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City Council Approves Final Design and Next Steps for Veterans Monument at Central Park

Rancho Santa Margarita, CA — In a meaningful tribute aligned with the City's Veterans Day observance, the Rancho Santa Margarita City Council on Wednesday unanimously approved the final design and next steps for the construction of a new Veterans Monument at Central Park. The action followed the City's annual Veterans Day recognition ceremony and represents a significant milestone in a project championed by Council Member Anne Figueroa, who has led the effort for more than two years.

The newly approved monument—an expanded, 15-foot-long installation with military service seals, a dedication plaque, integrated lighting, and shaded seating—will replace the existing 2015 Boy Scouts of America plaque, which will be preserved at City Hall. The monument will be located adjacent to City Hall, requiring an easement agreement with the Santa Margarita Landscape and Recreation Corporation (SAMLARC).

"This monument will serve as a lasting tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and patriotism of all who have worn our nation's uniform," said Mayor Tony Beall. "We are honored to create a place of reflection and gratitude at the heart of our community."

Council Member Anne Figueroa, who initiated the monument proposal and worked extensively with veterans, staff, and SAMLARC to develop the refined design, expressed her appreciation for the project's progress.

"Creating a permanent monument to honor our veterans has been one of the most meaningful efforts I have ever worked on," said Council Member Figueroa. "Rancho Santa Margarita is home to so many who have served, and this monument ensures their courage and sacrifice will forever be recognized by future generations."

Throughout the design process, Figueroa conducted outreach to local veterans and worked alongside City engineers and SAMLARC to resolve design challenges, including protecting

existing olive trees, improving visibility, and orienting the monument to support both reflection and accessibility.

Two local veterans spoke during the meeting, underscoring the emotional significance of the project.

Retired Navy Chief Petty Officer Jim Clements shared, “Being a veteran is earned—it can never be taken away. This monument will stand as a beacon of light for those who have served.”

Vietnam veteran Harry Steelman, Commander of VFW Post 6024, emphasized the value of a permanent place to reflect: “There are days when veterans just need somewhere quiet to sit, remember, and reflect. A monument like this becomes a place of healing and connection—something every community should provide its veterans.”

After multiple field reviews with SAMLARC’s Landscape and Facilities Enhancement Committee (LFEC), the monument footprint was moved approximately 18 feet south, protecting tree roots, eliminating the need to remove historic olive trees, and improving visibility. The SAMLARC Board approved the refined monument location and layout in October.

The FY 2025–26 Budget sets aside General Fund resources for the monument. Current cost estimates include \$50,000 for design and construction and \$20,000 for soft costs and contingencies. Construction is anticipated to begin in March 2026, with completion expected by May 2026, in time for Memorial Day and Independence Day commemoration.

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