



Joel Anderson

Supervisor, Second District
San Diego County Board Of Supervisors

Agenda Item

Date: August 18, 2026

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To: Board of Supervisors

Requesting Presentations From County Consultants Contributing to Ad Hoc Subcommittee Research and the Development of Ballot Measures (Districts: All)

Overview

On June 25, 2026 (24), the Board of Supervisors, by a vote of 3 to 2, adopted a revised ordinance to place a proposed County Charter amendment ballot measure before County voters on November 3, 2026. During that same meeting, the Board also adopted a resolution, by a vote of 3 to 2, to submit a ballot measure to voters that would impose a new County-wide sales tax measure, expected to result in residents County-wide paying \$400,000,000 to \$450,000,000 in new taxes annually. Both of these ballot measures have the potential to fundamentally change the functions of County government. Therefore, it is critical that San Diego County residents have access to all relevant information regarding the development and analysis of these ballot measures, or similar ballot measures, so that they are able to make educated decisions this election season.

On May 23, 2025, the County entered into a contract with the Berkeley-based consulting firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3 Research) to work with County Supervisors to develop a County-wide survey, or baseline poll, to analyze County residents' priorities and preferences regarding revenue sources, budget allocations, fiscal trade-offs and service expectations. This initial contract of \$49,000 was extended through January 8, 2029, and increased to a maximum compensation level of \$250,000. Among the deliverables included in this contract, FM3 is required to provide a full written report with key takeaways and actionable insights and provide a formal presentation of the findings. The contract also requires FM3 to be available for one to two community report backs in the form of a webinar, town hall, or other public presentation to ensure public engagement.

Additionally, on January 9, 2026, the County entered into a similar contract, with a maximum value of \$320,000, with the consulting firm Ironwood Public Affairs to support the actions of the Board's Sustainable Fiscal Planning Subcommittee. The consultant was tasked with conducting detailed public opinion research and analysis, engaging and coordinating with stakeholders, and developing and implementing a fully detailed public education initiative regarding the County's fiscal and/or governance priorities, challenges and opportunities. The consultant was also required to develop and prepare local revenue-generating ballot measure(s) for Board consideration in 2026. The Statement of Work for this contract was amended on April 30, 2026, directing the consultant

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to continue their work and deliver any requested ballot measure language, reports and presentations at a timeline set by the Subcommittee but no later than June 30, 2028.

Ironwood's initial research was based on the surveys conducted by FM3 Research, who also serves as a subconsultant to Ironwood. This baseline poll involved interviewing 727 individuals between February 22 and March 1, 2026, to identify key arguments that influence voter opinion for potential ballot measure language and to test the viability of potential revenue devices to be proposed to voters. Ironwood was able to survey voter reaction to potential County ballot measures by asking how they would vote on simulated ballot measure language. Ironwood also proposed conducting a second, benchmark, survey of 800 individuals, using focus groups and conducting a tracking survey. The project team also proposed holding a public meeting in April or May to solicit input from meeting attendees.

Because of the potential impact of their work and to ensure transparency to our constituents, I recommend that the Board receive public presentations on September 1, 2026, by the County consultants FM3 Research, Ironwood Public Affairs, and any other relevant consultants/subconsultants describing the work they have completed thus far as it relates to current or future ballot measures.

Recommendations by Supervisor Joel Anderson

- 1) Direct the Chief Administrative Officer or designee to request that Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3 Research) present to the Board on the body of work conducted under Contract No. 573914 to develop the proposed County Charter amendment ballot measure language and potential revenue generating proposals to be considered by County voters.
- 2) Direct the Sustainable Fiscal Planning Subcommittee to engage Ironwood Public Affairs under Contract No. 575033 to present to the Board on the body of work conducted to:
 - a. develop potential revenue generating proposals to be considered by County voters;
 - b. analyze, assess, or develop current or future revenue generating ballot measures.
- 3) Direct the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors to coordinate presentations by FM3 Research, Ironwood Public Affairs, and any other relevant consultants to the Board on September 1, 2026, to include, but not be limited to:
 - a. the process used to conduct survey interviews;
 - b. all versions of the questions and statements posed to the individuals participating in the firms' survey interviews;
 - c. key findings from the surveys the firms conducted;
 - d. all versions of the respective ballot measure language as the proposals progressed from the initial versions to the final measures brought before the Board for consideration, and the rationale for any changes to the proposed ballot language;
 - e. all versions of the presentation materials and other documents developed by these firms on behalf of the County.

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- 4) Recommendations 1 - 3 shall not require disclosure of any information that is otherwise prohibited by law.

Equity Impact Statement

The recommended action will provide the entire Board and the public we serve with an opportunity to hear directly from the County's contracted consultants on the body of work they performed on behalf of County taxpayers. This will ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, have access to, and are better informed of, the deliberations and actions that were taken to develop proposed ballot measures that will be considered by voters on November 3, 2026.

Sustainability Impact Statement

Educating voters on the potential benefits or negative consequences of these ballot measures will assist the County in either implementing or foregoing governance reforms that could impact its ability to deliver programs and services to County residents and provide the public with critical information regarding the County's long-term financial condition and sustainability.

Fiscal Impact

There may be costs for consultant services under an existing contract which are included in the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Operational Plan in the Finance and General Government Group based on existing General Purpose revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Business Impact Statement

The recommended action will provide the region's business community with additional information on the process used to develop proposed amendments to the County Charter, and the potential impact of the proposed changes on their future interactions with County government. It could also provide this constituency with information concerning the anticipated impact of imposing a new County-wide sales tax measure, estimated to total \$400,000,000 to \$450,000,000 annually, on retail transactions.

Advisory Board Statement

n/a

Background

On June 25, 2026 (24), the Board of Supervisors, by a vote of 3 to 2, adopted a revised ordinance to place a proposed County Charter amendment ballot measure before County voters on November 3, 2026. During that same meeting, the Board also adopted a resolution, by a vote of 3 to 2, to submit a ballot measure to voters that would impose a new County-wide sales tax measure, expected to result in residents County-wide paying \$400,000,000 to \$450,000,000 in new taxes annually. Both of these ballot measures have the potential to fundamentally change the functions of County government. Therefore, it is critical that San Diego County residents have access to all relevant information regarding the development and analysis of these ballot measures, or similar ballot measures, so that they are able to make educated decisions this election season.

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Ironwood's initial research was based on the surveys conducted by FM3 Research, who also serves as a subconsultant to Ironwood. This baseline poll involved interviewing 727 individuals between February 22 and March 1, 2026, to identify key arguments that influence voter opinion for potential ballot measure language and to test the viability of potential revenue devices to be proposed to voters. Ironwood was able to survey voter reaction to potential County ballot measures by asking how they would vote on simulated ballot measure language. Ironwood also proposed conducting a second, benchmark, survey of 800 individuals, using focus groups and conducting a tracking survey. The project team also proposed holding a public meeting in April or May to solicit input from meeting attendees.

With the adoption of the of the ordinances to place these two measures on the November 3, 2026, ballot, it would be helpful for the public and the full Board to better understand the deliberations and actions that were taken by the consultants to craft the ballot language determined to be most appealing to County voters. To ensure this level of transparency, I recommend that the Board receive public presentations on September 1, 2026, by the County consultants FM3 Research and Ironwood Public Affairs describing the work each consulting firm performed for the County. These presentations would include information on the process the consultants used to conduct their polling, the statements and questions used during their survey interviews, key findings from the surveys they conducted, and the progression of the initial ballot measures proposed text through the final ballot measure text that was brought before the Board for consideration on June 25, 2026.

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Linkage To The County Of San Diego Strategic Plan

This action supports the 2026–2031 Strategic Plan initiatives related to Transparency and Accountability and Community Engagement by enhancing public access to information and materials associated with proposed changes to County governance and the proposed imposition of a new sales tax.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joel Anderson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joel Anderson
Supervisor, Second District

Attachment(s)

March 3, 2026, FM3 Research Memorandum re: San Diego County Charter Amendment Measure Survey – Summary of Key Findings