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FOR: Immediate Release
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Residents Want La Mesa to Protect and Maintain Essential City Services

Survey shows strong concern about the State budget deficit's effect on City services

LA MESA, CA – March 18, 2008 - Public safety and the State's fiscal crisis were top concerns of La Mesa residents, according to a March community opinion survey conducted by the firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates.

Residents want to ensure that the State budget cuts do not affect essential City services and are willing to help the City protect these services. Out of the 400 people interviewed, about two thirds of those surveyed would support a Vital City Services Measure to maintain and improve important City services and maintain local control over funding for those services.

The City commissioned the survey to evaluate citizen satisfaction with City services, assess the community's needs, and to evaluate how best to solve the City's budget deficit. The survey found that 86% of the residents rate the quality of life as excellent/good and rated the satisfaction with City Services 88% very/somewhat satisfied. The results of these ratings on quality of life and satisfaction with City Services are similar to those obtained in 2006.

The survey, however, found that 67% of La Mesa residents were extremely/very concerned that due to a lack of funds, the City has been forced to use reserves to pay for vital services this year. "Unfortunately, the City of La Mesa, like many others across California, currently has inadequate revenue to protect, maintain or improve the services the community wants and needs us to provide" said Sandy Kerl, La Mesa City Manager. "If we don't find a local funding solution that is protected from Sacramento, we are likely to have no choice but to reduce or eliminate important community services in the foreseeable future."

In addition to protecting essential city services, residents also saw a need for the City to increase public safety services. La Mesa residents were especially concerned about gangs, assault robberies, and bank robberies that are plaguing the City. Residents want to improve the City's ability to retain quality police and firefighters, the capability to respond quickly to a natural disaster, increase security at trolley stations and to expand youth anti gang/drug programs.

The City is planning to get more input from the community about how to address these urgent public safety and city service needs, in light of projected budget deficits and the state's fiscal emergency.

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

Opinion Research &
Public Policy Analysis

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

DATE: March 16, 2008

RE: Summary of Survey Results

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a survey of 400 City of La Mesa residents to assess community needs, priorities, and satisfaction with the City of La Mesa and local services. Additionally, the survey tested support for a potential City of La Mesa Vital City Services Measure to raise revenue to maintain quality essential local services.¹

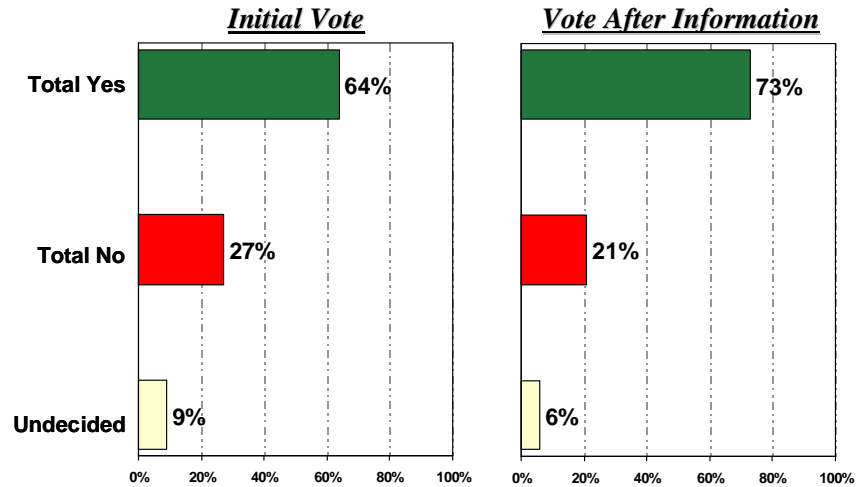
Overall, respondents are quite pleased with the quality of life in La Mesa and demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with City services and service providers. More than four-in-five (86 percent) rate the quality of life in La Mesa as either excellent or good, 13 percent consider it be fair and just 1 percent think La Mesa offers a poor quality of life. Nine-in-ten (88 percent) respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of services provided by the City of La Mesa, of which nearly half (48 percent) say they are “very satisfied” with City services. In comparison, only 9 percent are dissatisfied with the quality of City services. Respondents also rate the Police Department (82 percent excellent/good) and the Fire Department (83 percent excellent/good) very highly. Additionally, three-in-five (59 percent) believe that “City of La Mesa’s finances are generally well-managed.” These results indicate that the vast majority of La Mesa residents are pleased with their City and the quality of services provided by the City.

The survey results also found that initially more than three-in-five (64 percent) of La Mesa respondents would support a general purpose ballot measure to increase the City sales tax by three-quarters of a cent to fund essential local public services. Following information as to how the state budget deficit is affecting the City’s finances as well as the need to ensure adequate funding for local services, including public safety, support for the measure increases to 73 percent. These results indicate that it is feasible to pass a general purpose ballot measure, which requires a simple majority vote, in an upcoming election. (Figure 1)

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Figure 1: Vote on City of La Mesa ¾ Cent Vital Services Sales Tax Measure



City of La Mesa respondents recognize that the state budget deficit is a serious problem that is likely to impact their community, and that the City needs additional funding to maintain quality local services. Three-in-five (61 percent) respondents regard the state budget deficit as an extremely or very serious problem. Further, two-thirds (66 percent) consider the statement, “City government needs more money for City services,” to be an accurate description of their City. Also, a majority (52 percent) believes it is accurate that “without additional revenue the City of La Mesa will have to cut services over the next several years,” which is likely a recognition of the fact that state budget cuts will reduce funding for City services. The survey also found that two-thirds (67 percent) of La Mesa respondents are extremely or very concerned by the fact that this year the City had to use reserve funds to pay for vital services, including police, fire and paramedic services.

La Mesa respondents also show high levels of concern that crime is becoming a larger problem in their City and that action needs to be taken to address this problem. Fifty-seven percent of respondents consider the statement, “Property crimes, particularly auto thefts and burglaries, are on the rise” to be accurate and voters show high levels of concern about the following public safety-related facts:

- There has been a 73% increase in robberies since 2004 (80 percent extremely/very concerned)
- The La Mesa Police Department estimates that there are as many as one hundred gang members in the City (67 percent extremely/very concerned)
- There were 13 bank robberies in the City of La Mesa last year (60 percent extremely/very concerned)

La Mesa voters support using additional revenue provided by a Vital City Services Measure to fund a variety of community programs and services to preserve the quality of life and maintain quality City services. Specifically, the community wants to use funds for the following purposes:

- Improving the ability of the City to respond quickly and effectively to a natural disaster such as an earthquake (66 percent extremely/very important)
- Ensuring that the City of La Mesa can offer competitive salaries to retain quality firefighters and police officers (66 percent extremely/very important)
- Maintaining the senior community center (64 percent extremely/very important)
- Increasing security at trolley stations to prevent robberies and assaults (63 percent extremely/very important)
- Expanding and improving youth anti-drug and anti-gang programs (60 percent extremely/very important)

Respondents also regard the strong accountability provisions included in the ballot measure as compelling reasons to vote yes. After learning the measure requires the City to publish an annual expenditures report, available to the public, accounting for how all funds raised by the measure are spent, 78 percent are more likely to support the measure.

La Mesa respondents consider an incremental sales tax increase as a reasonable and effective means to provide additional funding for vital City services, including public, to maintain a high quality of life. The survey results demonstrate that La Mesa respondents understand the implications of the state budget crisis and the likely impact it will have at the local level. Further, there is recognition and concern that crime in La Mesa is increasing. Therefore, the community is willing to support a Vital City Services Measure to ensure that their City has adequate funds to provide effective services to the residents of La Mesa.

ⁱ **FMM&A Survey Methodology** From March 6-9, 2008 Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) conducted a poll of 400 City of La Mesa registered voters likely to cast a ballot in the November 2008 election. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 4.9 percent; the margin of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher.