

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: David W. Rowlands, City Manager
DATE: May 5, 2026
SUBJECT: Ballot Measure Polling Survey

Description:

The City Council will receive a presentation on polling survey results for a potential ballot measure, including community priorities and support for municipal services.

Environmental Notice: The activity is not a “Project” as defined under Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines; therefore, pursuant to State Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) no environmental review is required.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Receive a presentation on polling survey results for a potential ballot measure, including community priorities and support for municipal services; and
2. Provide direction to staff to draft approving resolutions for Submission of a Question to Voters regarding a proposed sales tax ballot measure to fund essential city services, as part of the General Municipal Election to be held Tuesday, November 3, 2026.

BACKGROUND:

The people of Santa Maria have spoken in support of maintaining and enhancing City services, as reflected in the latest survey poll conducted by DHM Research during March 2026. Santa Maria needs extended and enhanced local sales tax revenue to maintain and expand vital and desired municipal services. Measure U, the local one-percent sales tax measure approved in November 2018, is directed primarily (90 percent) toward public safety departments, including Police and Fire. Additional revenue through a proposed general sales tax measure would support other services that address additional priorities of the community.

DISCUSSION:

DHM Research assisted the City in conducting a survey among Santa Maria residents to assess their perceptions of and satisfaction with City services, and to gauge their support for a potential sales tax ballot measure in November. The 15-minute survey was completed by 400 likely voters between the dates of March 18 and 26, 2026, and was offered in both English and Spanish. The margin of error is ± 4.9 percent.

The survey found that Santa Maria voters are divided on the City's direction. The top issues facing Santa Maria include housing affordability, crime, homelessness and cost of living. Two-thirds of voters are satisfied with the City's delivery of services. Most voters also feel their financial situation is good and do not expect their personal finances to worsen.

The survey tested the response to a proposed sales tax ballot measure, with an initial test reporting 60 percent majority support. The survey then provided additional information on measure components and reasons to support. After this step, the support increased to 74 percent, up 14 percentage points from the initial test. The survey found that likely voters react positively to each proposed use of funds, reinforcing broad appeal rather than reliance on a single priority. Maintaining parks, expanding youth services, and other funding priorities are important to voters. The survey then provided the reasons to oppose, including cost-of-living impacts. However, this did not significantly erode support for the measure, and support remains majority at 64 percent by the end of the survey.

Given these survey findings, staff asks the City Council for direction to prepare approving resolutions for a proposed sales tax ballot measure to fund essential city services, as part of the November 3, 2026, General Election. Staff would bring the resolution back to City Council in an upcoming meeting in June.