



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** Matthew Downing, City Manager

**SUBJECT:** Letter of Support of SpaceX Operations at Vandenberg Space Force Base on Behalf of the City of Arroyo Grande

**DATE:** July 23, 2024

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Authorize the Mayor to execute a letter of support of SpaceX operations at Vandenberg Space Force Base on behalf of the City of Arroyo Grande.

**IMPACT ON FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL RESOURCES:**

No financial impact is projected as a result of sending the letter of support.

**BACKGROUND:**

Vandenberg Space Force Base (VSFB) is the only launch site on the West Coast of the United States and is viewed as the nation's primary launch site for putting rockets into polar orbit. The United States Government relies on launches from VSFB for critical national security missions. The U.S. Government has extensively detailed the need to increase its use of commercial space launch and commercial orbit capacity in support of the national defense from VSFB. In order to meet these policy goals, the United States Space Force (USSF) has proposed increasing the number of annual launches that take place at VSFB. The USSF indicates that there is a critical need for increased launch capacity at VSFB.

One of the final steps in the approval process for this increased launch capacity is permitting through the California Coastal Commission (CCC) in accordance with the California Coastal Act of 1976. The CCC has previously approved up to 36 launches per year for SpaceX, one of the commercial space launch operators at VSFB requesting additional launch capacity at VSFB. However, concerns have been raised by the CCC regarding impacts to coastal resources and coastal access as a result of increased launches at VSFB, including environmental impacts and beach closures associated with increased launches.

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**ANALYSIS OF ISSUES:**

The emerging space and aerospace industry on the Central Coast is a major driver for the growth of the local economy and is a major component of the REACH 2030 10-year action plan for the Central Coast economy. Increasing the frequency of launches at VSFB would bring additional economic benefits to the region through direct and indirect job creation, increased opportunities for small businesses, and enhanced infrastructure development.

One of the concerns over increased launches is the impacts to coastal resources. The USSF works with launch companies to mitigate environmental impacts, including engaging in stringent monitoring. However, even when impacts are minimized, increased SpaceX operations at VSFB could disrupt local wildlife habitats. Additionally, increased operations are seen to have the potential of increased beach closures in the vicinity of VSFB. Additionally, beach closures are also minimized to the maximum extent possible and ample coastal access is available in surrounding regions.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

The following alternatives are provided for the Council's consideration:

1. Approve the letter of support for SpaceX operations at VSFB and authorize the Mayor to sign the letter;
2. Do not approve the letter of support for SpaceX operations at VSFB; or
3. Provide other direction to staff.

**ADVANTAGES:**

The regional economic benefits, increases to national security, and continued innovation in the aerospace industry are likely to result from the increased SpaceX operations at VSFB and could outweigh costs identified by the CCC.

**DISADVANTAGES:**

Increased SpaceX operations could increase impacts to coastal resources and coastal access due to additional launches per year.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

No environmental review is required for this item.

**PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND COMMENTS:**

The Agenda was posted at City Hall and on the City's website in accordance with Government Code Section 54954.2.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Draft Letter of Support of SpaceX Operations at VSFB