

San Diego Newsline

Downtown San Diego news — the budget, public safety, business, and the civic life of America's Finest City

WHAT'S NEWS

DOWNTOWN

Measure C Clarifying Ordinance

COUNTY

County Budget Workshop Highlights Financial Planning, Identifies Challenges

COUNTY

County Officials Report a 3% Increase in Annual Suicide Rate

COUNTY

Free Trainings Available to Save Lives

DOWNTOWN

Probation Youth and Officers Complete MLK 5K

BUSINESS

State of the City

BUSINESS

New State Senate Committee Assignments

CALIFORNIA

Federal Prosecutors Seize Luxury Assets From Man Accused of Stealing \$23 Million in Homeless Aid Funds

INSIDE

Downtown, City & County — 2
Business — 2
Around California — 3
Cartoon — 3
Commentary — 4

DOWNTOWN

Measure C Clarifying Ordinance

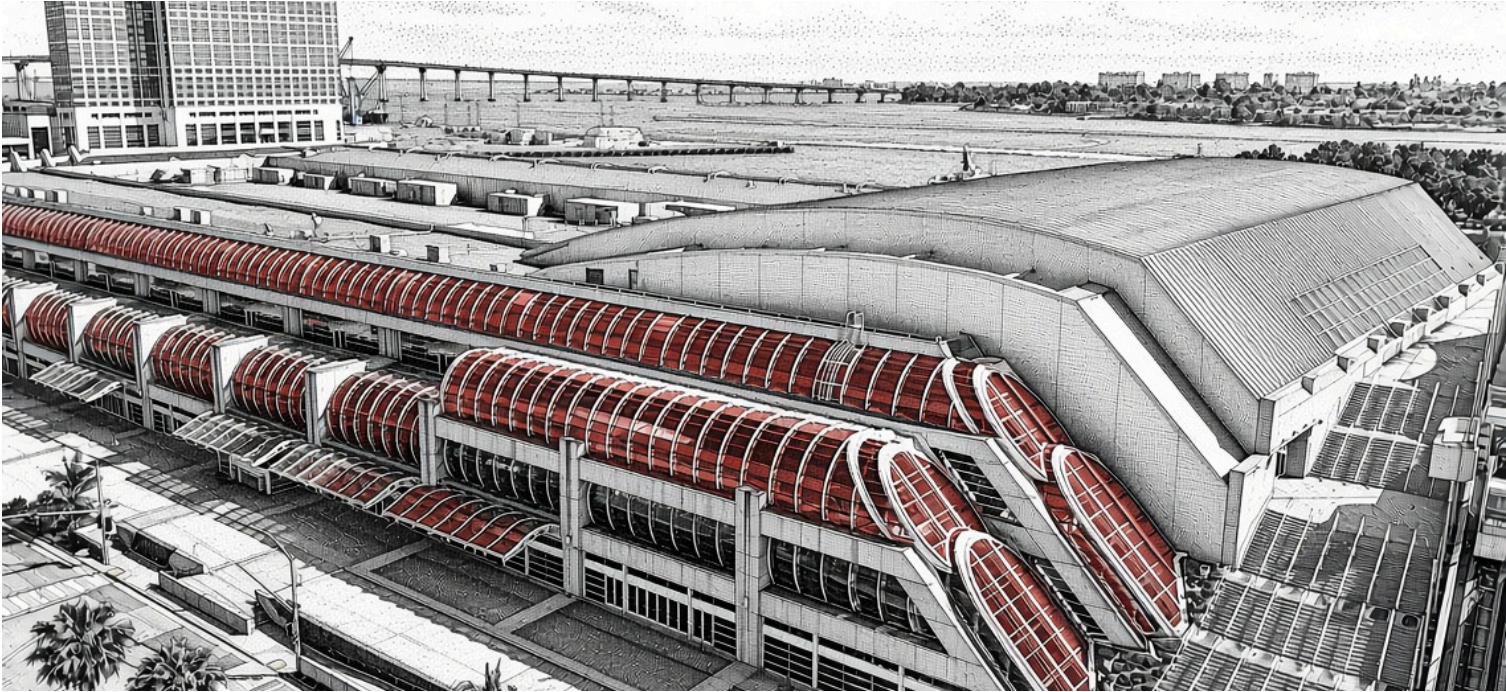


Illustration from a photo by Redideo · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0

The Chamber has long advocated for the timely implementation of Measure C, a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) increase designed to fund the modernization and expansion of the San Diego Convention Center, while also dedicating resources to homelessness services and street repair. Initially voted on in 2020, the measure was supported by the Chamber and its members as a critical tool to expand the Convention Center and address the ongoing homelessness crisis facing our city and region.

At the time, the ballot measure did not meet the two-thirds voter approval threshold required for non-citizen-initiated ballot measures. Despite receiving over 65% of the vote, the measure could not move forward. However, state law changes and subsequent rulings declared that the measure actually did pass. This subjected the City to a long litigation process over this voter approval threshold, and a final court decision in the City's favor was not issued until 2025.

After the favorable resolution of this litigation, the City Council passed a Clarifying Ordinance for Measure C on January 13 . The Ordinance updated outdated funding timelines and established the revenue oversight committees outlined in Measure C. Chamber Director of Public Affairs Evan Strawn spoke at City Council in support of the ordinance, which passed 8-0. The implementation of Measure C will deliver meaningful economic benefits for our region, and we are eager to see it move forward.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 23, 2026

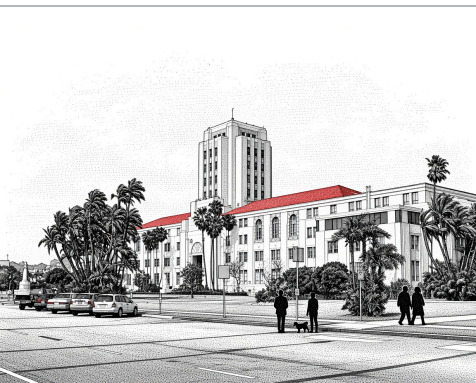


Illustration from a photo by Edward O'Connor (hober) · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

COUNTY

County Budget Workshop Highlights Financial Planning, Identifies Challenges

As planning ramps up for the County's upcoming budget, finance staff outlined what to expect during a budget workshop at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting.

The session emphasized the importance of transparency, collaboration, access to information and public input in County decision making. It was also an opportunity for residents to share their priorities while learning about future opportunities to participate in shaping the budget.

The County's budget impacts nearly every resident. Regionally, the County provides emergency preparedness, criminal prosecution, detention facilities, social services, behavioral health programs, food and restaurant inspections, elections and beach water monitoring. In the unincorporated area, the County delivers municipal services like law enforcement, fire protection, road maintenance, building permits and animal services. Some cities also contract with the County for services.

The workshop comes as state and federal funding—nearly half of the County's revenue—is expected to decrease, creating challenges for operations. By law, program revenue must be used for specific programs.

Finance staff said these challenges coupled with declining revenue,

slowing growth and rising costs will lead to difficult decisions in the upcoming budget.

The remainder of the budget comes from property taxes, fees and other local sources. Property taxes make up most of the County's general purpose revenue, or discretionary funding, meaning the Board can decide how to spend these dollars.

Despite this year's challenges, staff will work closely with the Board to ensure the budget meets the region's social, health and safety needs while maintaining long-term sustainability.

California law requires County departments to make budget requests based on ongoing program and service needs. To date, departments have submitted requests totaling \$180 million for ongoing programs and \$310 million for one-time needs such as technology, sustainability and facility improvements. These figures will be refined, and decline, as budget development continues.

By law, the budget must be balanced. That means that the County cannot adopt a plan that spends funds that it doesn't have.

"The economy shows mixed signals with short-term challenges in federal and state revenue," said Chief Financial Officer Joan Bracci. "County general purpose revenue is growing, but so are expenditures. The recommended budget will prioritize mandated programs and involve some very difficult decisions."

Service levels for mandated programs and discretionary programs will be reviewed, and budget balancing efforts will focus on streamlining operations, improving efficiency and exploring additional funding sources like state and federal grants and partnerships.

Decisions will also be informed by the Board's budget priority areas of public safety, housing and homelessness, behavioral health, public health and climate action. Data and

Continued on page 2

DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

Courts · Transit · Public safety

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

County Budget Workshop Highlights Financial Planning, Identifies Challenges

community feedback will also play key roles.

Community engagement remains central to the County’s General Management System, values and operations. Public input is gathered year-round to shape County programs, priorities and service delivery. As budget development continues, there will be additional opportunities for the public to learn more, share their priorities and make recommendations.

To learn more about important dates and the budget process, visit the County’s budget page.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 28, 2026

COUNTY

County Officials Report a 3% Increase in Annual Suicide Rate

San Diego County today confirmed 377 suicide deaths in 2024, a 3% increase in the suicide rate from the previous year. Overall, suicide rates are down 8% from 2016 and 4% from 2020.

The most recent local data on suicide is included in the San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council’s 2025 Report to the Community.

To account for population changes, the rate is measured by the number of deaths per 100,000 residents. It does not include people who attempted suicide and survived.

The report provides an overview of deaths from suicide, emergency department visits from suicide attempts and data from people who have thought about, considered, or have planned suicide. It includes demographic data across County sectors spanning the past 10 years.

“The data we are sharing

today helps guide prevention and intervention efforts and informs how resources are prioritized,” said Supervisor Monica Montgomery Steppe. “At the same time, it is important to remember that behind every data point is a person, a family and a community affected by the devastating impact of suicide in our County and beyond.”

In 2024, suicide death rates were highest among non-Hispanic white, male residents, ages 70-79. Geographically, the East Region had the highest rate of suicide death.

Firearms were the leading method of suicide among San Diego County residents and responsible for 134 deaths. Suicide by firearms were most common among men, ages 45 and older.

Youth suicide rates continue to rise. From 2020 to 2024, nearly one in five suicide deaths were young people, with rates highest among males, Non-Hispanic Black individuals, those aged 20–24 years, and those living in the North Coastal Region.

Non-fatal suicide attempts that require Emergency Department visits were highest among females, ages 10-17.

Suicide is a leading cause of death in San Diego County, and it is preventable.

“Our hope is that sharing this report creates meaningful conversations about suicide and encourages people to check in on someone who may need support,” said County Behavioral Health Services Director, Nadia Privara Brahms. “Prevention is key and there is an array of resources available to help people recognize the warning signs, engage in conversations, and connect loved ones or friends to the care they need.”

The County’s suicide data helps flag patterns, provide insight on emerging trends,

identify vulnerable populations and inform suicide prevention efforts. It also reinforces the ongoing need to promote education, training, wellness and recovery to reduce suicides and their devastating impact on communities.

To learn more about cost-free suicide prevention trainings, visit www.SPCSanDiego.org.

For information about suicide, risk factors, warning signs, how to get help, and available resources, visit [It’s Up to Us](#).

If you or someone you know is in need of support, please dial 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The call is free, confidential and available 24/7 in more than 200 languages. You do not need to be in crisis to call.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 27, 2026

COUNTY

Free Trainings Available to Save Lives

More than 750,000 people have learned hands-only CPR as part of the Revive & Survive San Diego Initiative launched in January 2024. The initiative is closer to its goal of training one million people to do hands-only CPR.

“Cardiac arrest can happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. With a 7 to 10 percent decrease in survival for every minute CPR is not performed, people can make the difference between life and death by taking a few minutes to learn this simple skill” said Kristi L. Koenig, MD, medical director of County Emergency Medical Services. “Reaching 750,000 San Diegans trained in hands-only bystander CPR is a remarkable accomplishment, showing what we can achieve together as a community.”

Training more people to do chest compressions will save additional lives. They have hosted more than 14,000

training sessions. Administering CPR immediately to someone experiencing cardiac arrest can double their chances of survival.

Hands-only CPR involves pushing fast in the center of someone’s chest at 100 beats to 120 beats per minute.

Globally, cardiac arrest claims more lives than colorectal cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, influenza, pneumonia, auto collisions, HIV, firearms and house fires combined, according to the American Heart Association.

You can help the program reach its goal. Learn more about the no-cost training opportunities. Revive & Survive is a joint effort between the County of San Diego and UC San Diego.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 23, 2026

DOWNTOWN

Probation Youth and Officers Complete MLK 5K

Two young men from the Probation Youth Transition Campus ran along the Embarcadero as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. 5K Fun Run, with nearly 700 runners and four Probation officers.

The young men, both 18, are part of the Probation Youth Transition Campus Run Club. Teens at the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility also have a Run Club program.

“Running is a great way to improve fitness, lower stress, and develop personal discipline to overcome challenges,” said Deputy Chief Probation Officer Matthew Strickland.

Officers work with teenagers to help them learn the physical and mental benefits that running provides, including forming connections to other runners. Based on their training level and good behavior, Run Club students have an opportunity to be sponsored and leave the

campus with Probation officers to run in community races.

“They were dedicated,” said Supervising Probation Officer Carlos Sanchez, who manages the program with two other officers.

One of the teenagers had never run three miles at one time, but he powered through with a lot of encouragement, Sanchez said.

“It was great to see the rapport they had built through their training and how they supported one another to make the most of the event,” said Strickland, who ran with the Probation Youth-Officer group.

“I appreciate that we have officers who want to facilitate the workouts and run alongside our youth.”

Sanchez said the young man who had never participated in a 5K struggled a bit because he’s more of a sprint runner and doesn’t typically run longer distances. So, he got through it by alternating between fast sprints and an even pace because that helped him stay focused, he said.

The other teenager ran another 5K recently, so he kept a steady pace, Sanchez said.

Running helps these young men find a physical and mental outlet that can help with stress, mood problems, anxiety and self-esteem, he said. It can also be a meditative time to refocus and set a positive goal, Sanchez added.

Teens in the Run Club also learn running techniques, injury prevention, diet, and the importance of running shoes and training.

County Probation works to help youth grow, heal, and build better futures, and that starts with safety, fairness, and trust for everyone involved.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 28, 2026

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



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BUSINESS

State of the City

This month, Mayor Todd Gloria delivered his annual State of the City address. The mayor outlined the City’s progress on housing production and homelessness reduction and stated several of his

goals for the coming year. He also focused on challenging federal conditions that have slowed the City’s economic growth, as well as his upcoming platform as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Mayor Gloria used the address to preview several major policy initiatives, including a significant announcement that the Midway Rising Project will be brought before the City Council for a vote this spring. The project is a top priority for the Chamber and a critical driver of the region’s long-term economic

growth. Once approved, Midway Rising would become the largest affordable housing development in California history, delivering thousands of new homes at attainable prices for San Diegans. The Chamber looks forward to supporting the project when it comes before the City Council later this year.

The address also included several additional policy announcements, including a new partnership to revitalize Golden Hall. The city will enter into an exclusive negotiating agreement with the San

Diego Community College District to redevelop the site. Mayor Gloria also reaffirmed his commitment to the broader revitalization of the Civic Center, a long-standing priority across multiple mayoral administrations. In addition, the Mayor emphasized his continued focus on homelessness and public safety, calling for greater collaboration with Caltrans to address encampments along state rights-of-way.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 23, 2026

BUSINESS

New State Senate Committee Assignments

A new year brings new committee assignments in the California State Legislature, and Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón (D-Santa Barbara) has announced her leadership team and committee chairs for the year ahead. Committee chairs play a critical role in the legislative process, serving as key gatekeepers with the authority to advance or halt legislation.

Continued on page 3

BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

New State Senate Committee Assignments

Several influential committees will see new leadership this year. Senator Sabrina Cervantes (D–Riverside) will chair the Senate Appropriations Committee, while Senator John Laird (D–Santa Cruz) will serve as Chair of the Budget Committee. San Diego legislators will also hold several prominent committee

leadership roles. Senator Catherine Blakespear (D–Encinitas) will continue as Chair of the Environmental Quality Committee, Senator Akilah Weber Pierson (D–San Diego) will lead the Health Committee, and Senator Steve Padilla (D–San Diego) will serve as Chair of the Insurance Committee.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 26, 2026

BUSINESS

US Naval War College International Delegation

The Chamber welcomed a delegation from the U.S. Naval War College as part of its Maritime Security and Governance Staff Course Field Studies Program, which is visiting San Diego this month. The group included nearly 30 military officers from around the world, including Belize, the Philippines, Singapore, and

Colombia, as well as faculty and staff studying how institutions contribute to regional stability, economic resilience, and good governance.

President and CEO Chris Cate shared an overview of San Diego’s economy and the Chamber’s policy efforts, including support for local businesses, economic development and trade, and affordable housing. The discussion further underscored the intersection of strong economic ecosystems, regional

security, and maritime governance, emphasizing San Diego’s distinct position as a global center for trade, defense, and cross-border collaboration. The conversation provided an opportunity for meaningful exchange, reinforcing the Chamber’s role as a convener and thought partner on issues that intersect with economic vitality, governance, and global security.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 23, 2026

AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

CALIFORNIA

Federal Prosecutors Seize Luxury Assets From Man Accused of Stealing \$23 Million in Homeless Aid Funds

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli says California is the epicenter of fraud and that the federal government under Attorney General Pam Bondi is providing accountability to taxpayers, with more investigations expected.

Federal officials arrested a Los Angeles contractor and seized his \$125,000 Range Rover and mansion after charging him with wire fraud for allegedly diverting about \$23 million in public money meant to house and feed up

to 600 homeless people.

Alexander Soofer held contracts with the city and county of Los Angeles for that purpose but instead spent millions on a luxurious life, according to the case.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli announced the development on X, stating that "California is the epicenter of Fraud, and the federal government under the leadership of @AGPamBondi has begun providing accountability to taxpaying citizens. More to come!"

Essayli directly challenged Governor Gavin Newsom’s office after it denied any state responsibility.

He wrote that "You and the California legislature facilitated this fraud by handing out billions in tax dollars to these nonprofits with zero vetting and zero state oversight" and that "No one arrested this defendant until President Trump and @AGPamBondi appointed me to investigate and charge fraud offenses in California. California could have brought charges before our arrest today but did not. In fact, California has not brought any meaningful prosecutions for homeless fraud."

The governor’s press office had called any link to Newsom "TOTALLY FALSE" and said fraud is unacceptable, adding that unlike

Donald Trump, who pardons fraudsters, Newsom "demands anyone who steals taxpayer dollars be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." Officials said the matter was uncovered by local investigators working with law enforcement.

The state has spent \$37 billion on homelessness programs since 2019, according to the California Legislative Analyst’s Office. Michael Shellenberger reported in May that under Newsom the homeless population grew 24 percent while violent crime rose to 31 percent over the national average.

Vice President JD Vance said about \$7 billion of fraud

has been discovered in California, stating "I think we have a fraud problem that is much worse in California than it is in Minnesota."

The Trump DOJ confirmed Soofer spent the money on a \$125,000 Land Rover, a mansion, a second home in Greece, luxury vacations, designer clothes and private schools.

Essayli wrote that "Taxpaying citizens deserve better."

The source indicates this is the tip of the iceberg, with more fraud investigations ongoing.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Jan 23, 2026

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Planning amid challenges

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

Opinion — the views of the writers named, not news reporting

COMMENTARY

Newsom’s Education Record: Soaring Spending, Falling Results

California Policy Center analysts argue that Governor Gavin Newsom’s massive increases in school funding have failed to improve student outcomes.

In his final State of the State address and accompanying 2026-27 budget proposal, Governor Gavin Newsom highlighted what he called record-breaking investments in education and positioned California as a model for nation-leading investments, according to the California Policy Center.

The Center notes that Newsom’s proposed budget totals nearly \$349 billion, with \$149.1 billion dedicated to education programs from Transitional Kindergarten through grade 12. That represents a sharp rise from the \$97.2 billion education budget when Newsom took office

in 2018, the Center writes.

Per-pupil spending now stands at \$27,418 when all funding sources are counted, a 60.8 percent increase since 2018-19 and the highest level in state history, the California Policy Center reports. This surge has occurred even as student enrollment has declined from just under 6.19 million to 5.8 million, despite the addition of Transitional Kindergarten, which now serves more than 177,000 four- and five-year-olds.

The Center observes that a growing share of students are leaving traditional public schools for charters, which have gained more than 74,700 pupils during Newsom’s tenure.

Newsom’s budget emphasizes expanded free preschool for two-, three- and four-year-olds, community schools, school-based behavioral health services, longer school days with before- and after-school and summer programs, and literacy initiatives including reading specialists

and dyslexia screening, the Center says.

The governor has pointed to recent slight gains on Smarter Balanced tests as evidence that the spending is working, claiming improvement "in every subject area, in every grade level, in every student group," according to the California Policy Center.

Yet those gains still leave proficiency rates below pre-pandemic levels despite a roughly 33 percent funding increase since 2019-20, the Center argues. National Assessment of Educational Progress scores paint an even bleaker picture.

California fourth-graders fell from two points below the national average in reading in 2022 to three points below in 2024, while remaining four points below in math both years, the Center reports. Eighth-graders slipped from matching the national average in reading in 2022 to two points below in 2024 and stayed three points behind in math.

A November report from the University of California San Diego further highlighted the crisis, revealing that the number of incoming freshmen whose math placement exams showed they failed to meet high school standards grew nearly thirtyfold between 2020 and 2025, the California Policy Center notes. Many also require extra writing courses to reach expected levels.

The Center points out that California’s high per-pupil spending exceeds that of Massachusetts, which spends slightly less yet far outperforms the state on NAEP tests. Lower-spending states such as Idaho, Montana and Mississippi also achieve better results, with Mississippi’s evidence-based literacy reforms producing what has been called the “Mississippi Miracle,” tying it for seventh nationally in fourth-grade reading.

According to the California Policy Center, these disappointing outcomes result

from a system controlled by powerful teachers unions that resist meaningful reforms and alternatives. While Newsom has called for modernizing education management, the Center writes that unions have effectively become the system’s managers.

Until that political influence is curtailed, California students will continue to bear the cost of rising expenditures and stagnant or declining academic performance, the California Policy Center concludes.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jan 23, 2026

ABOUT THIS PAPER

San Diego Newsline covers downtown San Diego first — City Hall, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Little Italy, Barrio Logan and the waterfront — and the county around it. Every item names its source; read the originals and our standards at sandiegonewsline.com.

MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

DOWNTOWN

Catch the Big Game in Gaslamp Quarter

Gaslamp Quarter Big Game Celebration 2026

Garage Kitchen + Bar: Super Bowl Viewing Party

Location: 655 4th Avenue, San Diego, CA 92101 Phone: (619) 231-6700

Super Bowl Sunday at Garage Kitchen + Bar!

Watch the Super Bowl at Garage Kitchen + Bar with TVs throughout the venue, so there’s not a bad seat in the house. Expect a high-energy game-day atmosphere with food and drink specials from kickoff through the final whistle.

Happy Hour: 3:00 – 6:00 PM 51% off all drinks (excluding top-shelf and specialty cocktails)

\$6 Crazy Bob’s Burger with fries Available 3:00 – 4:00 PM only

Meatball Sandwich – \$14 Home meatballs and mozzarella on a toasted hoagie roll

Buffalo Chicken Flatbread – \$15 Parmesan cheese sauce, roasted chicken, bacon, ranch, and buffalo sauce

Jalapeño Queso Dip – \$13 Monterey Jack cheese, roasted jalapeños, chorizo, and tortilla chips

El Chingon – Big Game Sunday + Brunch & Bad Bunny Halftime Watch Party

Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026 Time: Brunch & pre-game 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM; Big Game viewing with halftime afterward Location: 560 Fifth Avenue, San Diego, CA 92101

Get ready for a lit brunch celebrating the vibes of Bad Bunny at El Chingon. This is your go-to spot to kick back with friends, enjoy great food, amazing drinks, and nonstop beats that keep the energy up all day long.

Expect a brunch party with Bad Bunny-inspired music, cocktails, and photo ops , plus a live DJ setting the tone from start to finish. Stick around after brunch for the Bad Bunny halftime concert

watch party during the Big Game , featuring high-energy vibes and a packed Gaslamp crowd.

Brunch party celebrating Bad Bunny vibes

Brunch menu featuring Puerto Rican favorite Mofongo

Bad Bunny halftime concert watch party during the Big Game

Hard Rock Hotel San Diego – The Big Game Viewing Party

Join the ultimate Big Game viewing experience at the Hard Rock Hotel San Diego. Enjoy high-energy vibes, refreshing drinks, and game-day food while watching every play on multiple massive LED screens in the heart of the Gaslamp Quarter.

Kick off the day with the Beer Pong Tournament, then settle in to watch the Big Game on the largest LED screen in San Diego.

Beer Pong Tournament (Pre-Game Event) Kick off game day early with a

competitive Beer Pong Tournament before kickoff.

Entry Fee: \$40 per team (2 players per team)

Unlimited beer refills until elimination

Tournament Start Time: Begins before kickoff at 1:00 PM

Complimentary bottle of vodka or tequila

Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026 Time: 2:30 PM – 8:00 PM (Doors open ~2:30 PM) Location: 615 Broadway, San Diego, CA 92101 Phone: (619) 727-6789.

Watch the Big Game at Parq Nightclub on the biggest screen in the venue with energetic game-day vibes, food and drink specials flowing all game long, and a high-energy crowd cheering every play.

Margaritaville San Diego Hotel: LandShark Bar & Grill – Super Bowl Watch Party

Time: 3:30 PM – 7:30 PM Location: 616 J Street, San Diego, CA 92101 Inside Margaritaville Hotel San Diego

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