



**NORA VARGAS**  
**CHAIRWOMAN**  
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
**AGENDA ITEM**

**DATE:** October 22, 2024

**22**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT**

**COMMUNITY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: STRENGTHENING OUR REGIONAL CAPABILITIES IN THE FOUR PHASES OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

On June 13, 2024, the Board of Supervisors (Board) received a memorandum with 70 recommendations related to activities the County of San Diego (County) could take to address the Board's January 30, 2024 (1) direction to improve the County's ability to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from disasters. The memorandum categorized recommended actions across four areas:

- Regionwide Readiness and Training
- Accessible, Accurate, Timely and Translated Information
- Community Resources: Housing, Food, Transportation, Behavioral Health
- Strengthening Capacity and Coordination with Volunteers and Community Based Organizations

On September 26, 2024, staff provided a memorandum that included an analysis of the resources and staffing needs that would be required to implement 40 recommendations within the proposed timeframes. They also provided additional context necessary for the Board's awareness when considering such resource allocations. In that September memorandum, staff noted they would continue to proceed with implementation of 30 action items that do not require additional Board direction or resources within the timeframes identified.

Today's actions provide an opportunity for the Board to give input on the implementation of the remaining 40 recommendations, including creating a Recovery Division and Community Preparedness Division(s) within the Office of Emergency Services by working through the normal Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan process to identify additional staffing required and the necessary funding; adding support of legislation that will distribute monetary stipends to victims to assist them with housing, transportation, and food during recovery from disaster(s) to the

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Board's Legislative Program; and establishing an agreement with a fiduciary agency to directly distribute donated funds to disaster victims, among others.

**RECOMMENDATIONS  
CHAIRWOMAN NORA VARGAS**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) through the Office of Emergency Services to solicit feedback on the Board Memorandum dated June 13, 2024, and consult with:
  - a. Community-based organizations, including philanthropies and stakeholders who have experience working in the community, to partner on one or all the phases of emergency management; and
  - b. Individuals and organizations that can provide public awareness and education, media, communication channels, cultural and language sensitivity, psychosocial support and community healing, financial support, and infrastructure to enhance the community's capacity to respond to and recover from emergencies.
2. Authorize County departments, through October 22, 2029, to apply for and accept grant funding from the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program and execute all required grant documents, including any annual extensions, amendments and/or revisions thereto that do not materially impact or alter the services or funding level.
3. Direct the CAO to create policy options for the use and approval of funds from the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program, which require a 25% local share, to streamline the grant application requirements.
4. Direct the CAO to identify regional resiliency funding opportunities for climate risk hazard mitigation projects, including grants, in collaboration with community partners and other governmental agencies to address climate risk hazards. As part of the effort, identify jurisdictions that would most benefit from partnering with the County, and establish cooperative agreements with those select jurisdictions to streamline the application process and administration of the grants.
5. Direct the CAO to establish an agreement with a fiduciary agency to directly distribute donated funds to disaster victims.
6. Direct the CAO to include in the Board's Legislative Program support of legislation that will provide financial assistance to individuals and community-based organizations for disaster recovery.
7. Direct the CAO to explore the establishment of a Recovery Division within the Office of Emergency Services (OES) that models approaches used by federal and State agencies. Refer to budget the inclusion of the necessary staffing for the new division as part of the Fiscal Year 2025-27 Operational Plan process.
8. Direct the CAO to explore the establishment of a new Community Division of the OES that uses bilingual, culturally responsive County staff to leverage existing County community networks to boost disaster management coordination with regionwide communities and community-based organizations during all phases of emergency management. Refer to budget the inclusion of the necessary staffing for the new division as part of the Fiscal 2025-27 Operational Plan for OES.

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9. Waive Board Policy B-29: Fees, Grants, Revenue Contracts - Department Responsibility for Full Cost Recovery, which requires full cost recovery of grants and revenue contracts.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The consequences of years of inequitable community investments become starkly apparent during natural disasters, disproportionately affecting communities of color and low income. When disasters strike, these underfunded communities face disastrous outcomes, exacerbating the already existing disparities. To combat the lack of resources and preparedness that significantly amplifies the impact on residents, compounding the challenges they face during and after natural disasters, we will take a whole community approach in emergency management.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

A critical component to the sustainability of the region is resiliency, as outlined in the County's Strategic Plan. The ability to respond to, and recover from, disasters is essential. Repairs of needed infrastructure such as homes and roads are essential, as well as financial security for those who experience loss. Today's actions support long-term planning to ensure the viability of our communities as future emergencies are inevitable due to climate change.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for Recommendations 1 to 6 are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan in the Office of Emergency Services funded with general purpose revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. If approved, Recommendations 7 and 8 may result in the addition of 20 staff years estimated at \$3.4 million, a referral to budget that would be considered as part of Fiscal Year 2025-27 Operational Plan as well as future years budgets, for which staff would return to the board for consideration and approval. In addition, any grant awards associated with Recommendation 2 would include a waiver of Board Policy B-29 since County departments would not be required to return to the Board for authorization to accept any Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program funds within the next five years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

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**BACKGROUND**

On January 22, 2024, San Diego County experienced the heaviest rainfall in a single day in over one hundred years leaving historically underserved communities, primarily in the City of San Diego and National City, with \$30.8 million in verified public damages. This unprecedented storm led to a Major Disaster Declaration by the Biden Administration for San Diego County on February 19, 2024, which underscored the new reality of climate risks to our region and communities.

On January 30, 2024 (1), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a series of actions intended to improve a regionwide response and recovery efforts related to the January 22, 2024 storms and directed the Interim Chief Administrative Officer (ICAO) to assess and report back on what more can be done to strengthen our regional emergency management capabilities.

The Board directed the ICAO to:

- Consider all four phases of emergency management: Preparedness, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery including but not limited to resources needed to establish a Recovery division in the County’s Office of Emergency Services.
- Convene community outreach meetings to understand the needs of the region’s diverse communities during emergencies and throughout the recovery so that their input can be incorporated into the assessment.

According to FEMA, there are four phases to emergency management: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. All four of these phases were explored during the emergency assessment. Those phases involve:

- Preparedness is about working with the community to prepare community members for an emergency. This includes planning, training, exercises, or other preparations to save lives and to help responses and rescue operations. Preparedness activities take place before an emergency occurs.
- Mitigation involves the type of activity that can be taken to prevent future emergencies or minimize their effects. This can include activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or reduce the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies, such as improving storm drain infrastructure to prevent flooding. Mitigation activities take place before and after emergencies occur.
- Response includes immediate actions by first responders and partners to protect life, property, and the environment. Actions could include firefighting, evacuation, search and rescue, emergency sheltering and support, environmental response, etc. The response phase stabilizes the emergency and can vary in length and resource requirements depending on the situation, hazard, and community.
- Recovery from an emergency includes actions taken to return to a new normal or even safer situation following an emergency. It includes obtaining resources needed to help rebuild and restore a community. Recovery activities begin with community preparedness activities, continue to take place alongside response actions, and may continue for months or even years after the response has concluded.

To successfully navigate these four phases, also referred to as the life cycle of an emergency, we must know and understand the unique needs of our communities during each phase. This can be

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achieved by partnering with trusted community partners, conducting trainings in threshold languages, increasing Community Emergency Response Teams, and completing Emergency Plans for communities, families, and individuals.

During the emergency recovery phase, being advised by community-based organizations (CBOs), philanthropies, and stakeholders is crucial because they possess intimate knowledge of local needs, vulnerabilities, and resources. They are deeply embedded within the communities they serve, allowing them to build trust, understand cultural nuances, and address specific challenges faced by marginalized or underserved populations. Their input ensures that recovery efforts are equitable and tailored to the unique context of the area, fostering more effective and sustainable outcomes. They often have established networks and relationships that can mobilize support quickly, bridging gaps between governmental efforts and community needs. Their involvement enhances coordination, ensures inclusivity, and strengthens long-term community resilience.

An example of this work was the importance of preventing evictions during the January 22<sup>nd</sup> flood. The Legal Aid Society of San Diego worked with tenant flood victims to provide them immediate services and they connected with 394 tenant flood victims. Direct legal service was provided to 237 households, which benefited 377 adults and 215 minors, some of whom continue to be served. Additionally, Legal Aid Society attorneys and advocates conducted eight different outreach and educational training events with 187 people in attendance. However, the Legal Aid Society was not the only community organization that played a crucial role in the January 2024 storm recovery phase. Through partners like the YMCA, the Harvey Foundation, Feeding San Diego, the San Diego Food Bank, and many others our communities received housing assistance and food.

On average, every \$1 invested in hazard mitigation saves \$6 by lowering the risk and impacts of a disaster. The effects of climate change are increasing the frequency and consequences of disasters. San Diego County ranks 11th out of 3,142 counties on FEMA's national risk index to natural disasters. It is important for the County to pursue more hazard mitigation projects to lessen disaster impacts. Creating policy options for county-wide disaster mitigation, including cost share requirements, will help streamline and prioritize work to lower risk for our communities.

It is difficult to receive a Major Presidential Disaster Declaration that authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance program for small to mid-sized disasters. Even with a major declaration, FEMA's financial assistance to individuals and families is limited. Developing an agreement with a fiduciary agency to directly distribute donated funds to disaster victims will help close the financial gap and provide additional monetary support to disaster survivors.

FEMA's Individual Assistance program focuses on major disasters and often deems local incidents in populous states like California as too minor to warrant federal aid, regardless of their impact on local communities. When a local disaster doesn't qualify for federal aid, essential support from FEMA becomes inaccessible for many affected families and individuals, and California lacks a state program to fill this gap. FEMA advises states to create such programs, as they are crucial for those affected by disasters. As part of the Board's legislative program, the County should support

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legislation that will establish a State disaster assistance program to provide financial assistance to individuals and community-based organizations to aid in disaster recovery.

Disaster recovery is the most difficult and longest phase of the emergency management cycle. Recovery can take months or years following a catastrophic disaster. Investing in a permanent Recovery Division within the Office of Emergency Services (OES) will ensure that resources are available to update the regional recovery plan, provide recovery-related training and exercise opportunities to local stakeholders, and coordinate the distribution of resources to communities following a disaster.

Disaster preparedness is an essential phase of emergency management that can lessen the impact of disasters. Communities and individuals that are prepared for disasters can respond and recover more quickly. Creating a Community Preparedness Division within OES will provide opportunities for more community outreach and education, more effective partnerships with community-based organizations, and direct resources to individuals and families before disaster strikes. Educating the public about the importance of having a personal disaster plan, an emergency go kit in case of evacuation, and knowledge of information and resources available before, during, and after disasters will help further community resilience. It is essential that disaster-related information is accessible to all communities. Translating emergency information into the eight threshold languages and using culturally appropriate methods will help reach and prepare diverse communities.

On June 13, 2024, the Board received a memorandum with 70 recommendations related to activities the County could take to address the Board's January 30, 2024 (1) direction to improve the County of San Diego's ability to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from disasters. On September 26, 2024, staff provided the Board with an additional memorandum with an analysis of the recommendations and outlined activities and projects that are currently underway or will be pursued with no additional resources or Board direction.

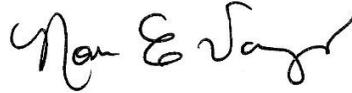
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**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed actions support the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic plan by supporting the Strategic Initiatives of Sustainability and Justice. Sustainability is supported in the area of Resiliency by ensuring the capability to respond and recover to immediate needs for individuals, families, and the region. Justice is supported in the Environmental component by placing an urgent focus on communities of color and low-income communities recognizing they historically lacked the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards.

Respectfully submitted,



NORA VARGAS  
Supervisor, First District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A