



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

VACANT  
First District

JOEL ANDERSON  
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER  
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE  
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND  
Fifth District

**DATE:** April 22, 2025 and May 6, 2025

**15**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### SUBJECT

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ARTICLE XX OF THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE ORDINANCE CODE, RELATING TO SAN DIEGO COUNTY FIRE, SAN DIEGO COUNTY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES, AND COUNTY SERVICE AREA 17 CHARGES AND FEES (4/22/25 – FIRST READING; 5/6/25 – SECOND READING UNLESS ORDINANCE IS MODIFIED ON SECOND READING) (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### OVERVIEW

San Diego County Fire (County Fire), which includes the Community Risk Reduction Fire Marshal services, Emergency Medical Services (County EMS) Office, acting as the Board of Supervisors (Board) designated Local EMS Agency (LEMSA), and the County Service Area 17 (CSA 17) ambulance transportation zone, recently conducted a review of fees and rates to ensure compliance with Board Policy B-29 (Fees, Grants, and Revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery), which requires County departments to recover the costs to provide services to agencies or individuals. As a result, County Fire is proposing actions that support the cost of providing services, while ensuring fair and equitable fee levels for customers and the public. After reviewing the current fees and rates, County Fire staff is proposing to increase 21 fees, decrease one fee, add one new fee, and remove 4 fees reflecting prior Board authorizations to dissolve County Service Area 69 ambulance transportation services. County Fire is also proposing 15 new rates for businesses and organizations requesting on-site and dedicated presence of fire apparatus and staff. For reference, a fee is a fixed charge for a service provided, whereas a rate is an hourly amount charged for the total amount of time spent providing the requested service. The Auditor and Controller reviewed and approved the supporting documentation and the methodology for establishing the fees in this proposal for Fiscal Year 2025-26.

### Fire Marshal Fees:

County Fire staff reviews residential and commercial projects in the San Diego County and Deer Springs Fire Protection Districts to ensure compliance with the County Fire Code and California Fire Code. Fire Marshal staff are also responsible for performing annual business and State-mandated inspections. While a fee currently exists in the administrative code for annual business and State-mandated inspections, those inspections are currently done at no cost to the businesses and other facilities, resulting in a shortfall of outside revenue in order to offset the cost of providing

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this service. Fire Marshal fees were last updated for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22. The revised fee package includes charging for those services beginning in FY 2025-26.

**Emergency Medical Services Office Fees:**

County EMS has the responsibility to credential Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics, authorize Mobile Intensive Care Nurses, inspect and permit private ambulances, permit air ambulances, approve continuing education providers, and designate Base Hospitals and Trauma Centers. On May 21, 2024 (21), the Board approved a three-year phased increase for County EMS fees. The updated fees before the Board today are based on the second year of the phased approach and take into consideration an annual analysis of staff time and costs for each service so that full cost recovery is achieved by year three. Due to the Board's approved three year phased approach, full cost recovery for these services will not be achieved in FY 25-26 and a waiver of B-29 is requested as the fees collected will not fully cover the cost of services provided.

**County Service Area 17 Fees:**

County EMS is responsible for the administration of CSA 17, which provides contracted ambulance transportation services for the incorporated cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach, and Encinitas, the communities of Del Mar Heights and Del Mar Terrace, and the unincorporated areas of Rancho Santa Fe, 4-S Ranch, and a portion of Elfin Forest. The proposed ambulance transport user fee received support from the CSA 17 Advisory Committee and would be consistent with the San Diego County Fire Protection District's Board of Directors approved fee for the SDCFPD Ambulance Service Area. In CSA 17, the average collection rate on fees assessed is about 26% due to various reimbursement rates from Medicare, Medi-Cal, commercial insurance, and patient private pay. Since 100% of the fee assessed on ambulance transports are not collected, full cost recovery for services will not be achieved in FY 25-26 and a waiver of B-29 is being requested. CSA 17 fees were last updated for FY 2021-22 when an Out-of-County fee for ambulance transports was added to the fee schedule. Prior to FY 21-22, the current resident and non-resident ambulance transport fees were approved by the Board on June 14, 2011 (7).

Today's action requests that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors approve amendments to Article XX of the San Diego County Administrative Ordinance Code to fees charged for services by County Fire's Community Risk Reduction, County EMS, and CSA 17. The Board last approved revisions to some of County Fire's fees on May 18, 2021 (1), County EMS fees on May 21, 2024 (21), and CSA 17's fees on May 4, 2021 (18).

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

On April 22, 2025:

1. Find the proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as specified under Section 15273 of the CEQA Guidelines and approve the

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findings in Attachment D pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15273 (a)(1), which provides a statutory exemption for the establishment, modification, structuring, restructuring, or approval of rates, tolls, fares, or other charges by public agencies that the public agency finds are for the purpose of meeting operating expenses.

2. Approve the introduction of the Ordinance (first reading):

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3. Waive Board Policy B-29, Fees, Grants, and Revenue Contracts – Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery which requires full cost recovery for services.

If, on April 22, 2025, the San Diego County Board takes action as recommended, then on May 6, 2025:

1. Consider and adopt (unless ordinance is modified on second reading):

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### **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Services and oversight provided by San Diego County Fire is partially supported through a fee charged to individuals and agencies applying for new residential and commercial building permits, tenant improvement permits, gate and grading permits, and special event permits. County Fire provides this detailed level of oversight ensuring residents in the San Diego County and Deer Springs Fire Protection Districts receive equitable fire protection by appropriately inspecting residential and commercial properties and ensures compliance with the County Fire Code and California Fire Code.

County EMS provides regional leadership and regulatory oversight of the EMS delivery system and ensures that residents in all areas of the County have access to safe, effective, and equitable prehospital care from trained and verified EMS professionals. County EMS also ensures this through appropriately credentialing licensed and verified personnel, permitting and inspecting

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privately operated transport vehicles, and designating specialized hospital facilities as required by State statute.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today's actions are supportive of the County's Sustainability goals to provide just and equitable access to County services by ensuring all residential and commercial properties are appropriately inspected and comply with County Fire Code and California Fire Code. By ensuring all EMS responders are duly credentialed in a comprehensive and timely manner, all private ambulances (including air ambulances) are permitted and inspected, continuing education providers have accurate and current lesson plans and course records, and hospitals have the correct specialty care designations. Lastly, ensuring communities remain resilient and capable of responding to the immediate needs of individuals and families within CSA 17.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact in the current fiscal year. If approved, this request will result in an estimated increase in revenue of \$685,000 in County Fire, and \$3.5 million in CSA 17 in Fiscal Year 2025-26. Costs and revenue for this request will be included in the Fiscal Year 2025-27 CAO Recommended Operational Plan for County Fire and CSA 17. The funding source is fees paid by agencies or individuals for services. The proposed fees will not cover all the operating costs for these services in County Fire and CSA 17. Estimated unrecovered costs of \$1.9 million will be supported by existing General Purpose Revenue for County Fire (\$0.3 million), and existing property tax for CSA 17 (\$1.6 million). There is no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed fees and rates for County Fire will have an impact on the business community within the San Diego County Fire Protection District and the Deer Springs Fire Protection District.

### **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

On March 3, 2025, the proposed Fire Marshal rates and fees were presented to the Fire Advisory Board (Advisory Board). The Advisory Board voted unanimously, with five members present, in support of the proposed fee schedule as presented.

On August 6, 2024, the proposed fees were presented to the CSA 17 Advisory Committee and the committee voted unanimously to support County EMS's recommendation to increase the CSA 17 ambulance transport fees to match the San Diego County Fire Protection District Ground Ambulance Service Area (ASA) fees.

On March 27, 2025, the proposed EMS Office fees were presented to the Board of Supervisors Emergency Medical Care Committee (EMCC). The committee, with 14 members present, withheld endorsement of the proposed EMS fee increases and stated that emergency medical

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services are a public good, and the County should support them without imposing fees on providers and hospitals, as this negatively impacts services available to the public in the emergency medical system. One member abstained from this motion.

**BACKGROUND**

San Diego County Fire (County Fire) is committed to maintaining the highest quality work product and customer service at the most efficient cost. Staff continually evaluate opportunities to streamline and improve processes, utilizing new technology as it becomes available. At the same time, County Fire annually evaluates the fees and rates it charges to align with current costs, as required under the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) Policy B-29 (Fees, Grants, and Revenue Contracts—Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery). A fee is a fixed charge for a service provided, whereas a rate is an hourly amount charged for the total amount of time spent providing the requested service.

**Fire Marshal Fees:**

County Fire recently conducted a review and is proposing adjustments to twelve (12) fees and one (1) rate, and the addition of fourteen (14) new rates for standby/special events, to ensure cost recovery for services provided. The fees are charged to individuals, groups, or agencies within the San Diego County Fire Protection District (SDCFPD) and the Deer Springs Fire Protection District. County Fire analyzed the services it provides to customers, including the tasks and functions performed as part of the service, and any direct and indirect costs associated with the service. County Fire is proposing updates to twelve fees, removal of one rate, and the addition of fourteen new rates to cover standby services for fire apparatus and personnel for special events in the community. Fire Marshal fees were last adjusted for Fiscal Year 2021-22. Subsequent increases in staff costs are a significant factor in the fee increases proposed for Fiscal Year 2025-26.

County Fire's Community Risk Reduction Fire Marshal program includes annual business and State-mandated inspections in the San Diego County and Deer Springs Fire Protection Districts. State-mandated inspections include, but are not limited to, schools, medical facilities, jails, hotels, and childcare facilities. County staff inspect approximately 1,150 business and 250 State-mandated sites. The significant staff time it takes to perform these functions is covered by County General Purpose Revenue. If the Board approves today's updated fees, County Fire will begin charging for these services and anticipates collecting an estimated \$300,000 in FY 2025-26 for business inspections and an estimated \$85,000 in additional revenue for the remaining Fire Marshal fees and rates. The business inspection fee is proposed as an hourly rate. Businesses and State-mandated locations will be charged a pro-rated amount of the hourly rate for the actual staff time associated with inspection at their facility and completing mandated paperwork. Each business is unique in location, operations, and size. An hourly rate has been identified as the fairest method for recovering actual staff costs. County Fire notified potentially impacted stakeholders by sending 2,180 emails directing businesses, stakeholders, and others to the Engage San Diego webpage and held a community listening session on March 27, 2025.

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**Emergency Medical Services Office Fees:**

County EMS has the responsibility to credential Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics, authorize Mobile Intensive Care Nurses, inspect and permit private ambulances, permit air ambulances, approve continuing education providers, and designate Base Hospitals and Trauma Centers. On May 21, 2024 (21), the Board approved a three-year phased increase for County EMS fees. The phased approach was taken to lower the immediate impact of a significant increase to personnel, agencies and hospitals, but still ensure full cost recovery by year three. The proposed fees before the Board today are based on the second year of the phased approach and take into consideration an annual analysis of staff time and costs for each service so that fees going forward stay consistent with an updated analysis. County EMS reviewed and analyzed nine existing fees and is proposing an increase to all nine fees for FY 2025-26. The proposed increase to the nine fees is estimated to generate an additional \$300,000 in revenue to support the costs of performing the services provided. Due to the Board's approved three year phased approach last year, full cost recovery for services will not be achieved in FY 25-26 and a waiver of B-29 is requested as the fees collected will not fully cover the cost of services provided. The EMS Office engaged with impacted stakeholders from the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties, the Ambulance Association of San Diego County, and the San Diego County Fire Chief's Association. The Emergency Medical Care Committee, the Board's advisory group, received several updates on anticipated fee changes.

**County Service Area 17 Fees:**

County Service Area (CSA) 17 is a voter approved special district established in 1969, to provide ambulance services to the incorporated cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach, and Encinitas, the communities of Del Mar Heights and Del Mar Terrace, and the unincorporated areas of Rancho Santa Fe, 4-S Ranch, and a portion of Elfin Forest. CSA 17 is funded through property tax, benefit fees, and ambulance transport user fees. With operating expenses increasing steadily year over year and property tax and benefit fees not increasing at the same annual pace, an increase to the ambulance transport fee, mileage rate, Treat-No-Transport rate, and Standby Hourly Rate are proposed in order to maintain current operations in CSA 17. Proposed changes have no impact to residents on Medi-Cal. Medicare and private insurance patients remain responsible for their co-pays and/or deductibles, where required by the terms of their insurance. In CSA 17, the average collection rate on fees assessed is about 26% due to various reimbursement rates from Medicare, Medi-Cal, commercial insurance, and patient private pay. Since 100% of the fee assessed on the estimated 7,000 ambulance transports are not collected, full cost recovery for services will not be achieved in FY 25-26 and a waiver of B-29 is being requested. The proposed increases to the fees today will generate an estimated \$3.5M in additional revenue for CSA 17. The CSA 17 Advisory Committee and fire chiefs in the communities where transportation services are provided, received several updates on the need for a proposed fee increase and anticipated impacts.

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On December 31, 2021, County Service Area 69 (CSA 69) was officially dissolved from the County of San Diego through the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) process. An administrative adjustment is being made to the County Administrative Code Article XX Sections 366, 367, & 368 to remove all references to CSA 69 fees.

Based on this review, County Fire proposes changes to the fees for Fire Marshal, County EMS, and CSA 17, detailed in Attachment E – Summary of Proposed Fee Schedule. The proposed fees and rates are intended to match anticipated operational expenses, including wage rates and fringe benefit costs for County employees that work on these fee programs. The Auditor and Controller has reviewed and approved the supporting documentation and the methodology for establishing the fees in this proposal for FY 2025-26. The overall analysis results in the following fee recommendations (see Attachment A and Attachment B for additional details).

<b>Fire Marshal</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Number of Fees/Rates</b>	<b>Description</b>
Increases	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential Building Permit without Fire Sprinklers from current \$184 to \$232</li> <li>• Residential Building Permit with Fire Sprinklers from current \$381 to \$451</li> <li>• Commercial Building Permit without Fire Sprinklers from current \$366 to \$493</li> <li>• Commercial Building Permit with Fire Sprinklers from current \$698 to \$1,315</li> <li>• Grading Plan Review from current \$58 to \$143</li> <li>• Gate Plan Review from current \$58 to \$84</li> <li>• Fire Safety/Site Inspection from current \$222 to \$280</li> <li>• Special Event from current \$275 to \$324</li> <li>• Fire Alarm System from current \$408 to \$547</li> <li>• Alternative Fire Suppression System from current \$417 to \$460</li> <li>• Initial Inspection and Re-Inspection Fee from current \$171 to \$181</li> </ul>
Decreases	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial Tenant Improvement from current \$539 to \$384</li> </ul>
Addition	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Type I Hourly Rate</li> </ul>

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		\$173 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Type II Hourly Rate \$164</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Type III Hourly Rate \$157</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Type IV to VII Hourly Rate \$150</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Water Tender Tactical I Hourly Rate \$148</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Standby- Water Tender Tactical II Hourly Rate \$127</li> <li>• Firefighter I Hourly Rate \$40</li> <li>• Firefighter II Hourly Rate \$49</li> <li>• Firefighter II (Paramedic) Hourly Rate \$56</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Engineer Hourly Rate \$54</li> <li>• Fire Apparatus Engineer (Paramedic) Hourly Rate \$62</li> <li>• Fire Captain Hourly Rate \$61</li> <li>• Fire Captain (Paramedic) Hourly Rate \$69</li> <li>• Battalion Chief Hourly Rate \$71</li> </ul>
Removal	1	• Fire Prevention Specialist Rate of \$135
<b>Total Fees &amp; Rates</b>	<b>27</b>	

San Diego County Emergency Medical Services		
Action	Number of Fees	Description
Increases	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMT/Advanced EMT Initial/Renewal from current \$183 to \$200</li> <li>• Paramedic Accreditation Initial from current \$183 to \$200</li> <li>• Mobile Intensive Care Nurse Authorization Initial from current \$183 to \$200</li> <li>• Ambulance Provider Permit from current \$6,400 to \$11,300</li> <li>• Continuing Education Provider from current \$2,350 to \$4,100</li> <li>• Base Station Hospital Designation from current \$39,800 to \$61,000</li> <li>• Annual Vehicle Inspection from current</li> </ul>



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		\$373 to \$385 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma Center Hospital Designation from current \$57,000 to \$66,000</li> <li>• Air Ambulance Fee from current \$5,239 to \$5,500</li> </ul>
<b>Total Fees</b>	<b>9</b>	

County Service Area 17		
Action	Number of Fees	Description
Addition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambulance Transport Fee \$3,743</li> <li>• Standby Hourly Rate \$235</li> </ul>
Increases	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mileage from current \$40 to \$48</li> <li>• Treat-No-Transport (TNT) from current \$150 to \$460</li> </ul>
Removal	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambulance Transport Resident \$400</li> <li>• Ambulance Transport Non-Resident \$1,050</li> <li>• Ambulance Transport Out-of-County \$2,500</li> <li>• Mileage Resident &amp; Non-Resident \$20</li> </ul>
<b>Total Fees</b>	<b>8</b>	

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

Today's proposed actions support the Living Safely Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The actions will ensure that adequate fire protection and prevention measures are included in new residential and commercial development. Periodically reviewing San Diego County Fire services and related fees ensures that the County is optimizing its operational delivery system to ensure efficiency, integration, and innovation while maintaining fiscal stability.

Respectfully submitted,



*Andrew Strong for*

EBONY N. SHELTON  
 Chief Administrative Officer

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**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Attachment A: An Ordinance Amending Article XX of the San Diego County Administrative Ordinance Code, Relating to San Diego County Fire, San Diego County Emergency Medical Services, and County Service Area 17 Charges and Fees (Clean Copy)

Attachment B: An Ordinance Amending Article XX of the San Diego County Administrative Ordinance Code, Relating to San Diego County Fire, San Diego County Emergency Medical Services, and County Service Area 17 Charges and Fees (Informational Copy)

Attachment C: Summary of Proposed Ordinance

Attachment D: Findings Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15273(c)

Attachment E: Summary of Proposed Fee Schedule