Memo

To: John Russo, City Manager
From: Melissa Fox, City Councilmember
Date: June 13, 2019
Re: Agenda Item for City Council consideration on June 25, 2019: A Resolution designating the ARDA site at the Great Park as the appropriate location for the Veterans Cemetery; and expressing the City's intent to transfer the property to the State.

From the beginning of the veteran’s cemetery effort, my sole concern has been to do whatever best ensures that an O.C. Veterans Cemetery becomes a reality. It is now clear to me that the Assembly Bill 368 provides the best and clearest path toward achieving this goal.

AB 368 provides for a state-built and state-run Veterans Cemetery (the Southern California Veterans Cemetery) on the 125-acre ARDA site at the Great Park. AB 368 was passed unanimously (76-0) by the State Assembly and is expected to be passed by the State Senate and signed into law by the Governor this summer.

The legislation states that that the California Department of Veterans Affairs “shall acquire, study, design, develop, construct, and equip a state-owned and state-operated Southern California Veterans Cemetery, which shall be located at the site of the former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, on 125 acres known as the Amended and Restated Development Agreement [ARDA] Site in the Orange County Great Park in the City of Irvine.”

The costs of the cemetery will be borne by the State, at no cost to the City.

In fact, in anticipation of the final passage of AB 368, the State Legislature has included first year funding in the 2019-2020 FY State Budget for initial demolition, cleanup and preliminary site preparation at the ARDA site, as part of a CalVet-approved 30-month construction timeline for the Southern California Veterans Cemetery.

Significantly, several members of the legislature, from both sides of the aisle — Democrats Senator Thomas J. Umberg (SD 34) and Assemblymembers Sharon Quirk-Silva (AD 65) and Tom Daly (AD 69) and Republican Assemblymembers Tyler Diep (AD 72), William Brough (AD 73) and Philip Chen (AD 55) — have pledged to allocate the funds necessary for the decontamination of the site and the construction of a veterans ...
cemetery in that location and requested that the Irvine City Council re-designate the
ARDA as the official site in conformity with the legislation.

In their recent letter to the City Council, these legislators state, "We are ready to work
with State and Federal officials to secure funding for the Southern California Veterans
Memorial Park and Cemetery. We ask that you stand by your previous commitment to
provide a resting place for California veterans at the ARDA site."

Therefore, it now appears that the only obstacle to the realization of the state-built and
state-operated Veterans Cemetery is for the City Council to do as these legislators ask
and authorize the transfer of the City-owned 125-acre ARDA site to the State, pursuant
to a property transfer agreement negotiated with CalVet.

Accordingly, please place this item on the agenda for the June 25th City Council
meeting. Because of the widespread public interest in this important project, I would
appreciate the item being set for a specific time-certain to facilitate public attendance
and participation.

Meanwhile, I am preparing an appropriate resolution for Council consideration, which I
will share with the City Council and the general public well in advance of the June 25th
Council meeting. This resolution will include a provision that if the State not complete
Phase One of the veterans cemetery within five years, the land will revert to the City.

I look forward to our City working in a positive, bipartisan way with our State and
Federal representatives, veterans’ organizations, and community groups to finally
establish the veterans cemetery that we have fought for and needed for so long.

Our veterans deserve a final resting place close to their families and loved ones.

Let’s get it done.

cc: City Council
    City Attorney