
SENATE COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Senator Bob Archuleta, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 571	Hearing Date:	7/14/25
Author:	Quirk-Silva		
Version:	6/19/25 Amended		
Urgency:	Yes	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Jenny Callison		

Subject: California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: Gypsum Canyon Veterans Cemetery

DESCRIPTION

Summary:

Exempts the proposed Gypsum Canyon Veterans Cemetery in Anaheim, Orange County from further review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Existing law:

- 1) Requires under CEQA that a lead agency determines whether a project is exempt from CEQA, or if it must do an initial study to determine if a project will have significant effects on the environment. If a project has no effect on the environment or effects that can be mitigated, the lead agency prepares a negative declaration (ND) or mitigated ND (MND). If the project will have significant impacts, the lead agency prepares an environmental impact report (EIR) to evaluate and propose mitigation measures for any effects on the environment, including impacts or likely impacts to land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and historic or aesthetic significance. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§21000 et seq.)
- 2) Requires a subsequent or supplemental EIRs in the cases where:
 - a) Substantial changes are proposed in the project which will require major revisions of the EIR.
 - b) Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is being undertaken which will require major revisions in the EIR.
 - c) New information, which was not known and could not have been known at the time the EIR was certified as complete, becomes available. (PRC 21166)
- 3) Requires the lead agency or responsible agency to prepare an addendum to a previously certified EIR if some changes or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described above calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred. (CEQA Guidelines 15164)

This bill:

- 1) Exempts from CEQA any activity or approval necessary for the completion of the public and state veteran's cemetery in Gypsum Canyon in the County of Orange, known as the Gypsum Canyon Veterans Cemetery, and sunsets this exemption January 1, 2030

- 2) Makes related findings and declarations, including that the Gypsum Canyon site has undergone extensive environmental review, through a certified EIR in 2005 and an approved EIR addendum in 2024, and noting that the proposed cemetery represents a less intensive land use than the uses contemplated under the prior EIR.
- 3) Is a special, urgency statute.

BACKGROUND

By population, Orange County is the sixth largest county in the United States and is the largest county in the State without a veterans cemetery. It is home to more than 115,000 veterans. In Southern California, the closest veterans cemeteries with burial spaces still available are in San Diego and Riverside counties. The legislative pursuit of a veterans cemetery in Orange County began with the January 2014 introduction and later passing of State Assembly Bill 1453.

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 in the Anaheim Hills 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.

In 2005, the city certified a Specific Plan EIR for a large housing development on the site, known as Mountain Park. According to the EIR, the Mountain Park Specific Plan allows for the development of an 830-acre, gated residential community with a maximum of 2,500 residential units, public facilities, infrastructure, a fire station, public trails, a trail staging area, a concession store/interpretive center, a school site, and a public community park. The cemetery project was reviewed via an addendum to the 2005 Specific Plan EIR.

COMMENT

According to the Senate Environmental Quality Committee: CEQA provides important information on the environmental impacts of a project that can help decision-makers and the public make informed choices on development. CEQA also requires that projects with significant impacts take steps to mitigate those impacts. Typically, a large project that is likely to have significant impact on the environment, such as a cemetery, would need to be subject to CEQA in order to understand and potentially mitigate those impacts.

However, the Gypsum Canyon Veteran's Cemetery may be a unique case, because it has already undergone recent environmental review under CEQA. In 2005, a large housing project was proposed on the site of the Gypsum Canyon Veteran's Cemetery, and that project was evaluated in a full EIR. The impacts of a housing project are not the same as the impacts that result from a cemetery: however, housing projects are generally higher intensity use than cemeteries. Even more relevant, in 2024, the lead agency approved an addendum to the 2005 EIR. Based off of information in the addendum, the city council found that the original 2005 EIR and addendum:

“...provides an adequate assessment of environmental impacts satisfying the requirements of CEQA supplemental review by fully disclosing new or substantially more severe significant

impacts that would occur due to the Project and/or changes under supplemental review standards since certification of the prior EIR”

According to the author, “Our veterans gave everything to protect our freedoms. “All gave some, and some gave all.” After years of advocating for the Southern California Veterans Cemetery, AB 571 is the crucial tool we need to deliver on a promise we owe to our veterans and their families. This cemetery will be their final resting place, a place of honor and dignity. The time has come for Orange County to be home to the heroes who defended our country. We cannot afford to delay any longer.”

Currently, the Orange County Board of Supervisors, all 34 Cities in the county, and a bipartisan majority of the county’s federal and state delegation, as well as public safety, labor organizations, and veterans organizations, are in support of the Southern California at Gypsum Canyon in Anaheim.

POSITIONS

Sponsor: County of Orange.

Support: 38alpha
 American Legion, Department of California
 AMVETs Hal Camp Post 18
 AMVETs, Department of California
 Anaheim Firefighters Association Local 2899
 Anaheim Police Association
 Association of California Cities - Orange County (ACC-OC)
 Association of the United States Army, Greater Los Angeles Chapter
 California Association of County Veterans Service Officers
 California State Commanders Veterans Council
 California-Hawaii State Conference of the NAACP
 City of Laguna Niguel
 Filipino American Chamber of Commerce of Orange County
 Heroes Hall Veterans Foundation
 Military Officers Association of America, California Council of Chapters
 Orange County Cemetery District
 Orange County Employees Association
 Orange County Professional Firefighters Association, Local 3631
 Orange County Veterans and Military Families Collaborative (OCVMFC)
 Orange; County of
 Private Citizen
 Saddleback Valley Chapter, American Gold STAR Mothers, INC.
 Veterans Alliance of Orange County (VALOR)
 Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3173
 Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council

Oppose: None on File.