



### NEWS RELEASE

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PAGE 1 of 2

#### **Poll: Over 70 Percent of Santa Maria Residents Support a Temporary Revenue Measure to Staff New Fire Station and Hire Back Police Officers**

Residents of Santa Maria are concerned about the impact of State takeaways on local services, particularly police, fire and 9-1-1 response times, and they want to do something about it. According to a recent public opinion research survey conducted by the respected polling firm of Godbe Research, 71 percent of voters would support a temporary, ¼-cent sales tax measure to maintain and restore essential services to Santa Maria.

“Over the last 20 years, the State has taken \$28.5 million dollars from Santa Maria to deal with Sacramento’s budget mess,” City Manager Tim Ness said. “Coupled with the recent recession, this has forced us in recent years to cut public safety services, including seven police officers. At this time, there is simply not enough money to staff our new fire station.”

According to Fire Chief Jeffrey Jones, since 2001, calls to the Santa Maria Fire Department have increased by 80 percent. “The need in our community for additional fire services is so great that the city qualified for Federal Stimulus dollars to build the new fire station, at no cost to residents,” Chief Jones said.

The City is struggling to maintain services because General Fund revenues plunged nearly \$10 million over the past four years, forcing numerous budget reductions.

The City’s General Fund budget has been reduced by \$6 million over the past three years, and one-time reserves are being depleted. All departments have reduced their operating budgets, some by as much as 20 percent, and close to 70 budgeted positions have been either eliminated or unfunded. In addition, the City is entering its third year of employee concessions and mandatory furloughs designed to reduce operating expenses. However, the ability to financing ongoing expenditures continues to be a problem.

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Page 2 of 2

With this in mind, the City recently commissioned Godbe Research to conduct a survey of residents in order to gauge voter opinions on a variety of issues, including the feasibility of a Temporary Revenue Measure that would allow the City to fill police positions and fully staff the new fire station.

The survey found that, overwhelmingly, Santa Maria residents want their local City services protected and maintained in order to:

- Hire 9 additional firefighters to staff the new Fire Station No. 5 to improve 9-1-1 response times
- Allow the police department to restore police officers to the gang suppression unit
- Enable rapid police and fire 9-1-1 emergency response times
- Maintain neighborhood police patrols

“Money from such a temporary measure would be legally required to be spent for the Santa Maria community, could not be taken by Sacramento or the County, and would ensure local control over the funds generated to maintain city services,” Ness stated. “This type of measure requires a simple majority to pass.”

Over the next few weeks, as part of the City’s regular speakers’ bureau program, City staff, including our Police and Fire Chiefs, will be giving a series of Community Presentations on these issues and look forward to hearing more from our community prior to the placement of any measure on the ballot, which requires a vote by the City Council. Staff will recommend placing the measure on the June 2012 ballot.

Groups interested in arranging for a community presentation, and those with questions, may contact the City Manager’s Office, 925-0951 ext. 372.

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