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# New polling leaves union-backed San Diego sales tax increase still iffy for November ballot

Decision coming soon on measure supporters say has better chance for success than failed 2024 measure because it would restrict spending to infrastructure projects



A possible San Diego ballot measure would raise millions for infrastructure projects like upgrading the Lake Hodges Dam, shown here on Aug. 13, 2025 in San Diego County, CA. (Ana Ramirez / The San Diego Union-Tribune)

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Backers of a possible San Diego sales tax increase say they will use new polling that tested a half-cent hike instead of a full-cent hike to decide in coming days whether to target the November ballot.

The local construction union proposing the [ballot measure](#) says it could have a better shot at passing than a failed 2024 measure because it would restrict uses of the additional revenue mostly to infrastructure projects.

Polling in October and November showed a measure focused only on infrastructure would do better than the 2024 measure, which would have allowed city officials to spend the money on almost anything.

Despite solid support, the union — Local 89 of the Laborers' International Union of North America — decided to conduct a new poll to see how shrinking the size of the increase in half would affect support among city voters.

The new polling, conducted last weekend, also narrowed the possible uses of the money to certain kinds of infrastructure: projects focused on water, sewer, stormwater, roads, firefighting, law enforcement and Balboa Park.

Kelvin Barrios, Local 89's policy and community engagement director, said Thursday that officials from multiple labor unions will meet in coming days to discuss results of the poll and how to move forward.

If they don't target the November ballot, they would likely target either the March 2028 ballot or the November 2028 ballot, Barrios said.

The 2024 measure, known as Measure E, was narrowly defeated with a vote of 50.31% to 49.69%. It would have raised the city's sales tax rate from the lowest in the county at 7.75% to the highest at 8.75%.

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The new measure would raise the city's sales tax rate from 7.75% to either 8.25%, 8.5% or 8.75%. Last weekend's poll asked voters whether they would support an increase to 8.25%, which would generate \$200 million a year.

Supporters can make the case that a number of other local cities have already raised their rate to 8.75% — Chula Vista, Escondido, San Marcos, National City, Lemon Grove, Del Mar, Solana Beach and Imperial Beach.

And polls indicate that restricting uses to infrastructure-only increases support, Barrios said. San Diego faces a \$6 billion backlog of delayed infrastructure projects.

But the new measure faces some notable headwinds.

Polls show that voters are particularly anti-tax because they are frustrated with continuing inflation and fee increases. Polls also show that San Diego voters don't trust City Hall to spend money wisely.

Another complicating factor could be the presence of additional revenue measures on the November 2026 ballot, including a possible measure to raise the sales tax countywide.

And lower voter turnout, which tends to hurt tax measures, is expected in 2026 compared to 2024 because 2026 is not a presidential election.

Last weekend's poll referred to the possible city measure as the "City of San Diego Public Safety and Infrastructure Repair Act."

Local 89 declined to provide the results of the poll, which they just received mid-week.

Typically, a ballot measure restricting how revenue can be spent would require a daunting approval threshold of two-thirds of voters instead of a simple majority — but that's only if the measure is placed on the ballot by city officials.

Local 89 plans to keep the approval threshold a simple majority by making its effort a citizens measure. That will require the union to gather valid signatures from about 82,000 registered voters within the city limits.

Barrios said signature gathering, which must be done by early June to qualify for the November ballot, could be completed in about 75 days.

The proposal would let the city raise billions immediately for infrastructure repairs by explicitly allowing city officials to sell bonds that they would pay back over several years with the additional sales tax revenue, Barrios said.

The measure would also require a citizens oversight committee and annual audits.

The proposal also aims to prevent the city from potentially shifting money it now spends on infrastructure to other priorities once it has the new dedicated funding stream.

To do so, the proposal would require the city to keep general fund spending on infrastructure at certain levels, possibly the level from fiscal year 2023 or 2024.

Val Macedo, leader of Local 89, touted the possibility of an infrastructure ballot measure Wednesday while explaining his opposition to a proposed empty home tax that a City Council committee rejected for the June ballot.

"Our position is that any discussion of new revenue must be deliberate, transparent and tied to clearly defined public benefits — including potential voter-led solutions that dedicate funding specifically to infrastructure improvements and public safety," Macedo said. "If new taxes are considered in the future, they should be directly tied to infrastructure projects that protect public health, our beaches and waterways, and create good-paying jobs for San Diegans."

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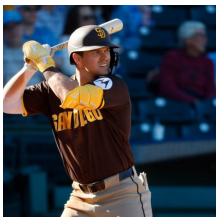
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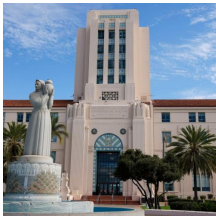
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