



Public Safety Referendum

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the proposed referendum on the Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ballot?

The City of Whitewater will have a referendum on the April 2025 ballot to ask taxpayers whether or not they support a \$1,305,782 increase in the property tax levy to fund five additional police officers, a dispatcher, two cross-trained firefighters/EMTs, and their necessary equipment.

What will appear on the ballot?

The referendum question will appear on the Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ballot as follows:

Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Whitewater for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2026, is limited to 2.166% (based on the City's best estimate), which results in a levy of \$6,600,275. Shall the City of Whitewater be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2026 for the purpose of funding increased staffing, and continuing to operate police and fire/EMS services, by a total of 18.29% (based on the City's best estimate), which results in a levy of \$7,906,057, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$1,305,782 for each fiscal year going forward?

Why is the City asking for this increase now?

The City of Whitewater has identified a need to add additional, full-time personnel to its Police and Fire departments.

The City of Whitewater has a critical need for more police officers. There has not been an increase in police staffing for 17 years. Since 2010, we've seen a nearly 90% increase in calls for service. As a result of additional strain on police resources, the Whitewater Police Department has seen an **80 percent increase in overtime hours worked by police officers since 2014.**

As for the Fire Department, in 2022, City of Whitewater voters passed a referendum to meet an acute Fire & EMS need in the community. Since that time, **calls for service have grown by 32%** and the number of available paid-on-call staff has further decreased. While we are in a better spot today than we were before the referendum, the bottom line is we are not meeting the current or prospective needs of the community.

What will happen if a majority of voters vote "yes"?

If Whitewater residents approve the referendum, the tax levy in 2025—and each year going forward—would increase by approximately \$1,305,782 to fund five additional police officers, a dispatcher, two cross-trained firefighters/EMTs, and their necessary equipment.

If the referendum passes, a homeowner in the City of Whitewater who lives in Jefferson County will see an annual property tax increase of approximately \$92.00 annually or \$1.77 weekly per \$100,000 of assessed property value, and in Walworth County, will see an increase of \$118.00 annually, or \$2.27 weekly per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

What will it mean if a majority vote "no"?

If the referendum is rejected by a majority of voters, the City will be faced with difficult decisions about how to address the growing need for public safety services. A rejection of the referendum **would not** be the equivalent of maintaining the status quo of police and fire/EMS services.

A "no" vote means the City will not be able to hire additional officers or firefighters/EMTs, impacting its ability to provide the level of service the citizens of Whitewater deserve.

Investing in additional staff supports proactive policing—preventing crime, improving efficiency, and building trust by addressing issues before they escalate.



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Why do we need a referendum to raise the property tax levy limit?

The State of Wisconsin limits the amount of property taxes a City can collect each year. In order to exceed the levy limit, the City needs voter approval through a referendum.

What will be the impact on taxpayers if the referendum passes?

If Whitewater residents approve the referendum, the tax levy in 2025—and each year going forward—would increase by \$1,305,782 million to fund five additional police officers, a dispatcher, two cross-trained firefighters/EMTs, and their necessary equipment.

If the referendum passes, a homeowner in the City of Whitewater who lives in Jefferson County will see an annual property tax increase of approximately \$92.00 annually or \$1.77 weekly per \$100,000 of assessed property value, and in Walworth County, will see an increase of \$118.00 annually, or \$2.27 weekly per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

In addition, if the referendum passes, the Whitewater Police Department will cease borrowing for certain recurring capital items, instead annually investing the \$250,000 toward new equipment, such as vehicles. This will better serve residents by removing interest payments on depreciating assets. By doing so, Whitewater taxpayers will save approximately \$772,000 in interest over the next 10 years alone, while providing better equipment for staff.

What is the Police and Fire/EMS Department recommending for staffing increases?

Based on an [organizational and workload study](#), the police department is recommending hiring five additional police officers and a dispatcher to help meet the public safety needs of the Whitewater community.

In addition, the fire department is recommending hiring two cross-trained firefighters/EMTs to meet the rising calls for service [following a staffing and operations report](#).

When and where do I vote?

Whitewater voters can cast their vote one of three ways: through absentee mail-in ballots, early in-person voting at the City Clerk's office, or in-person voting on election day, April 1, 2025.

Voters can request a mailed absentee ballot from the City Clerk's office. You may request an absentee ballot be mailed to you until March 28. If you plan to return your absentee ballot using the U.S. Postal Service, please remember that the ballot must be RECEIVED by the Elections Office by the close of polls on election day, April 1, 2025. Absentee ballots may be returned to the Municipal Building Community Room on election day.

In-person early voting will take place at City Hall on the following dates:

Monday through Friday;

March 18 – March 28 from 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

To find your polling place, and for additional voting information, please visit myvote.wi.gov. Please remember that Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote.

Where can I learn more about this referendum?

Additional information about the upcoming public safety referendum can be found at whitewater-wi.gov/615/Police-and-Fire-EMS-Referendum.

Who can I contact for more information?

Send any questions or feedback via email to WW2025Referendum@whitewater-wi.gov.