

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 5

SUBJECT: AUTHORITY FOR COUNTY FIRE TO OPERATIONALIZE AN AERIAL FIREFIGHTING PROGRAM, APPROVE THE SINGLE SOURCE PURCHASE AND OUTFITTING OF A SIKORSKY S70 FIREHAWK HELICOPTER, EXTEND AN AGREEMENT WITH SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC FOR REGIONAL AERIAL FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES, AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On January 28, 2025 (16), the Board of Supervisors (Board) took several actions to bolster wildfire preparedness, response, and educational efforts in our region, including directing the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to identify funds to purchase a night-flying helicopter for San Diego County Fire (County Fire) to staff and conduct night-time water drops on wildland fires in our region. County Fire has been working to identify acquisition options, financing, funding for debt payments, staffing, maintenance, and operational support.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), County Fire's operational partner for fire protection and emergency medical services, has fully transitioned to the Sikorsky S70 Firehawk and maintains 16 of these in their fleet for aerial firefighting. The Sikorsky S70 Firehawk has been determined by County Fire staff to be the most effective helicopter platform for attacking wildland fires due to its durability, increased water storage capacity, and ability to remain in the air longer than other platforms. To increase aerial resources in the San Diego region, and through the existing Cooperative Agreement between the County of San Diego (County) and CAL FIRE, CAL FIRE has offered, indefinitely, to cover staffing, fuel, and maintenance costs if the County purchases a Sikorsky S70 Firehawk. San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) purchased a Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter for firefighting purposes but that helicopter has not yet been deployed. SDG&E has offered to sell their aircraft to the County so that County Fire can utilize this asset. In addition, SDG&E would provide ongoing funding of \$3,300,000 to County Fire's aerial firefighting program, subject to California Public Utilities Commission approval in future years.

Today's actions include authorizing a single source contract with SDG&E to acquire their Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter and a single source contract with United Rotorcraft to outfit the new helicopter to meet CAL FIRE's operational standards. Today's actions would also authorize the Director of San Diego County Fire, or their designee, to execute revenue agreements of up to \$5 million annually from SDG&E for a County Fire helicopter program through October 31, 2035, and the CAO to take all necessary actions to operationalize a County Fire helicopter program. Today's actions would also authorize an extension to a long-term agreement with SDG&E that provides other aerial resources to the region and increases available revenue to the County, direct the Auditor and Controller to establish an interest-bearing trust fund to deposit revenues generated from the helicopter program that will be committed to the helicopter program, and establish appropriations of \$23,806,000 million based on bond proceeds.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with San Diego Gas & Electric and subject to successful negotiations and a determination of a fair and reasonable price, award a contract for a Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter, and amend the contract as needed to reflect changes to services and funding, subject to the approval of the Director, San Diego County Fire or their designee.
2. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to enter into negotiations with United Rotorcraft and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award a contract to complete the outfitting of the Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter to meet California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) standards, and amend the contract as needed to reflect changes to services and funding, subject to the approval of the Director, San Diego County Fire or their designee.
3. Authorize San Diego County Fire to accept up to \$5 million annually from San Diego Gas & Electric for the period of November 1, 2025, through October 31, 2035, for the San Diego County Fire helicopter program and authorize the Director of San Diego County Fire, or designee, to execute all revenue agreement documents, including any annual extensions, amendments, and/or revisions thereto that do not materially impact or alter services or funding levels.
4. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or their designee, to take all necessary actions to operationalize the San Diego County Fire helicopter program, subject to available appropriations.
5. Waive Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, and in accordance with Administrative Code 401, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, to award contracts for maintenance, spare parts, and other equipment and services necessary for the Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter to be fully operational, and to amend the agreements as needed to reflect changes to requirements, services, and/or funding subject to the approval of the Director of San Diego County Fire.
6. Direct the Auditor and Controller to establish an interest-bearing trust fund to deposit revenues generated by the helicopter program from agreements with San Diego Gas & Electric, CAL FIRE, and the U.S. Government, and other income sources, with all interest earnings allocated to and distributed to this fund. Funds in this trust fund will be committed to debt service payments, maintenance, fuel, staffing, equipment necessary to operate a firefighting helicopter program, and the purchase of new helicopters.

7. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, and Administrative Code 401, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to amend contract 567111 with San Diego Gas & Electric, for utilization of other firefighting-equipped helicopters for fire suppression, to extend the contract term for an additional three (3) years plus two (2) additional option years through July 31, 2032, and increase the annual funding up to \$500,000, subject to the availability of funds; and to amend the contract as required to reflect changes to services and funding allocations, subject to the approval of the Director, San Diego County Fire or their designee.
8. Establish appropriations of \$23,806,000 in Finance Other, Capital Assets, based on bond proceeds for the purchase of a Sikorsky S70 Firehawk helicopter. **(4 VOTES)**

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Purchasing an additional night-flying helicopter increases locally available resources to quickly respond to emerging wildland fires that frequently start in rural and isolated communities that disproportionately includes tribal nations, lower-income residents, and senior citizens. By increasing firefighting resources, the County can ensure a more equitable and rapid response that better protects vulnerable populations and their properties from the devastating impact of wildfires.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action to authorize the purchase of an additional night-flying helicopter demonstrates the County's ongoing commitment to the region's environmental stewardship. By enhancing the region's firefighting capabilities, the County can better manage the risks of wildland fires that pose threats to both residents and sensitive habitats.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are partially included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Adopted Operational Plan in Finance Other (\$14,250,000). If approved, today's action will increase appropriations and result in an estimated total one-time cost of \$38,056,000 to purchase one Sikorsky S70 Firehawk (approximately \$32,756,000) and to outfit the new helicopter (approximately \$5,300,000). The funding source will be bond proceeds of \$38,056,000. The ongoing debt service payment will be covered by the \$3,300,000 of annual revenue received from San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) through 2027 and thereafter will be subject to approval by the California Public Utilities Commission and will be included in future years Operational Plans. Should SDG&E not provide annual revenue, County Fire would identify alternate funding sources and return to the Board for authorization of any necessary actions and approval of the new funding source(s). Annual staffing and maintenance costs for the helicopter, estimated at \$5.5 million, will be covered through an agreement with CAL FIRE. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. The establishment of a trust fund for the deposit of funds above the annual operating and financing costs will be committed for the helicopter program.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Aguirre, seconded by Supervisor Desmond, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended, on Consent.

AYES: Aguirre, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe, Desmond

State of California)
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter