



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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DATE: March 25, 2026

05

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ADOPT A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CERTIFICATION AND SUBMISSION OF GRANT APPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFER GRANT WITH THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD SUPPORTING THE CAMERON CORNERS WATER CONSOLIDATION PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego's Department of Public Works (DPW) intends to pursue grant funding to advance critical drinking water infrastructure improvements. This State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) grant supports the evaluation and development of drinking water infrastructure to consolidate multiple small water systems and properties in the Campo/Cameron Corners area of southeast San Diego County. The primary objectives of consolidation are to improve water supply reliability, achieve compliance with the State's California Safe Drinking Water Standards, and enhance operational efficiency throughout the region. The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program advances environmental justice by prioritizing communities that have historically lacked reliable access to safe drinking water. By supporting the consolidation of small, disadvantaged water systems and improving infrastructure, the program helps ensure equitable access to clean, reliable water and strengthens long-term community resilience.

SWRCB administers the SAFER grant, which requires DPW to obtain a resolution and certification adopted by the Board of Supervisors to apply for this grant. The proposed action to approve and delegate authority to DPW to apply for and accept SAFER grant funds will streamline the application process and ensure timely access to critical external funding opportunities. This grant supports the evaluation and development of infrastructure to consolidate multiple small water systems and properties in the Campo/Cameron Corners area of southeast San Diego County. The primary objectives of consolidation are to improve water supply reliability, achieve compliance with California Safe Drinking Water Standards, and enhance operational efficiency throughout the region. Staff will return to the Board as necessary to establish appropriations and revenue for grants that are awarded as well as for construction of the project.

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This is a request to adopt a resolution authorizing the DPW Director, and/or their designee(s) to submit, negotiate, accept and execute all documents necessary to secure grant funding from the SAFER program.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find in accordance with Section 15061 (b)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines that delegating authority to allow application for and acceptance of possible grant funding is exempt from CEQA review because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility the activity may have a significant effect on the environment.
2. Authorize the Department of Public Works (DPW) Director or designee, to submit, negotiate, and execute all documents necessary to apply for and secure the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) grant.
3. Adopt a Resolution in the form developed by the State agency administering the SAFER grant program entitled: AUTHORIZING RESOLUTION/ORDINANCE.
4. Waive Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, Revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery, which requires full cost recovery for services provided under grants.
5. Authorize the Clerk of the Board to attest to the accuracy of the Resolution and take such other action as may be necessary to demonstrate the Board’s adoption of the Resolution.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Grant funding plays a vital role in supporting infrastructure improvements and essential services for communities across San Diego County, including the protection of agricultural lands and the development of modern water systems. These investments not only advance environmental and economic goals but also directly address environmental justice concerns. By improving water supply reliability, ensuring access to safe drinking water, and implementing long-term drinking water solutions, the County promotes equitable outcomes, particularly for communities that have historically faced systemic barriers to clean and sustainable water resources.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today’s actions support the County of San Diego’s (County) Sustainability Goal of protecting the health and well-being of everyone in the region, with a focus on collaborating with community partners and stakeholders and advocating for environmental justice for communities that have been disproportionately impacted by lack of safe drinking water. Approval of today’s actions will further enhance the County’s activities to develop sustainable drinking water solutions.

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FISCAL IMPACT

There is no current fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. If approved and grants are awarded, staff will return to the Board to appropriate grant funds. If grants require matching funds, matching funds will be provided by available funds managed by the Department of Public Works (DPW). A waiver of Board Policy B-29 is requested because the proposed grant funding may not offset all administrative costs. The funding source for potential unrecovered costs will be provided by available funds managed by DPW. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego’s Department of Public Works (DPW) seeks approval to apply for and accept funding through the State Water Resources Control Board’s Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) grant program. This funding will support the Cameron Corners Consolidation Project, which aims to improve drinking water infrastructure in the Campo area.

The Campo area includes two County-operated water systems, Rancho del Campo and Campo Hills. A 2022 feasibility study funded by the State and prepared by NV5 identified significant water quality and supply challenges across multiple systems in the region. The recommended solution, Consolidation Concept 1, proposes integrating nine public water systems and five private parcel areas to enhance water reliability, regulatory compliance, and operational efficiency. Several systems in the area, including Campo Elementary, Camp Lockett Middle School, and San Ysidro Health, occasionally experience water quality challenges related to naturally occurring minerals such as nitrate and uranium. California’s State Water Resources Control Board — through its Division of Drinking Water (DDW) oversees public water systems statewide and is responsible for regulating these levels. The permit holders such as Campo Elementary, Camp Lockett Middle School, and San Ysidro Health are responsible to ensure these levels are not present. The County has no responsibility for these systems. While these levels are generally low, they can sometimes exceed State drinking water standards, requiring attention to ensure long-term compliance and safety. Addressing these issues can be particularly difficult for small systems because treatment solutions for uranium removal are often cost-prohibitive. Consolidation offers a practical approach to improve water quality and reliability without placing an undue financial burden on individual systems.

The SAFER grant, administered by the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), provides funding for planning and implementation of sustainable water solutions. DPW was

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invited by the State apply for the grant due to its operational role in the area. If awarded, the grant will fund infrastructure improvements and support long-term water system consolidation.

The SAFER Program, established by Senate Bill 200 in 2019, provides approximately \$130 million annually to support sustainable drinking water solutions for underserved communities. Administered by the State Water Resources Control Board, the program funds system consolidation, infrastructure upgrades, and interim water supplies to improve water quality and reliability. This effort prioritizes communities that have historically faced systemic barriers to safe and reliable drinking water, often rural, low-income, or disadvantaged areas. By consolidating small, underperforming water systems and improving infrastructure, the program addresses inequities in water quality and access that disproportionately affect these populations. It ensures compliance with California Safe Drinking Water Standards, reduces health risks associated with contaminated or unreliable water sources, and promotes resilience against drought and climate impacts. Through collaboration with local stakeholders, the program empowers communities to participate in decision-making, fostering transparency and trust while delivering solutions that are culturally and economically appropriate. Ultimately, SAFER helps close the gap in water security, advancing public health and equity for all residents.

The ability to apply for the SAFER grant requires the Board of Supervisors to adopt a resolution and certification specific to this grant. Approval to delegate authority to DPW to apply for and accept SAFER grant funds will streamline the application process and ensure timely access to critical funding opportunities.

In accordance with Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, Revenue Contracts Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery, the Director, Department of Public Works, certifies that the activities for which grant funds will be sought are worthy of funding by the County even if grant funds were not available. It is likely that available funding will exceed the delegated authority of up to \$250,000 in Board Policy B-29. Approval to delegate authority to DPW to apply for and accept SAFER grant funds will streamline the application process and ensure timely access to critical funding opportunities. The action also includes a waiver of Board Policy B-29 to the extent the Policy requires full cost recovery. It is possible that expenses will be incurred by the County to apply for and utilize funding that will not be recovered by available grant funds.

Today's action includes a request for Board approval of the required resolution and certification. The Resolution is in the form provided by the State and includes a delegation of authority to the Director, Department of Public Works, or designee to take action to secure and use grant funds on behalf of the County.

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ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Section 15061 (b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines provides that a project is exempt from CEQA review where “it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment”. The proposed action seeks the delegation of authority for possible applications for and acceptance of grant funding for potential future projects. While entitlement funds are anticipated, there is no guarantee that discretionary funds will be awarded. Since the action involves the delegation of authority to seek and accept funding without a commitment to any particular project, the action is exempt from CEQA review because it can be seen with certainty that the activity will not have a significant effect on the environment

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed actions support the Equity (Health) and Community (Quality of Life) initiatives of the County of San Diego’s 2026-2031 Strategic Plan, by providing sustainable drinking water among San Diego County residents who live within, or visit, the unincorporated area of Campo.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – AUTHORIZING RESOLUTION