's City Attorney," Burgess said. "This is such a special community, one defined by its people's deep commitment to preserving the beauty, character and spirit that make Ojai unique. As someone who believes in the power of public service, I'm grateful to the City Council for their trust in our firm. We look forward to working hand in hand with the community to help protect and uplift all that makes Ojai shine."

As Ojai welcomes its new legal partnership, the City expresses its gratitude to Matthew Summers and Taylor Anderson of Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, who have served with distinction for many years. Summers has provided steady and principled counsel through multiple administrations, while Anderson has offered strong support on municipal law and planning matters.

"Assistant City Attorney Taylor Anderson and I are proud of the successes we have achieved in my ten years' service and Taylor's 18 months' service in Ojai," Summers said. "From solving a dozen land use conflicts by negotiated solutions to securing two certified Housing Elements, handling the legal issues to ensure the reopening of the Playhouse and the El Roblar Hotel, and supporting the revitalization of the Libbey Bowl, Ojai is a special place. Its deeply involved and caring community is its strength and we look forward to seeing the City continue to thrive."

Formal agreements with both Aleshire & Wynder and Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley were approved by the City Council at a special City Council meeting on December 2, 2025. The City looks forward to continuing its tradition of dedicated and high-quality legal support for the Ojai community.

Ojai Permanent Supportive Housing Project Takes Steps Forward

At a September 30 Special City Council meeting, the City Council conducted a workshop to review construction documents for the City's Permanent Supportive Housing Project, formerly known as The Cabin Village. The project is a partnership between the City and non-profit developer DignityMoves to create housing for up to 30 individuals in 26 single room units and 2 double room units on the City's lower Public Works Yard, in between Ventura and Montgomery streets.

The project is funded by a \$12.7 million Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF) grant that was awarded to the City in April of 2024. The grant program seeks to take an existing homeless encampment, Ojai Tent Town located at the greater Ojai City Hall campus, and convert it to permanent supportive housing.

The September 30 workshop was an opportunity for the City Council to review and discuss the project and gain a deeper understanding of the plans from DignityMoves' architect. While no formal decisions were made during this workshop, input received from the City Council helped shape the final project design details before construction documents were finalized for bid on November 7.

The next steps for the project include the anticipated permit issuance in February of 2026, followed by the awarding of a bid for the contract. Construction is expected to start in February of 2026, with substantial completion projected for June 1, 2027. The grand opening is tentatively scheduled for July 6, 2027.

For more information regarding the Ojai Permanent Supportive Housing project, please visit Ojai.CA.Gov/589/Ojai-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Project.



Ojai City Council's Strategic Goals Chart Community Priorities

After months of deliberation and community input, the Ojai City Council finalized nine strategic goals to guide the City's priorities through 2026. The goals were developed through extensive discussions at seven different City Council meetings held throughout 2025.

The City Council's adopted goals are:

- 1. Affordable Housing**
- 2. Wildfire Safety Risk Mitigation**
- 3. Arts, Culture, and Recreation Funding**
- 4. Infrastructure Maintenance and Improvement**
- 5. Public Safety**
- 6. Diversifying Economy/ Tourism Management**
- 7. Climate Resiliency**
- 8. Financial Stability**
- 9. Communication and Relationships**

At its October 21 meeting, the Council completed its goal-setting effort by selecting three tactics for each goal.

Beginning in 2026, City staff will provide quarterly progress reports on these goals, with "report cards" available to the public on the City website. The adopted Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget reflects all nine goals, with potential amendments as implementation continues.

For more information, visit Ojai.CA.Gov/378/City-Council-Goals-and-Tactics.



Ojai Valley Music Delivers Stellar First Season

Ojai Valley Music brought 10 remarkable concerts to Libbey Bowl in 2025, marking an impressive debut season. Despite only receiving the keys in January — well after most tours had been booked — the Libbey Bowl team rose to the challenge of booking top talent while competing with nearby Santa Barbara and Los Angeles venues.

The season delivered incredible moments: Rilo Kiley and Chris Isaak's sold-out May performances, Bright Eyes' heartfelt August show and Rufus Wainwright's pin-drop piano moments in September. The Hermanos Gutiérrez concert became a season highlight when Ojai favorite Jack Johnson made a surprise appearance. Ocie Elliott's soulful October performance and Todd Rundgren's rocking November performance rounded out this inaugural season.



This first year established a strong foundation for what's ahead. Ojai Valley Music is already planning twenty-five concerts for 2026, spanning many genres and generations. The 2026 lineup will be announced by the spring, putting Ojai firmly on the map for touring artists nationwide.

For tickets and updates, visit LibbeyBowl.org or follow @OjaiValleyMusic on Instagram.



Ojai Strengthens Financial Operations and Transparency

The City of Ojai has continued to strengthen its financial operations and increase transparency following its Finance Department Assessment, conducted by the independent CPA firm Eide Bailly.

Since the assessment, the City has filled two key leadership positions, appointing Brenda Cho as Finance Director and Leah Palmer as Accounting Manager. Together, they will help guide and support the department's ongoing improvements to ensure greater oversight and efficiency.

In 2025, the City issued its first Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2024, giving Ojai residents a clear look at how public funds are managed.

The Finance Department and Human Resources Office are collaborating to modernize the City's timekeeping process, reducing manual work, and increasing accuracy. The City is also transitioning to the Cirrus version of its financial system, which will strengthen budgetary control and tracking. Mail and invoice processing have been centralized, and all banking has been consolidated under one institution to enhance security and resolve previous check issues.

The Finance Department has updated internal procedures for payroll, purchasing, and credit card management, and is working with Eide Bailly to develop updated financial policies that reflect best practices in the areas of purchasing, cash management, and reimbursement.

Together, these actions reflect the City's commitment to responsible financial management, efficiency, and transparency for the Ojai community.



Ojai's Finance Department



Ojai Outlook

Staff Feature: Meet Trolley Driver Edmundo Moraila

After months of effort and community patience, the Ojai Trolley restored its full seven-day schedule in late August. The major milestone was made possible through teamwork among City drivers and a temporary driver contract with a local company, Fillmore Area Transit.

"This has been a long road, and we thank the community for their patience," said City Manager Ben Harvey. "We're proud to bring Sunday service back and look forward to building rider morale and support for the Ojai Trolley."

Among those keeping Ojai moving is trolley driver Edmundo Moraila, a friendly face behind the wheel

since April 2016. Before joining the City, Moraila spent more than 20 years driving large buses for Vista. Off duty, he enjoys exploring local restaurants, spending time at Libbey Park and gardening.

"I've always enjoyed being behind the wheel," he said. "Ojai is a relaxing city with no pressure. Thank you to the City for trusting me. I love the City of Ojai."

Known for his calm demeanor and safe driving, Moraila's best compliment from riders is being told he's kind and dependable. His advice for sharing the road is simple: "Safety first. Be courteous and drive carefully."

The Ojai Trolley operates daily, learn more at OjaiTrolley.com.



CITY INFORMATION

The City Council meets at 6:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Meetings take place at Kent Hall, which is located at 111 W. Santa Ana Street, Ojai, CA 93023.

City Council

Andy Gilman.....	Mayor
Rachel Lang	Mayor Pro Tempore District 2
Leslie Rule.....	Council Member District 1
Andrew Whitman	Council Member District 3
Kim Mang	Council Member District 4
Steve Quilici.....	Elected City Clerk
Steve Olsen.....	Elected City Treasurer

City Hall Hours

Monday – Friday
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

City Staff

Ben Harvey.....	City Manager
Bethany Burgess	Co-City Attorney
Sunny Soltani	Co-City Attorney
Carrie Raven.....	Assistant City Attorney
Lindy Palmer.....	Public Works Director
Lucas Seibert..	Community Development Director
Brenda Cho	Finance Director
Kristy Rivera.....	Recreation Manager
James Hahn	IT Manager
Kathy Holman....	Human Resources/Risk Manager
Weston Montgomery	Chief Deputy City Clerk

City Hall

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