AGENDA MATERIAL
DATE 2/9/26 ITEM NO. RA 5

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 23, 2026

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Lesher
County Administrator

Re: **Possible County Bond Election**

Background

Pima County's Strategic Plan 2025–2028 identifies as a priority of the Board of Supervisors the review and update of financial policies to support long-term funding strategies, including the use of bonds. For many years, Pima County, like many other local governments, periodically asked voters to approve general obligation bonds to fund a variety of capital improvement projects across the region.

Spanning 40 years between 1974 and 2014, the County had numerous successful bond authorizations approved by voters. Projects were included across the region, including within cities and towns, since the secondary property taxes that repay the bonds are paid by all Pima County taxpayers. However, this changed with the loss of the 2015 and 2018 bond elections. As a result, the County moved to a pay as you go (PAYGO) method in 2019 for funding many capital improvements. While successful, capital needs are increasingly competing with funding for operational needs. In considering bonds again, I asked staff to meet with individual Board offices for initial thoughts and to better understand preferences for the possible timing of a bond election and priority projects or types of projects.

FEB 06 '26 PM 03:14 PC CLK OF BD

General Fund PAYGO

While PAYGO has successfully funded a portion of the 10-year road repair program and some capital needs of the County, continuing to fund capital needs from the primary property tax levy is becoming increasingly difficult due to growing services and operational costs that also rely upon the primary property tax levy. In addition, the County's capital improvement needs exceed the capacity of PAYGO.

If voters approved the issuance of General Obligation (GO) bonds, we could consider revising the Board's current General Fund PAYGO policy with one that continues to provide necessary support for other ongoing capital needs that would not be funded by bonds.

Staff Meetings with District Board Offices

Staff met with four Board offices to discuss and receive input on a possible bond election this year or in 2027. The District 4 office asked to meet after the Regional Transportation

Authority (RTA) election in March 2026. Following the meetings with each individual Board office during December 2025, staff compiled key feedback, and those priorities and concerns expressed regarding timing, scope and messaging of a future County bond election. The information below summarizes these discussions and provides preliminary recommendations and next steps.

Key Points

All offices emphasized the need for unified, concise messaging that clearly shows the needs and tangible benefits to the community. Any proposed bond package should include projects that meet the strategic priorities of the County, providing clear public benefit. Another important consideration was early engagement with the public, incorporated jurisdictions, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and Tohono O'odham Nation and continuing that engagement throughout the process.

There was consistent direction from the majority of offices to remain focused on capital infrastructure needs with public benefit, and to avoid non-capital, programmatic and operational costs, which should not be funded with GO bonds. There was consensus that a bond election should not resemble the scale of the 2015 bond package, which totaled over $800 million and included a wide variety of projects.

Project Types and Themes

While individual Board offices highlighted specific interests, particular themes and project categories seemed to be supported:

- Safety and wellness as an overarching focus
- Capital projects related to flood control, emergency preparedness, neighborhood reinvestment, libraries, and parks and recreation

Some noted particular interest in bond projects that further the objectives of the Prosperity Initiative. There are different ways in which this can be accomplished. For example, bond projects, regardless of type or location, could incorporate equitable development practices such as construction related job training opportunities for low-income job seekers. The Regional Flood Control District's stormwater park programs could serve as a model.

Timing of a Bond Election

With one exception, it appeared that Board offices expressed interest in 2027 rather than 2026 for a County bond election. Key reasons included:

- The 2026 ballot is expected to be crowded, with concerns that bond messaging could be lost.
- A 2027 election would allow for additional time for meaningful public engagement, stakeholder input, and project scoping.

If the Board were to direct staff to pursue a 2026 bond election, Board offices stressed the need for a smaller, highly focused package with the process needing to start in early 2026. A Bond Advisory Commission (BAC) would have to be convened as soon as possible, and potential bond projects would have to be identified before the BAC begins to meet. Below is an accelerated timeline of actions required of the Board if a 2026 Bond election is pursued. The actions in red below are the minimum required milestones to hold a November Bond election. The BAC would have about two months to meet and develop recommendations.

Possible 2026 Bond Election Timeline

Actions	2026
BOS - Vote to convene the Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) and appointment of the 25 members	February
BAC – begins meeting, with kick-off meeting covering bonds 101, bonding capacity and tax scenarios, and information on proposed projects.	March– April
BAC – Recommendations to the BOS	April
County Administrator recommendations to the BOS	May
BOS deliberates Bond package	May
BOS calls Bond Election and approves resolution soliciting for and against arguments	**June**
Staff drafts Bond Implementation Ordinance and Publicity Pamphlet	**June – July**
BOS approves Bond Implementation Ordinance at a hearing that is publicly noticed 15 days prior	**August**
Publicity Pamphlet is mailed and Bond Implementation Ordinance is published	**August – September**
Early Voting for military overseas begins	**September**
Regular Early Voting begins	**October 7, 2026**
County Bond Election	**November 3, 2026**

If the preference is for a 2027 bond election, the actions in red would be done in the same month of the year but in 2027. Therefore, the main difference in the 2026 and 2027 timelines is that a 2027 Bond election would allow more time for public engagement and the Bond Advisory Committee to complete its work before the Board calls the election, as well as additional time for public outreach.

As noted above and per the County's Truth in Bonding Code, the Board must convene a 25-member Bond Advisory Committee, with appointees from each Board member, the County

Administrator, each of the incorporated cities and towns and the two tribes. The BAC is responsible for making recommendations on the bond funding amount and projects to be included in the bond implementation plan. The BAC is also responsible for overseeing the implementation of voter-approved bond programs. Any amendment to the Truth in Bonding Code requires publishing a notice 15 days prior to the Board holding a public hearing.

Initial Estimate of Impact on Property Taxpayers

To provide a preliminary understanding of the impact on property taxpayers, it is estimated that a $100 million bond package would cost the owner of a home assessed at $200,000 $1.07 per month or $12.84 per year. This suggests that every $50 million would increase the tax on a home assessed at $200,000 by $0.53 or $6.42 per year.

Recommendation and Next Steps

The Board is scheduled to hold a Retreat on Monday February 9, 2026, and I recommend the Supervisors provide direction to staff at that time about whether or not planning should continue for a bond election and whether the election should be held in 2026 or 2027.

If the Board directs staff to pursue a 2027 Bond election, work would begin to develop a preliminary list of bond projects. The identification of possible projects will be informed by discussions with cities and towns, the Tohono O'odham Nation and Pasqua Yaqui Tribe, with the goal to begin public engagement early in the process and convene the BAC by the third quarter of 2026 to begin their work.

If the Board prefers a Bond election in 2026, we will need to convene the BAC and complete the 25 appointments as soon as possible to keep with the accelerated 2026 timeline.

JKL/anc

c: Carmine DeBonis, Deputy County Administrator
Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
Art Cuaron, Director, Finance and Risk Management
Rod Lane, Director, Project Design and Construction
Constance Hargrove, Director, Elections Department
Diana Durazo, Senior Advisor, Pima County Administrator's Office
Nicole Fyffe, Senior Advisor, Pima County Administrator's Office