



Preparation for Possible Revenue Ballot Measure

February 20, 2014

A decorative graphic consisting of a dark teal vertical bar on the left, a series of five small white dots arranged vertically to its right, and a thin red circle that overlaps the bottom of the dots and the top of the text box.

William C. Statler

Fiscal Policy ■ Financial Planning ■ Analysis ■ Training ■ Organizational Review

City of Monterey
Preparation for Possible Revenue Ballot Measure

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Preparation for Possible Revenue Ballot Measure

REPORT PURPOSE

City of Monterey is considering the possibility of placing a revenue measure on the November 2014 ballot. The purpose of this report is to present a work program in preparing for a possible measure that sets forth key tasks, schedule and budget, which builds on the factors that have led to successful outcomes in other communities throughout California.

About Successful Revenue Measures. Since adoption of voter approval requirements for tax measures via Proposition 218 in 1996, ballot results throughout California show that revenue measures can be successful. However, the results also show that effective preparation before placement of the measure on the ballot is a critical success factor. As discussed in more detail below, there are two key steps in preparing for a successful revenue measure:

- Feasibility assessment
- Community outreach and public education

Based on the experience of local agencies that have been successful with revenue ballot measures, achieving support at the ballot box (the only place it matters) requires two key ingredients:

- A compelling vision of how the new revenues would be used.
- And an effective way of communicating this vision to likely voters.

This underscores the importance of an effective community outreach and public education program in telling the City's fiscal story. At the end of the day, this story is not about the City's budget, but about what kind of community Monterey wants to be.

Time Is Short. Many communities spent 12 to 18 months in preparing for a possible revenue measure before making the decision to place it on the ballot. The City has less than five months for this. The decision to place a revenue measure on the November 2014 ballot must be made by August 8, 2014. The last scheduled Council meeting before this deadline is August 5, 2014. Based on this, there is a very short timeframe for community outreach and public education. While it is possible to develop and implement an effective program in the remaining few months, this will require a well-planned, focused and disciplined effort to do so.

BACKGROUND

While the City has begun to recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression, it is still faced with difficult fiscal challenges. In the first quarter fiscal review presented to the Council on December 3, 2013, the City Manager characterized critical investment shortfalls in both the City's physical and human infrastructure as unsustainable. The fiscal review outlined three budget scenarios for the Council's consideration: two leave the City with significant annual deficits; and a third, buoyed by a one-percent sales tax

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increase that generates about \$7 million annually, results in a reasonable General Fund capital improvement program and a balanced budget.

Given this situation, the City is currently considering the possibility of a placing a general purpose, 1-cent sales tax measure on the November 2014 ballot. However, as discussed below, in assessing the feasibility of a revenue measure, the City should consider other revenue options as well.

WORK PROGRAM

As noted above, there are two key steps in effectively preparing for a possible revenue ballot measure:

- ***Feasibility Assessment.*** Conduct public opinion research and assess the likelihood of a successful revenue measure.
- ***Community Outreach and Public Education.*** If the feasibility assessment is favorable, develop and implement a community outreach and public education program on why added revenues are needed.

Each of these steps is detailed below. However, it is important to stress that while the City can take the lead on these two tasks in preparing for a possible revenue measure, once it is placed on the ballot, the City can no longer be an active participant in the process or commit resources to its passage in any way.

Under State law, local agencies have broad discretion in using their funds for professional assistance in researching issues, conducting surveys and providing information about the challenges facing the agency. However, once an issue becomes a formal ballot measure, local governments cannot participate or use their resources as an advocate in any way. This means that advocacy for the measure's passage must come from a strong community-based group that will raise funds and campaign for the measure: without this, the measure is not likely to pass. For this reason, even if the results of these two steps may be positive, the City should also consider the likelihood that a community-based group will emerge that will campaign for its passage before placing a measure on the ballot.

① Feasibility Assessment

The first step in preparing the feasibility assessment is to hire a qualified public opinion research firm: the results of scientific public opinion research are invaluable in assessing at the very beginning if there is adequate voter support for a new revenue measure. While support can subsequently be built (or maintained) through an education program, if there is very low support initially, an education campaign is unlikely to be successful in gaining voter support on Election Day.

The public opinion survey will typically surface four key issues:

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- ***How does the community feel about the City and the services it delivers today?*** The experience from revenue measures in other communities shows that it is very difficult to gain voter support for new revenues where there isn't already a high level of satisfaction with agency services and trust in its government. In short, if voters do not feel that current revenues are being used wisely, they are not likely to approve more.
- ***What programs are most likely to attract voter support?*** What do voters see as the biggest problems in the community and would be likely to approve additional funding for: Public safety? Street maintenance? Parks and recreation? What messages would be most effective in communicating the need for additional resources? On the other hand, which service areas are least likely to attract voter support? And what are the reasons why voters would not support a revenue measure?

- ***What revenues would voters most likely support?*** While the City is currently considering a general purpose, 1-cent sales tax measure, public opinion research should assess other revenue options as well. Which available source is most likely to attract the most voter support? And how does support change based on the rate and level of revenue generated? In the final analysis, every revenue option has an underlying philosophical reason that might make it desirable, such as added revenue diversity, broad base, revenue-generating capacity, stability or shifting the tax burden to non-residents. However, the best candidate for a successful measure is probably the one that voters are the most supportive of at the outset.

Effective Public Opinion Research

Professional public opinion research firms are the experts in performing this type of work and interpreting the results.

However, they are not the expert on the Monterey community. For this reason, the best results will come from the City and research firm working closely together in framing survey questions that make the most sense for the community.

- ***What other factors affect feasibility?*** Based on the results, is a general or special purpose tax more likely to pass in November 2014? For a general purpose measure, is a sunset provision needed? If so, for how long? And how will the possible placement of other local or state revenue measures on the November 2014 affect feasibility? For example, Monterey-Salinas Transit is considering placement of a 1/8-cent sales tax measure on the November 2014 ballot.

From the results of this research, the City can evaluate the feasibility of a revenue measure; and if it is feasible, the results can help guide the community outreach and public education program that will follow.

The cost of public opinion research depends on several factors, including reliability (larger samples will result in higher statistical confidence, but higher costs) and survey length (longer surveys will provide more information but cost more). Based on this, the cost of public opinion research for city revenue ballot measures typically ranges from \$20,000 \$25,000, and takes 30 to 60 days to complete.

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② Community Outreach and Public Education Program

Before placing a measure on the ballot, this second step is essential in communicating the need for additional revenues to likely voters and includes:

- Tentatively framing the new revenue purposes and uses.
- Selecting the likely funding source.
- Developing and implementing a community outreach and public education program.

Framing the Measure

Based on the results of the public opinion survey, the City will need to tentatively frame the nature of the measure. While this may change based on the results of community

outreach, this includes making a key strategic decision in conceptually framing the issue: should this be a majority or two-thirds voter approval measure? General-purpose tax measures only require majority voter approval, while special-purpose taxes (including general obligation bond measures), where the proceeds are restricted as to their use, require two-thirds voter approval.

On its surface, passage of a majority voter approval measure would appear “numerically” easier; however, since its proceeds cannot be earmarked for a specific purpose, it can be difficult to communicate the need for the measure, when it calls for raising taxes without committing to a specific reason. On the other hand, while it is obviously a greater challenge to gain two-thirds than majority voter approval, it has the advantage of communicating a more focused reason for added revenues.

Majority-voter approval measures are often used when the purpose is to address a “fiscal crisis” in just continuing to deliver essential day-to-day services. That said, the more nuanced approach of making an already good community better via general purpose measure has also been

“A/B” General Purpose Measures

One variation on general-purpose measures is an “A/B” measure, which has had mixed results in California and successfully used in a few cases. This is a dual-component measure: the “A” measure function is an “advisory” vote on specific programs and projects, asking if voters would support certain uses if new revenues were to become available. The “B” measure asks voters to approve a general-purpose revenue measure, but in the context of the specific project or programs identified in Measure “A,” with the expectation that elected officials would be committed to using the new general revenues for these specific purposes.

As such, “A/B” measures provide some specificity—although via a non-binding advisory measure, which can be appealing to the electorate. However, they need to be carefully structured from a legal standpoint; and because they are two separate measures with different messages, it may be more difficult to conduct an effective campaign.

Moreover, one of the strengths of a general-purpose measure is the needed flexibility it provides in responding to changed circumstances and new, higher priorities in the future. The “A/B” approach can make addressing changing priorities more difficult. And if the goal is to clearly identify current priorities and policy commitment to achieving them, there are other strategies that can effectively do this.

Stated simply, “A/B” approaches to general-purpose measures need to be carefully considered; and in weighing the pros and cons, most cities have decided not to use this approach.

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successful. Two-thirds voter approval measures are more likely when the purpose is to improve services or make specific community improvements, like a library, fire station, street improvements, senior center or athletic fields.

However, regardless of whether it is a majority or two-thirds measure, the City needs to communicate a compelling reason for why it needs added revenues.

Selecting the Funding Source

While this is also subject to change based on the results of community outreach, the City will need to tentatively select the likely funding source and its level. For example, the City has surfaced a 1-cent, general-purpose sales tax measure for consideration. However, as discussed above, the City should consider other options as well, based on the results of the feasibility assessment.

Developing Key Messages

Once the City has tentatively framed the measure (majority or two-thirds voter approval) and the funding source, key messages are developed that:

- Address the need for such a measure, and why now—make the case that this is a necessary, responsible fiscal plan.
- If a two-thirds measure, include specifics of the items to be funded; and if a general purpose measure, identify the kinds of services and projects that would be funded from the new revenues: where are there current shortfalls in day-to-day delivery of services?
- Establish protections for ensuring money will be spent responsibly, such as sunset provisions, audit requirements and perhaps a citizen oversight committee.

Community Outreach and Public Education

The City's community outreach program should include information-only fact sheets, brochures, letters, newsletters and guest columns are that are developed for mailing and distribution. Specific tasks include:

- **Face-to-face meetings and forums:** directly meeting with community members face-to-face. This is one the most powerful approaches in telling the City's fiscal story. This includes meeting with community groups like the Chamber of Commerce, environmental groups, neighborhood associations, senior groups, youth sports organizations, Rotary, Kiwanis, Downtown Association, Visitors and Conference Bureau and the Board of Realtors. It also should include briefings with all of the City advisory bodies as well as informational briefings with employees on ongoing basis. Lastly, it should include one or more community forums/town hall meetings that are widely noticed.

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As part of this effort, meaningful presentations should be developed that concisely explain why the City needs added revenues, including what the City has done in the past to balance its budget, its use of effective financial management practices, how the added revenues would be used and why the proposed revenue source makes sense. “Fact sheets” should be developed that can be handed-out at the presentations along with feedback forms to let participants provide input and comment on the City’s tentative proposal.

- **Direct mail:** implementing a direct mail program that includes a return card or other mechanism to allow citizens to ask questions, provide input and otherwise comment on the City’s tentative proposal is also a key way to effectively tell the City’s fiscal story. Along with face-to-face interactions, this approach helps the City identify and address questions early in the process while educating the community about the fiscal challenges facing the City. Given the short time frame, I recommend at least two informational mailers, the first one providing basic information with a feedback “tear-off;” and follow-up mailer on the results (“we hear you”). If time and resources permit, additional mailers could be sent. Along with telling the City’s fiscal story, the mailers should include the date, time and location of the community forum(s). They should also provide ways of receiving more information about the role of a possible revenue ballot measure, including staff contact information and links to the City’s web site and social media (Facebook, Twitter). Sample mailers from other successful public education and outreach programs are provided in the Appendix.
- **“Earned” media:** placing informational update stories in local papers, radio and television news and other media. This should include early briefings with editorial boards to assess what additional information they would need in supporting a possible revenue ballot measure.
- **Web site, CATV and social media:** using the City’s web site, public access cable television channel and social media in telling its fiscal story and soliciting feedback.
- **Fixed site visibility:** where appropriate, being present at public activities with tables or booths to distribute non-partisan information about a potential revenue measure.
- **Ad hoc advisory committee:** The role of this group, consisting of 15 to 25 leaders from all walks of community life – business, environment, neighborhoods, students, social services, cultural services – is to advise the City Manager on the outreach program. Many communities have found such a group to be very helpful in asking tough questions, improving how the City tells its fiscal story and arranging community group meetings.
- **Community outreach advisor:** The City possesses in-house capabilities to develop and present the key components of the proposed program. That said, preparing for a revenue ballot measure is a unique endeavor, and as such, many communities have benefited from the assistance of an experienced professional that specializes in this type of work. While the City should take the lead role, the guidance and feedback

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from professionals with a strong track record of success will significantly aid the City’s program.

These represent “core tasks” with modest resource requirements, which could be meaningfully augmented by:

- **Additional direct mail:** As noted above, time permitting, additional direct mailings would enhance the City’s ability to tell its fiscal story.
- **Follow-up public opinion research:** Following the community outreach and public information program, the City could conduct another scientific public opinion survey (which could be an abbreviated version of the earlier one) just before placing the measure on the ballot. The purpose of this follow-on public opinion research is a final “litmus test” in assessing if there is substantial voter approval at this point and confirming financial thresholds (that the City is not asking for too little or too much money for the measure). In short, conducting this research close to the time that the City makes a final decision in going forward with a ballot measure is the final opportunity to evaluate voter support, and to make adjustments in the measure as necessary—including not going forward at all. If there was more time available, this would be one of the recommended “core” tasks.

SCHEDULE

As discussed earlier, limited time remains to successfully prepare for a possible revenue measure on the November 14, 2014 ballot. The following outlines the schedule for core tasks:

| Core Tasks | Target Date |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Select opinion research firm: a. Issue RFP and receive proposals. b. Select firm and award contract subject to Council approval of the feasibility assessment. | February 21 February 28 |
| 2. Council action: Make go/no-go decision on feasibility assessment. | March 4 |
| 3. Select community outreach advisor a. Issue RFP and receive proposals. b. Select firm and award contract subject to Council approval of the community outreach program. | March 31 April 11 |
| 4. Conduct public opinion research and evaluate results; make “go/no-go” decision in proceeding further; and if the decision is to go forward, approve community outreach/public education program. | April 15 |
| 5. If “go:” Implement community outreach and public education program | April 16 through July 31 |
| 6. Council action: Make go/no-go decision on placing measure on the November 2014 ballot. | August 5 |

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If the Council decides to move forward with a community outreach and public education program on April 15, a more detailed implementation plan will be developed.

BUDGET

The following outlines the budget for core tasks:

| Core Tasks | Cost |
|--|---------------|
| Step 1: Feasibility Assessment | |
| Public Opinion Research | \$25,000 |
| Step 2: Community Outreach and Public Education | |
| Direct Mail: Postage and Printing for Two Mailers | 28,000 |
| Voter Data | 3,500 |
| Community Outreach Advisor* | 15,000 |
| Contingencies @ 10% | 7,200 |
| Step 2 Total | 53,700 |
| Total | 78,700 |

** Assumes that City staff will take the lead role in preparing outreach materials; if this becomes the advisor's task, which has been the case in many other communities, the cost will increase to about \$50,000, depending on the scope of the outreach effort.*

The following outlines additional costs for the enhanced outreach program tasks discussed above:

| Possible Augmentation Tasks | Cost |
|--|-----------------|
| Postage and Printing for One Direct Mailer | 14,000 |
| Follow-Up Public Opinion Research | 22,000 |
| Total | \$36,000 |

| Comparable Public Education Budgets in Successful Communities | |
|--|-----------|
| City of Fremont | \$235,000 |
| San Luis Obispo | 164,500 |
| City of Escondido | 161,000 |
| City of La Mesa | 135,000 |
| City of Visalia | 97,000 |
| City of Dinuba | 95,000 |
| City of Los Banos | 81,000 |

As shown in the sidebar, even with “augmented” tasks, the proposed budget compares favorably with that by other cities (ranging in population size from 19,000 to 210,000) that successfully prepared for revenue ballot measures.

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ALTERNATIVES

- **Do not move forward with a feasibility assessment/community outreach and public education and program.** Given the importance of undertaking an effective public information and outreach program in preparation for a successful revenue ballot measure, this option makes sense if the City decides not to move forward in considering a possible measure in November 2014. However, recognizing that a Council decision regarding placement on the ballot will not be made until August 5, this alternative is not recommended if the City wants to realistically preserve the option of doing so.
- **Reduce the workscope.** Given the limited time remaining, the proposed “core tasks” present a modest program in preparing for a possible revenue ballot measure. That said, public opinion research is an essential factor for success. Accordingly, while other tasks could be reduced or eliminated (with reduced chances for a successful outcome), public opinion research provides a critical foundation for success.
- **Augment the workscope.** Each of the augmented tasks discussed above would strengthen the likelihood of a successful preparation program for a possible revenue measure.

SUMMARY

Based on the experience of many cities and other local government agencies throughout the State, if the need is compelling and it is effectively communicated, revenue ballot measures can be successful. However, this requires thoughtful preparation as the City considers a possible measure, and this in turn requires commitment, resources and time.

Sample Mailers from Other Successful Public Education Programs

- City of La Mesa
- City of Visalia
- City of San Luis Obispo

While they all tell different stories from Monterey's (every city's story is different, which is why a "cookie cutter" approach won't work), they do show the general approach and type of information that is provided in effective information mailers.

Public Safety & Emergency Services Community Working Group

For well over a year now, the City of La Mesa has been working with the Police and Fire Chiefs, the City Council, and a team of facilities experts to evaluate the need for new and upgraded police and fire stations.

As part of this effort, a group of La Mesa civic leaders has been meeting regularly to provide input and discuss neighborhood issues, concerns, and priorities. This group, the "Community Working Group," has also been kept up-to-date on plans for a potential bond measure to address these urgent public safety needs.

The members of your La Mesa Community Working Group are:

- Gary Clasen
Small Business Owner
- Helen Givens
Commission on Aging
- Ken Kasinak
La Mesa Police Officer
- Mary Meadows-Pitt
Registered Nurse, Grossmont Hospital
- Jane Peterson
Neighborhood Watch Block Captain
- Steve South
Local Business Leader
- Chuck Strickland
La Mesa Fire Captain
- Ken Trent
Former City Treasurer & WWII Veteran

* Titles for Identification Purposes Only

Dozens of public safety officers, civic organizations, business groups, doctors, and community leaders have offered their thoughts on La Mesa's public safety needs. Here is what some of them have to say:



"For firefighters, police officers, and paramedics, the most important thing is to ensure that we can help the citizens that we serve in an emergency. If the 51 year-old fire station is replaced and upgraded, it's likely that crucial seconds could be shaved off response times to emergencies."

—**Michael Murphy**
American Medical Response (Paramedics)

"Our police and fire stations are long overdue for repair and replacement, but the state budget crisis means there is no money to go around. Upgrading the stations will only get more expensive, the longer we wait."

—**Steve South**
Local Business Leader



"Serving on the Working Group has allowed me to witness the planning process with my own eyes. The stations are badly in need of repair, and the Group has pushed hard for a Citizens Oversight Committee to monitor the funds and issue annual audits."

—**Helen Givens**
Commission on Aging



La Mesa City Hall
8130 Allison Avenue
La Mesa, CA 91941

PRSRTD STD
US Postage
PAID
Admail

City of La Mesa Fire, Police and Emergency Services Measure

FAST FACTS:

La Mesa Police & Fire Stations

- ✓ Over 900 La Mesans have returned community surveys offering input on the need for upgraded police and fire stations.
- ✓ Fire Chief Doug Matter and Police Chief Cliff Resch have scheduled community presentations in front of over 30 civic organizations, business associations, and church groups.
- ✓ Facilities experts have spent almost two years working with the Chiefs to evaluate and assess necessary repairs and upgrades. Construction plans and cost estimates are nearly complete.
- ✓ The La Mesa City Council is scheduled to decide whether or not to place a public safety & emergency services bond measure on the March ballot later this month.



*An Update from Your
Community Working Group*



VISALIA'S PUBLIC SAFETY: COMMUNITY UPDATE



City of Visalia
707 W. Acequia
Visalia, CA 93291

www.ci.visalia.ca.us/

PRSR TD STD
US Postage
PAID
Admail

Please
place 37¢
stamp
here

City of Visalia
Randy Groom
Deputy City Manager
707 W. Acequia
Visalia, CA 93291



COMMUNITY UPDATE FROM YOUR VISALIA POLICE AND FIRE CHIEFS

Dear Neighbor:

We are working to improve Visalia's 9-1-1 safety services and need your input.

Visalia's 9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch Center, serving both the police and fire departments, was built in 1970. It hasn't been significantly upgraded in nearly 20 years. This building is now completely inadequate, and is in need of important upgrades.

Our community has also grown dramatically in the last three decades. In order to meet the needs of a growing population, and continue the fight against gang activity and drug trafficking, we must expand our safety personnel. Additional neighborhood-based fire stations and beat officers are needed to ensure rapid response to all areas of our city.

Unfortunately, budget problems created by Sacramento have only made our job harder. Visalia, along with many other California cities, is facing budget cuts in the millions.

With the support of the City Council, we have developed a team that is working closely with community members and staff to study a potential Public Safety Revenue Measure that would address these urgent needs. In order to ensure a Safety Plan that addresses community priorities and needs, please take a moment to provide your input on the attached card.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call either of us at: Police Chief: 559-713-4215, Fire Chief: 559-713-4218 . Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Chief George Sandoval
Visalia Fire Department

Chief Jerry Barker
Visalia Police Department

Please take a look at some of the public safety improvements we are considering and check those that you agree are priorities.

- Adding neighborhood fire stations to ensure rapid medical and emergency response to every neighborhood
- Improving police and medical response times to reach victims faster
- Upgrading Visalia's 30 year-old 9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch Center
- Adding neighborhood beat officers to reduce gang violence and drug trafficking
- Other: _____
- I have the following questions: _____
- Keep me informed.

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone (day)

Phone (eve)

Email

A Recent Survey of San Luis Obispo Residents Determined the Following Priorities

What are the needs in San Luis Obispo?

We are seriously considering a potential revenue measure to protect and maintain urgent City services. Just take a look at our essential services and some of our current needs and priorities.



Repairing city streets and fixing potholes



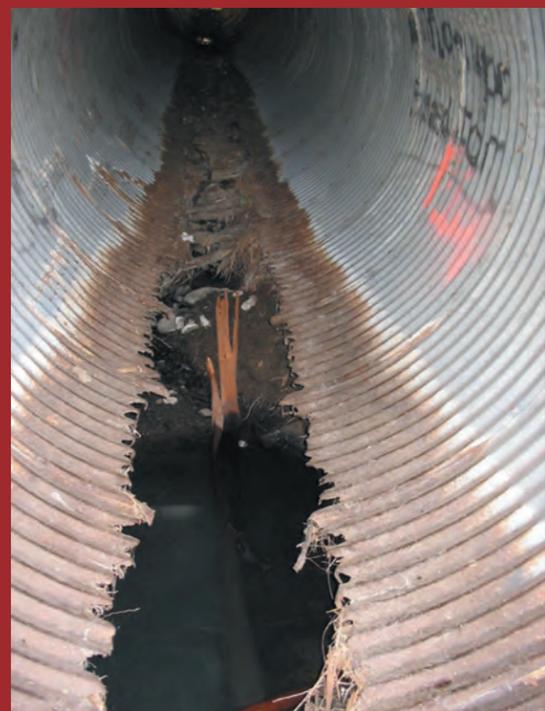
Improving fire services



Improving police services



Protecting senior services



Fixing 100 year old storm drains



Maintaining our parks



Managing traffic congestion

We Need Your Help!

Over the next several months, the City will continue to work with the community on a plan to address local public safety and street repair needs in the most fiscally responsible way possible. Please let us know about your urgent needs and priorities by returning the attached card today!

Let us hear from you!

CITY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
990 PALM ST
SAN LUIS OBISPO CA 93401-9938

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 369 SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA
BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

Tell Us More!

What are your urgent needs and priorities for the City of San Luis Obispo?

I agree that it's important to protect and maintain vital public safety and city services. My priorities are, from 1 (most important) to 8 (least important)

___ Fixing potholes and repairing & maintaining city streets

___ Reducing traffic congestion

___ Hiring more police officers

___ Hiring, training and retaining additional firefighters & paramedics

___ Upgrading our 100-year-old storm drain

___ Protecting open space

___ Maintaining our parks

___ Protecting senior programs and services

___ Other:

I have the following questions: _____

Keep me informed.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone (day): _____ Phone (eve): _____

Email: _____

Did You Know?

✓ The State has taken \$22 million of our community's revenue over the past 15 years – and continues to take \$3 million from us each year.



✓ Budget cuts have forced the City to reduce spending on infrastructure and facility upkeep by 50%.

✓ For the first time in 15 years, we've been forced to use millions of dollars from our emergency reserves to provide essential City services.



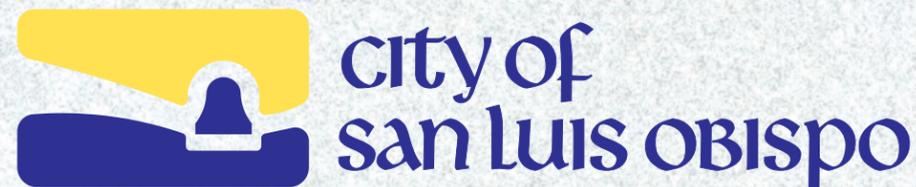
✓ Calls for fire and paramedic services have increased by 65% in the last decade. Unfortunately, without additional funding, our City's emergency and public safety services are unable to keep pace with this demand.



990 Palm St., San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

PRESRT STD
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Star Mailing

Preserving Essential Public Services for San Luis Obispo Residents



We're
Ready
to
Address
Your
Concerns