



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

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DATE: January 28, 2026

07

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

GILLESPIE FIELD AIRPORT- ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS IN THE AIRPORT ENTERPRISE FUND AND ADVERTISE AND AWARD A CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT FOR THE GILLESPIE FIELD RUNWAY 17-35 REHABILITATION PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

OVERVIEW

This action is requesting the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors (Board) approval to fund and initiate construction for the rehabilitation of Runway 17-35 at Gillespie Field, a critical general aviation and public safety County airport in East County. The \$8.4 million project will extend runway life, improve safety, and support sustainable infrastructure. Construction is expected to begin in fall 2026 and to be completed by winter 2026-27. Gillespie Field is a County-owned and operated general aviation airport located within the cities of El Cajon and Santee. Established in 1942 as a Marine Corps facility and transferred to County ownership in 1952, the airport serves as a key gateway for San Diego's East County, supporting corporate and general aviation, flight training, maintenance, and aircraft storage. It also functions as a regional hub for emergency services and public safety operations, housing Sheriff's aerial units, SDG&E firefighting helicopters, and medical evacuation services.

To maintain Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) funding eligibility under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), Gillespie Field updates its Airport Pavement Management Program (APMP) every three years. The 2025 APMP identified Runway 17-35, last rehabilitated in 2006, is due for pavement rehabilitation based on age and condition. Maintaining runway conditions is critical to ensuring the safety of pilots, passengers, and ground personnel, as compromised surfaces can lead to accidents, equipment damage, and operational disruptions. The project will mill and overlay the existing runway asphalt, improve connector taxiways and shoulders, restripe pavement, and upgrade runway lighting. It will also pave service roads around both runway ends, consistent with the FAA-approved Airport Layout Plan.

The project estimated cost consists of environmental review, design, and contract administration costs of \$650,000 and construction costs of \$7,750,000 for a total project cost of \$8,400,000. The total project costs also include 15% contingency for unforeseen conditions. The funding source is FAA grant (\$4,716,287) and available prior year Airport Enterprise Fund fund balance

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(\$3,683,713). Previous Board actions on March 15, 2022 (23) and June 24, 2025 (06), appropriated \$600,000 and \$405,000 totaling \$1,005,000.

Today's request is to establish additional appropriations of \$7,395,000 and approve the advertisement and subsequent award of a construction contract to the lowest qualified bidder for Gillespie Field runway 17-35 rehabilitation project. The project is full cost recovery under Board Policy B-29 and will not affect other projects.

On October 23, 2024 (7), the Board granted authority to Land Use & Environment Group departments to apply for and accept grants from non-profits, local, state and federal agencies through Fiscal Year 2029-30. The FAA grant application was submitted in December 2025 and is expected to be awarded by September 2026. Upon Board approval and FAA grant award, the Department of Purchasing and Contracting will advertise and award a construction contract to the lowest qualified bidder.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find in accordance with Section 15301 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines that the proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA review because it involves the repair and maintenance of an existing runway at a public airport, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use.
2. Establish additional appropriations of \$7,395,000 in the Airport Enterprise Fund (AEF) to provide funds for the Gillespie Field Runway 17-35 Rehabilitation Project based on additional unanticipated revenue from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) (\$4,141,200) and available prior year AEF fund balance (\$3,253,800). **(4 VOTES)**
3. Authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to advertise and award a construction contract and to take other actions authorized by Section 401 et seq., of the Administrative Code with respect to contracting for the Gillespie Field Runway 17-35 Rehabilitation Project.
4. Designate the Director, Department of Public Works, as the County Officer responsible for administering the construction contract in accordance with Board Policy F-41, Public Works Construction Projects.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Gillespie Field is one of seven airports owned and operated by the County that provide vital air transportation hubs, emergency response facilities, and economic engines to the region. The County pursues delivery of these services in a fair and equitable manner and actively works to remove barriers by providing information in multiple languages, encouraging participation, and providing competitive opportunities for small businesses. The project will be procured in accordance with Board Policy B-53, Small-Local Business Policy requiring a three percent (3%) Small-Local Business subcontractor participation requirement and will include the County's Skilled and Trained Workforce Requirements as well as payment of prevailing wages to workers.

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Construction is administered in conformance with federal standards for labor practices, wage requirements, safety standards, Working Families Ordinance and are subject to ongoing reporting and verification of compliance with these federal provisions. The County construction contracts are competitively and publicly advertised and bid, and help stimulate the local economy, primarily by creating construction-related job opportunities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego is committed to supporting the safe and efficient movement of people and goods by ensuring our airport facilities are maintained to FAA standards. Today's action supports the County's environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals. Rehabilitation of the existing runway pavement extends the useful life of the runway structure, is significantly more cost-efficient than reconstruction, and saves a significant amount of resources over full reconstruction, thereby supporting sustainability of resources. Recycled asphalt pavement is used in rehabilitation activities and is derived from sourced materials in old, deteriorated pavement. The recycled pavement material is removed, processed, and reused, ultimately saving tens of thousands of tons of aggregate from the landfill each year. Using recycled content reduces pollution, greenhouse gases, and vehicles miles traveled in the manufacture, transport, and installation of virgin materials. Well-maintained runways improve the mobility of airport vehicles and subsequently decrease vehicle maintenance and operation costs. This project will rehabilitate the top few inches of pavement to prolong the life of the entire runway structure. Implementation of sustainable construction methods, including the use of recycled content, aligns with the County's initiatives to incorporate sustainability practices in construction projects. Planning, coordinating, and implementing effective sustainability objectives and measures are crucial to reducing the County's impact and ensuring safe and healthy communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are partially included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan in the Airport Enterprise Fund (AEF). If approved, today's requested action will establish additional appropriations of \$7,395,000 in the AEF for this project. The total project cost for the Gillespie Field Runway 17-35 Rehabilitation Project is estimated at \$8,400,000, which includes \$7,750,000 construction costs and 15% contingency for unforeseen conditions, and \$650,000 for environmental review, design, and contract administration. The funding sources are the Federal Aviation Administration (\$4,716,287) and available prior year AEF fund balance (\$3,683,713). This project is full-cost recovery in accordance with Board Policy B-29, Grants and Revenue Contracts. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

When approved by the Board of Supervisors for advertising and award, County of San Diego construction contracts are publicly advertised and competitively bid and help stimulate the local economy. Construction is administered in conformance with federal standards for labor practices, wage requirements, safety standards, Working Families Ordinance and are subject to ongoing reporting and verification of compliance with these federal provisions. All workers employed on public works projects must be paid the higher of either (a) prevailing wages determined by the

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California Department of Industrial Relations, according to the type of work and location of the project, or (b) Davis-Bacon Act locally prevailing wage rates for federally funded contracts determined by the U.S. Department of Labor.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

Staff briefed the Gillespie Field Development Committee at a regularly scheduled public meeting on November 18, 2025, and the Committee indicated it supports this project. Outreach to airport tenants and users will be provided before construction and throughout the project development via website postings and electronic communications.

BACKGROUND

Gillespie Field is a County-owned and County-operated general aviation airport located within the cities of El Cajon and Santee. Originally built in 1942 as a Marine Corps parachute facility, ownership was transferred to the County in 1952. The airport is part of the national air transportation system and serves as a key aviation hub for San Diego's East County, supporting corporate and general aviation, flight training, maintenance, and aircraft storage. Gillespie Field also serves a vital public safety role, hosting the Sheriff's Aerial Support to Regional Enforcement Agencies (ASTREA) and its firefighting helicopters, San Diego Gas & Electric's year-round firefighting fleet, and medical evacuation operators such as Mercy Air. Its central East County location allows for rapid, coordinated emergency response across the region.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires airports receiving federal funds through the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) to maintain an up-to-date Airport Pavement Management Program (APMP). Gillespie Field updates its APMP every three years to evaluate pavement conditions and prioritize maintenance projects. The most recent update in 2025 identified Runway 17-35, last rehabilitated in 2006, as requiring pavement rehabilitation due to age and structural evaluation results.

This project will mill and overlay the existing runway asphalt, correct grade variations, and improve connector taxiways, shoulders, and lighting. The project will also shorten the runway from 4,147 feet to 3,160 feet to meet FAA B-I Small design standards, enhancing safety by clearing obstructions within the Runway Safety Area and minimizing incompatible land use. In addition, existing service roads will be paved to complete a continuous vehicle service route around both runway ends. All work aligns with the FAA-approved Airport Layout Plan for Gillespie Field.

The project cost is estimated at \$8,400,000 including \$650,000 for environmental review, design, and contract administration, and \$7,750,000 for construction, which includes a 15% contingency. The FAA will fund eligible design and construction costs in accordance with the AIP handbook, with the required local match provided by the Airport Enterprise Fund (AEF), which supports airport operations, maintenance, and capital improvements. Prior Board actions appropriated \$1,005,000.

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Today's request is to establish additional appropriations of \$7,395,000 to fund construction and authorize the advertisement and award of a construction contract. The project is full cost recovery under Board Policy B-29 and will not affect other projects in the current spending plan.

This project follows the standard FAA grant process and does not differ from other FAA-funded construction projects. The FAA grant application was submitted in December 2025 and is expected to be awarded by September 2026. Upon Board approval, the Department of Purchasing and Contracting will advertise and award a construction contract to the lowest bidder. Construction is expected to begin in fall 2026 and be completed by winter 2026-27.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Section 15301 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines exempts from CEQA review actions consisting of the "operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use." The key consideration in applying this exemption is whether the proposed action involves expansion of an existing use. The proposed action involves repair and maintenance of an existing runway and associated infrastructure at Gillespie Field, with negligible or no proposed changes or expansion in use from what currently exists, and is, accordingly, exempt from CEQA review pursuant to Section 15301 of the CEQA Guidelines.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions to approve the advertisement and subsequent award of a construction contract for the Gillespie Field Runway 17-35 Rehabilitation project supports the sustainability, Community, and Equity Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by providing infrastructure to improve the economy, quality of life, and economic opportunity for all residents and to invest in communities that have too often been left behind. Airports in San Diego County are an important part of the County's physical infrastructure, the federal and state transportation system, and provide superior service delivery to the local aviation customers and the public which they serve.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

A. Vicinity Map

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