



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: JANUARY 27, 2026**

FROM: COUNCILMEMBER ROBILLARD **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO EXPLORE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO ESTABLISH THE LEARNING INSTITUTE FOR FLIGHT TECHNOLOGY THROUGH JUNE 30, 2029.

ISSUE:

Approve a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding with Riverside Unified School District, Riverside City College, California Baptist University, and University of California, Riverside, to explore partnership opportunities to establish a collaborative framework for dialogue, planning, and evaluation to establish the Learning Institute for Flight Technology (LIFT) through June 30, 2029.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Riverside and Riverside Unified School District, Riverside City College, California Baptist University, and University of California, Riverside, to explore partnership opportunities to establish the Learning Institute for Flight Technology (LIFT) through June 30, 2029; and
2. Authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to execute the Memorandum of Understanding with the Riverside Unified School District, Riverside City College, California Baptist University, and University of California, Riverside including making minor and non-substantive changes.

BACKGROUND:

Southern California's aviation legacy is unparalleled in the United States. Beginning in the early 20th century, the region transformed from agricultural groves into a global aerospace hub. Companies like Douglas Aircraft, Lockheed, and Hughes established manufacturing plants that produced iconic aircraft during World War II and the Cold War. These efforts not only helped secure Allied victory, but also propelled technological advancements in jet propulsion, stealth technology, and space exploration.

The Inland Empire became a critical aviation corridor during the 20th century. Its vast open spaces and proximity to Los Angeles made it ideal for airfields and military installations. During World War II, the region hosted numerous training bases and aircraft production facilities, supporting troop deployments and logistics.

March Air Reserve Base, established in 1918, is one of the oldest continuously operated military airfields in the U.S. March Field evolved from a training ground for biplane pilots into a strategic hub for bomber operations during WWII and later a center for jet-age and Cold War missions.

Riverside Airport traces its roots back to the early 1920s, when local aviation pioneer Roman Warren, known as the “Cowboy Aviator,” established a small landing field near the Santa Ana River. Warren initially used a 15-acre pasture with a 900-foot runway for his surplus JN-4 aircraft, marking the beginning of Riverside’s civil aviation era.

By the mid-20th century, the airport—then known as Riverside Arlington Airport—expanded its facilities. In 1956, Runway 9/27 was paved, enabling larger aircraft operations. Soon after, Bonanza Air Lines began scheduled flights, later joined by Air West, offering service to destinations like Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Palm Springs. Through the 1970s, Golden West Airlines operated Twin Otter flights to LAX, reinforcing Riverside’s role in regional connectivity.

Today, Riverside Airport spans 525 acres, featuring two asphalt runways and a helipad. It serves as a general aviation hub and an aeronautical education center, hosting multiple flight schools and aviation programs. A notable milestone occurred in 2013, when FedEx Express donated a Boeing 727-200F to California Baptist University, creating a hands-on laboratory for aviation science students.

Riverside Airport is now the busiest FAA Federal Contract Tower airport in California, ranking 116th nationwide in operations. It supports emergency services, air ambulance flights, and firefighting missions, while also fostering community engagement through events which highlights its economic and educational impact on the Inland Empire.

DISCUSSION:

1. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

Exploring the LIFT concept would allow the City and its educational partners to examine potential opportunities to support workforce development and long-term economic growth within the aviation, aerospace, and related technology sectors. Through early coordination with local school districts, colleges, and universities, participants would evaluate how existing educational offerings, industry needs, and regional assets could be better aligned over time. This exploratory effort is intended to inform future discussions around career awareness, skills development, and workforce readiness, consistent with broader state and federal priorities such as the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Aviation and Space Education (AVSED) initiative.

2. Integration of Advanced Technology

Through this exploratory effort, the City and participating institutions would engage in discussions regarding the evolving role of technology within aviation, aerospace, and related fields. These conversations are intended to provide shared awareness of emerging trends, potential applications, and broader considerations related to education, training, and workforce development. This exchange of information would help inform future planning discussions, without committing the City or participating partners to specific technologies, investments, or implementation strategies.

3. Economic and Community Considerations

As part of the exploratory discussions, the City and participating partners would consider how a collaborative aviation- and technology-focused initiative could relate to broader economic development and community priorities in Riverside and the Inland Empire. These conversations may include examining the role of Riverside Airport as a regional asset, identifying opportunities for

alignment with existing educational, workforce, and industry activities, and understanding how such efforts could complement, not duplicate, current programs. Any potential economic or community impacts would be evaluated as part of future planning discussions and would not be assumed or guaranteed through this Memorandum of Understanding.

4. Educational Alignment and Knowledge Sharing

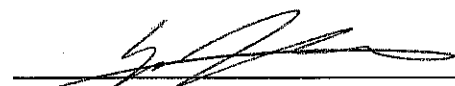
Through the Memorandum of Understanding, participating educational institutions and the City would engage in discussions to better understand existing programs, areas of expertise, and potential points of alignment related to aviation, aerospace, and related fields. These conversations are intended to support coordination and information-sharing, and to help identify whether future opportunities for collaboration may exist. Any consideration of shared resources, academic initiatives, or research activities would be evaluated through separate discussions and would not be established through this agreement.

The Memoranda of Understanding with the participating educational institutions are non-binding and are intended to formalize a collaborative, exploratory process. Through these agreements, the City and its partners would engage in dialogue to share information, exchange ideas, and evaluate concepts related to aviation, aerospace, and associated technology and workforce considerations. The MOUs are intended solely to inform future planning discussions and do not establish curricula, programs, funding commitments, or implementation actions.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

Submitted by:



Steven Robillard
Councilmember, Ward 3

Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Memorandum of Understanding – Riverside Unified School District
2. Memorandum of Understanding – Riverside City College
3. Memorandum of Understanding – California Baptist University
4. Memorandum of Understanding – University of California at Riverside