



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: January 28, 2026

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

MODERNIZING COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY TO CAPTURE MILLIONS IN ONGOING TAXPAYER SAVINGS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego (County) is preparing for a difficult fiscal year driven largely by significant reductions in federal funding. As the County approaches the upcoming budget cycle, maintaining public trust requires demonstrating that every reasonable efficiency, consolidation, and cost-saving measure has been identified and pursued before any service reductions are considered.

Over the past several years, the way County employees work has fundamentally changed. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the County rapidly expanded remote and hybrid work, increased reliance on mobile devices, and adopted secure, software-based communications tools such as Microsoft Teams to maintain operations and public access to services during unprecedented disruption.

This item advances modernization by accelerating the County's transition to enterprise software-based communications. By standardizing modern tools that are already widely in use and responsibly phasing out legacy systems that were maintained during the transition for continuity, the County can align its technology spending with how work is actually performed today. These actions are expected to capture between \$1.5 and \$7 million in yearly taxpayer savings without reducing public access to County services or disrupting operations.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR LAWSON-REMER AND SUPERVISOR MONTGOMERY STEPPE

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop and implement a plan for the adoption of an only one phone number standard for staff and define an exception process.

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2. Direct the CAO to develop and implement a plan to replace desk phones with the adopted County Technology Office enterprise standard for softphones and define an exception process.
3. Direct the CAO to develop and implement enterprise-wide policies for the timely return of unused devices.
4. Direct the CAO to develop and implement a plan to replace fax machines with virtual fax applications and eliminate the use of analog phone lines and fax machine hardware.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Modernizing County communications technology and reducing ongoing operating costs help preserve resources for the essential services that residents rely on every day. By aligning technology investments with current work practices and capturing ongoing savings, the County strengthens its ability to sustain health, safety, and economic stability programs, particularly for communities disproportionately impacted by rising costs of living and potential service disruptions. This approach ensures that modernization improves efficiency without reducing public access to services, supporting more equitable outcomes across all communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Modernizing County communications technology reduces reliance on energy-intensive legacy hardware and physical infrastructure. Expanding software-based tools supports more efficient operations and advances the County's sustainability goals by reducing unnecessary equipment, maintenance, and resource use.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. Anticipated savings resulting from implementation of policies will be incorporated into future Operational Plans. There will be no change to net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how the County of San Diego (County) delivers services and how employees perform their work. In response, the County rapidly expanded remote and hybrid work, increased reliance on mobile devices, and adopted secure, enterprise software-based communications tools to ensure continuity of operations and uninterrupted public access to services.

During this period of rapid change, legacy communications systems were intentionally maintained in parallel to manage risk, preserve reliability, and allow new tools to scale without disrupting service delivery. Over time, as these modern tools proved effective and widely

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adopted, the County gained clearer insight into which systems best meet operational needs and do so at lower cost.

Today, the County's communications environment reflects this successful transition. As of late 2025, the County maintains 8,167 mobile phones and 3,157 Microsoft Teams softphone lines, alongside 14,733 desk phone numbers originally designed for a pre-mobile, pre-remote-work environment. In many cases, employees are assigned both a mobile phone and a desk phone number, even though mobile and software-based solutions now meet most operational needs.

The County's adopted enterprise standard, Microsoft Teams softphones, provides secure, software-based communications at a lower ongoing cost and aligns with the County's mobile and hybrid work environment. Teams phone lines cost approximately \$212 annually per user, compared to \$212 to \$385 per year for traditional desk phone numbers, depending on configuration.

The primary cost driver in maintaining desk phones is the continued operation of Avaya, the County's legacy phone platform. Avaya was designed for a centralized, desk-based workforce and requires substantial fixed annual support costs, regardless of how many employees actively rely on the system. As long as desk phones remain in service anywhere in the organization, the County must continue paying for Avaya support, which costs taxpayers more than \$5 million annually. These costs do not scale down incrementally with reduced usage; they remain largely fixed until the system can be fully decommissioned.

The County has already begun capturing savings as part of this transition. To date, 5,247 employees have moved to mobile-only configurations, generating an estimated \$1.9 million in annual savings. In parallel, device optimization efforts have reduced the number of active desktop and laptop devices by 334 since July 2025, producing approximately \$288,000 in estimated annual savings, with an additional \$126,000 in potential annual savings identified from inactive or disabled devices, subject to limited operational exceptions.

A similar modernization opportunity exists with fax technology. The County currently operates an estimated 531 physical fax machines, each supported by a dedicated analog phone line at an estimated cost of \$50.74 per month. Secure virtual fax solutions are already in use and provide equivalent functionality at lower cost. Completing the transition to virtual fax is expected to generate approximately \$79,000 in estimated annual savings while maintaining compliance and service reliability.

This item builds on the County's efforts to modernize communications by directing the CAO to establish clear, enterprise-wide standards that allow the County to fully transition to software-based systems and safely decommission the Avaya platform. By completing this transition, the County can eliminate a fixed legacy cost, capture the largest share of ongoing savings, and align technology spending with how work is performed today while maintaining reliable service delivery and public access.

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LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the Sustainability and Innovation Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by accelerating the adoption of modern communication solutions and realizing taxpayer savings.

Respectfully submitted,



Supervisor, Terra Lawson-Remer,
3rd District



Supervisor Montgomery Steppe
4th District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A