

Timeline of State and Local Efforts to Establish a Veterans Cemetery in Orange County

(Prepared by Precision Advocacy)

The following timeline attempts to capture local, as well as state legislative and budgetary requests in support of a state veterans cemetery in Orange County to date.

2014

- July 22, 2014, the Irvine City Council designates the former Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) El Toro – ARDA (Amended and Restated Development Agreement) as the location for a Southern California Veterans Cemetery.
- [AB 1453](#) (Quirk-Silva, Chapter 646, Statutes of 2014) codifies the City’s designation and directs the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to apply for a federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grant for the design, development, and construction of a Southern California Veterans Cemetery in the City of Irvine.

The bill also creates the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Master Development Fund in the State Treasury and provides that any expenditure of funds be appropriated upon approval by the Legislature to fund annual cemetery operations and maintenance. The bill further establishes the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Donation Fund and the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Perpetual Fund for ongoing operations and maintenance.

Lastly, the bill appropriates \$500,000 State General Fund to CalVet for completion of a site assessment and conceptual design consistent with grant requirements set forth by the VA.

2017

- In June 2017, the Irvine City Council rescinds the ARDA site in response to cost concerns regarding environmental clean-up and demolition of existing buildings as part of the initial phase of construction (estimated at \$77 million in 2016) and identifies 125 acres known as the Bake Parkway site (also referred to as Strawberry Fields).
- [AB 97](#) (Budget Act, Chapter 14, Statutes of 2017) transfers \$5 million from the State General Fund to the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Master Development Fund and \$500,000 to CalVet for the completion of a site assessment and conceptual design plan consistent with grant requirements set forth by the VA.
- [SB 96](#) (Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 28, Statutes of 2017) amends existing state law to specify the Bake Parkway site.

2018

- A June 5, 2018 voter referendum places the Bake Parkway site on an Irvine Special Election ballot, Measure B, which overturns the Council's previous action.
- August 2, 2018, Irvine City Council directs staff to study an additional site, referred to as the Golf Course site, as well as ARDA, both of which are located in the former MCAS El Toro. The study concludes that the Golf Course site would require approximately \$59 million and the ARDA site would require approximately \$91 million (based on updated 2018 state study) to remediate and begin construction.

2019

- July 23, 2019, the Irvine City Council and the Orange County Great Park Board vote to begin steps to offer the Golf Course site to the State.
- [AB 74](#) (Budget Act, Chapter 23, Statutes of 2019) transfers \$20 million to the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Master Development Fund.
- [AB 368](#) (Quirk-Silva, Chapter 284, Statutes of 2019) requires the Southern California Veterans Cemetery to be located at either ARDA or the Golf Course site in the City of Irvine.

The bill also directs CalVet and the Department of General Services (DGS) to complete acquisition studies for both sites and offer a recommendation on which site to pursue based on specified factors, including economic feasibility, benefits to veterans and Irvine residents, and availability of each location.

2020

- April 19, 2020, an initiative to “Build the Great Park Veterans Cemetery” gathers enough signatures to appear on the November 2020 ballot. The initiative rezones the original ARDA site exclusively for a veterans cemetery.
- May 12, 2020, the Irvine City Council votes to adopt the initiative.
- June 23, 2020, the Irvine City Council does not approve a motion to begin negotiations for the transfer of the ARDA site to CalVet, opting instead to wait for the results of the site studies to make the most informed decision.
- [SB 74](#) (Budget Act, Chapter 6, Statutes of 2020) transfers \$700,000 from the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Master Development Fund to CalVet for the completion of a site assessment and conceptual design plan consistent with grant requirements set forth by the VA.

2021

- Senator Tom Umberg introduces [SB 43](#) (Umberg) to require CalVet to work with local government entities in the County of Orange to develop the state-owned and state operated Southern California Veterans Cemetery in the City of Irvine, in accordance with the City's enacted laws and ordinances.
- March 23, 2021, the Irvine City Council hears a presentation by CalVet on the process and timeline of the studies conducted on the veterans cemetery.
- In May 2021, CalVet and DGS releases the results of the site studies in accordance with AB 368. Referred to as the Concept Plan, the studies determine that phase 1 construction and development of the Golf Course site would cost over \$60 million and the ARDA site over \$95 million.
- June 22, 2021, the Irvine City Council receives a presentation on the outcome of the site study and but does not take action, effectively preventing CalVet from submitting an application for a federal grant in 2021 with a specified site.
- July 1, 2021, leaders representing veteran's organizations, as well as federal, state, and local officials, hold a press conference at a site in Gypsum Canyon in Anaheim to express their support for the location for the purpose of building the Southern California Veterans Cemetery.
- July 5, 2021, Senator Tom Umberg pulls SB 43 from the agenda of the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, thereby making it a two-year bill.
- July 20, 2021, the Anaheim City Council adopts a resolution in support of the Gypsum Canyon site.
- July 27, 2021, the Orange County Board of Supervisors approves the allocation of \$20 million for a veterans cemetery at the Gypsum Canyon site in Anaheim.

2022

- January 3, 2022, Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva introduces [AB 1595](#), authorizing, upon completion of an acquisition study by CalVet any site within Orange County to be eligible for construction of a state-owned and operated Southern California Veterans Cemetery.
- September 27, 2022, AB 1595 (Quirk-Silva, Chapter 579, 2022) is enacted.

2023

2024

- January 2024, a feasibility study is prepared by the California Department of General Services, in consultation with CalVet, confirms Gypsum Canyon's suitability for the veterans cemetery.
- June 26, 2024, the 2024 Budget Act is implemented via [AB 107](#) (Budget Committee, Chapter 22, 2022), allocating an additional \$5 million for the Southern California Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon.
- July 22, 2024, the Anaheim City Council unanimously approves OCCD's application for environmental entitlements for the Gypsum Canyon Cemetery project.
- August 21, 2024, a coalition files a lawsuit, *Build the Great Park Veterans Cemetery, et al. v. City of Anaheim*, challenging the City of Anaheim's approval of the Gypsum Canyon Cemetery project.
- September 25, 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors authorizes County Counsel to file a motion to intervene in the lawsuit, representing the City of Anaheim and the Orange County Cemetery District (OCCD). A hearing on the motion is scheduled for October 25, 2024.
- October 1, 2024, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs includes Gypsum Canyon on its pre-application list of non-conforming state, territory, and tribal government cemeteries. This designation is a critical step toward achieving federally recognized veteran cemetery status.
- December 20, 2024, Judge William D. Claster sustains the demurrer in *Build the Great Park Veterans Cemetery vs. City of Anaheim*, but allows the plaintiffs an opportunity to file an amended petition by January 6, 2025, which is later extended to January 13, 2025, to address the deficiencies identified by the court.

2025

- March 2025, CEQA litigation effectively ends with a decisive court ruling in *Build the Great Veterans Cemetery v. City of Anaheim* is to sustain the demurrer again, this time without leave to amend.
- June 2025, CalVet submits updated pre-application materials to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The federal VA confirms receipt of updated materials and continues evaluating the Gypsum Canyon site.

- July 1, 2025, as part of the budget, AB 102 (Chapter 5, Statutes of 2025), Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva secures \$4.5 million in additional funding for the Southern California Veterans Cemetery Master Development Fund.
- October 1, 2025, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs updates its national Priority List and moves Gypsum Canyon from the “Non-Conforming” section to the Conforming List, confirming that the revised CalVet 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.
- October 1, 2025, Governor Newsom signs [AB 571](#) (Quirk-Silva, Chapter 158, Statutes of 2025), granting a CEQA exemption for the Gypsum Canyon Veterans Cemetery.

This action removes the final environmental barrier caused by ongoing litigation. Codifies that the 2005 EIR and the 2024 EIR Addendum satisfy CEQA requirements. Allows site development and construction planning to proceed without delay. AB 571 represents the first statutory CEQA exemption ever granted for a veterans cemetery project in California.