

ASSEMBLY BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 5 ON STATE ADMINISTRATION

INFORMATIONAL HEARING NOVEMBER 21, 2025

Honoring Our Heroes: The Path Forward for the Southern California Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon

The Assembly Budget Subcommittee 5 on State Administration will hold an informational hearing on the construction of the proposed Southern California Veterans Cemetery in Orange County, California. The State has been exploring various sites in Orange County for over ten years and has now found a suitable location in Gypsum Canyon in Anaheim, California.

Attached for easy reference is a “Timeline of State and Local Efforts to Establish a Veterans Cemetery in Orange County.” It describes the path that has ultimately led to identifying Gypsum Canyon as the preferred site for the proposed Southern California Veterans Cemetery.

The purpose of this hearing is to identify the appropriate next steps necessary to begin the construction of the Southern California Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon.

BACKGROUND

State of California Feasibility Study. In January 2024, the California Department of General Services, in consultation with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, completed a feasibility study confirming the suitability of Gypsum Canyon for a veterans cemetery.

Gypsum Canyon Cemetery Proposal. The Anaheim City Council approved the Gypsum Canyon location on July 22, 2024. The location lies on a 283-acre site within a former quarry in the hills on the eastern edge of Anaheim. The approved cemetery plans to split the plot of land into two cemeteries, one for the general public and one for veterans. The first phase will include 11,000 burial plots for veterans and over 4,000 columbarium niches, estimated to cost \$66 million. Construction is slated to begin in 2026, with a potential opening for burials in 2027. There are plans for 10 phases over the next 100 years, with the first phase focusing on cremation remains.

Federal Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP) was established in 1978 to complement VA's national cemeteries. The program assists states, territories, and tribal governments in providing gravesites for Veterans in those areas where NCA cannot fully satisfy their burial needs.

Grants may be used only to establish, expand or improve Veterans cemeteries that are owned and operated by a state, territory or tribal government on trust land. Aid is granted only to states, U.S. territories and federally recognized tribal governments, not to private organizations, counties, cities or other government agencies.

The VA can provide up to 100 percent of the development cost for an approved project. For the establishment of new cemeteries, the VA can provide for operating equipment as well. The VA will not pay any off-site costs, land purchases, demolition costs or state employee costs.

Cemeteries funded under the grant program must conform to the standards and guidelines pertaining to site selection, planning and construction prescribed by VA.

Cemeteries must be operated solely for the interment of Veterans (as defined in 38 CFR part 39.2), and their eligible family members (see 38 CFR part 39.10).

The administration, operation, and maintenance of a VA-supported state cemetery is solely the responsibility of the state, territory or tribal government.

The VA is authorized to pay a "plot allowance" of \$978 to a state, territory or tribal government for expenses incurred in the burial of an eligible Veteran without charge. The program is administered by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

CalVet Submits Updated VA Cemetery Grant Program Application. In June 2025, the California Department of Veterans Affairs submitted updated pre-application materials to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The federal VA confirmed receipt of the updated materials and continued evaluating the Gypsum Canyon site.

Gypsum Canyon on Conforming List. October 1, 2025, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs updated its national Priority List and moved Gypsum Canyon state veterans cemetery proposal from the "Non-Conforming" section to the Conforming List, confirming that the revised California Department of Veterans Affairs pre-application meets all federal specifications required for eligibility in the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. This is the first time in project history that the site achieves full federal pre-application compliance.

NEXT STEPS

Now that California's proposed Southern California Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon is on the VA Conforming List, the next steps for the Administration and Legislature should be determining the project cost, developing a funding plan, taking title of the Gypsum Canyon property, and providing the California Department of Veterans Affairs with the authorization to begin the construction Gypsum Canyon state veteran cemetery.