



Council Agenda Item

Meeting Date: 01/07/2025

Agenda Item: Public Safety Referendum

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BACKGROUND

(Enter the who, what when, where, why)

Members of the Common Council,

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and partnership in choosing to pursue a public safety referendum. The organizational and workload study completed by Fitch & Associates made it clear that additional resources are needed, recommending the addition of eight sworn staff. As you know, we do not take the decision to pursue a referendum lightly, and one of our foremost concerns is ensuring fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers of the City of Whitewater. To that end, we have worked tirelessly to exhaust all available avenues in an attempt to avoid financial impacts related to the referendum. This includes adding equipment that increases our efficiency, obtaining grant funding for additional staff, utilizing new legislation allowing us to charge fees for certain services, and adding staff through the existing operational budget.

Specifically, the following actions have been taken to improve our police department operations outside of the referendum:

- Flock Camera System: Grant funding was utilized to outfit the City with 12 automated license plate reading cameras. The benefits of this system have been apparent, increasing our investigative capacity and increasing our efficiency.
- COPS Hiring Grant: Staff pursued a competitive grant through the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office. Awarded total of \$375,000 for 3 officers over a three-year period (Year 1: \$75,000, Year 2: \$35,000, Year 3: \$15,000 per officer).
- City Immigration Liaison position: Staff has worked closely with state and federal political representatives to find opportunities for funding. That effort has resulted in a federal appropriation request of \$85,000 being made for a City Immigration Liaison position. It's yet to be determined if this will be formally adopted in the 2025 federal budget.
- Detective Staffing: The Common Council approved the addition of one Detective position within the existing operational budget. This additional position has been posted both internally and externally to ensure we attract the most competitive pool of applicants possible.
- Records Specialist: As was recommended by Fitch and Associates, these positions were adjusted and recategorized in the salary resolution, to ensure the associated pay scale properly aligns with their increasingly challenging duties.

- Records Technician: As was recommended by Fitch & Associates, we plan to move the part-time Records Technician position to a full-time position through increased revenue in 2025. The increased revenue is anticipated to be realized from parking ticket increases approved by Council as well as video redaction fees that were incorporated based on new statutory language.
- Evidence Garage: The primary capital improvement recommend by Fitch & Associates was replacing the current long-term evidence storage building. \$180,000 has already been financed for this purpose, and staff are addressing this in early 2025 beginning with a request for proposals for the building design.
- Dispatch Technology: Staff are working with vendors to determine the feasibility of non-emergency call rollover between the WPD Dispatch Center and the Walworth County Dispatch Center. 911 emergency calls already rollover between dispatch centers ensuring that any such calls are answered by a live person as immediately as possible.
- Forensic Lab MOU: Beginning in 2025, our agency has 24/7 access to Waukesha Police Department’s state-of-the-art forensic lab facility. This serves to increase our investigative capacity related to electronic device downloads and also significantly increases our investigative efficiency.

Our primary objective is ensuring that we are providing the City of Whitewater with highly capable and efficient law enforcement services. However, police department staffing has not kept up with increasing demand, making it increasingly challenging to meet that objective. Prior to the approval of the additional detective in the 2025 budget, sworn staffing had remained constant at 24 sworn staff since 2008. That is in stark contrast to call volume, which has increased 89.9% from 2010 to 2024, with total annual calls for service steadily increasing from 7,501 to 14,245 during that time. We are taking every opportunity to improve our police department operations outside of the referendum, with a commitment to fiscal responsibility. Ultimately, we are simply unable to meet all the needs outlined by Fitch and Associates absent a referendum.

To that end, we recommend the following verbiage for the referendum question appear on the ballot on April 1, 2025:

“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, staffing, and continuing to operate police services, by a total of 17.82% (based on the City’s best estimate), which results in a levy of \$7,776,416, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$1,176,141 for each fiscal year going forward?”

Thank you for your consideration, and for providing the opportunity for the Whitewater Police Department to better serve the City of Whitewater.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS
(Dates, committees, action taken)

On November 7, 2024, the Common Council affirmed the decision to pursue a public safety referendum.

FINANCIAL IMPACT
(If none, state N/A)

Referendum impact: \$1,176,141

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommended Motion: Move to approve referendum question as written.

ATTACHMENT(S) INCLUDED

(If none, state N/A)

1.
