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Airport Office-Tower Controversy Deepens

Gene Cubbison, NBC 7/39 Reporter

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SAN DIEGO -- Are city officials getting improper outside help resolving the dispute over a controversial office tower near Montgomery Field?

That's a question being raised by City Attorney Mike Aguirre, who has uncovered a draft agreement between the city and the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority.

The proposed pact, which Aguirre contends would violate Section 40 of the city charter and would require his signature, lends the city of San Diego the services of Airport Authority executive Theodore Sexton.

Aguirre spokeswoman Maria Velasquez told NBC 7/39 that Sexton apparently would be assigned to the city's Real Estate Assets division, which oversees the city-owned Montgomery Field.

Velasquez said Aguirre's overriding concern is whether Sexton's role would be to broker a settlement of the standoff involving Sunroad Enterprises' Centrum One tower, which is north of the airport and which the Federal Aviation Administration has ruled is an aviation hazard due to its height of 180 feet. That is 20 feet taller than FAA regulations.

Aguirre is said to suspect a settlement might call for rerouting the bad-weather landing pattern at Montgomery Field. That is a move that would have to be approved by the FAA.

If such approval is ultimately granted, that could keep Sunroad from having to lop off the top two floors of the building. The Sunroad permits were granted in a process that Sanders has admitted was deeply flawed.

Fred Saenz, the mayor's chief spokesman, told NBC 7/39 that Aguirre's suspicions "couldn't be further from the truth." Saenz said that Sexton's role would be to evaluate whether the city should continue to operate Montgomery and Brown fields or transfer them to the airport authority.

"Airports are not our core competence," Saenz said. "Executive-loan programs are considered a 'best management practice' within the public sector."

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