

### What is the proposed referendum?

The proposed referendum will ask Fitchburg voters whether or not they support a \$3,593,000 increase in the property tax levy going forward to fund five police positions, six fire positions, three additional City staff positions, police services building operating costs, improvements to public transit, and other City operating costs.

To learn more about the referendum, please visit [fitchburgwi.gov/referendum](https://fitchburgwi.gov/referendum)

### What will appear on ballots?

The referendum question that will appear on the November 5, 2024 ballot is as follows:

*“Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Fitchburg for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2025, is limited to 3.847%, which results in a levy of \$32,642,047. Shall the City of Fitchburg be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2025, for the purpose of funding five (5) police positions, six (6) fire positions, three (3) City staff positions, police services building operating costs, improvements to public transit, and other City operating costs, by a total of 11.01%, which results in a levy of \$36,235,047 and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$3,593,000 for each fiscal year going forward?”*

### What will happen if a majority of voters vote “yes”?

If Fitchburg voters approve the referendum, the City would be able to institute a one-time, permanent \$3,593,000 increase to the property tax levy, beginning with property tax bills issued in December 2024.

More specifically, Fitchburg would have the funding to hire five additional Police Department staff members, six additional Fire Department staff members, a Communications Director, an HR Generalist, and a Finance Manager. The City would also have the funding necessary to operate public safety facilities and invest in the transit system.

This would translate to a property tax impact of approximately \$65.20 per \$100,000 in assessed property value. The impact to a median Fitchburg home valued at \$457,800 is estimated at \$298.49 annually.

### So, is the City going to add \$3,593,000 to the tax levy each year?

No. If Fitchburg voters approve the referendum, the City would be able to institute a one-time, permanent \$3,593,000 increase to the property tax levy.

### Is the City going to referendum to make up for a budget deficit?

No. The City of Fitchburg’s finances are in good order. Additional funds would support the City’s ability to maintain and improve services, including by supporting increased public safety staffing and operational funding, invest in improvements to the transit and paratransit system, and hire critically necessary City staff.



## **Why do we need a referendum to raise property taxes? Can't we borrow?**

Funds necessary to support ongoing costs, including salaries for public safety and administrative positions, are funded by the City of Fitchburg through the municipality's operating budget. These funds are necessary on a recurring basis. While municipalities can borrow for one-time expenses like equipment purchases and building construction, it is not permissible to borrow for ongoing staffing and other operating expenses. Therefore, funds must be acquired through alternative sources. In this case, the alternative source is via referendum that increases property tax levy limits.

To learn more about the referendum, please visit [fitchburgwi.gov/referendum](https://fitchburgwi.gov/referendum).

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

If the referendum is rejected by a majority of voters, the City will have to make difficult decisions about how to address the growing need for public safety, parks and roadway maintenance, communications and other City services and increasing challenges with staff recruitment and retention.

A "no" vote would result in maintaining current funding for staffing, which may limit the City's ability to employ and retain quality staff to provide high-quality services to City residents.

## **When and where do I vote?**

Election day is Tuesday, November 5, 2024. There are various polling places throughout Fitchburg to utilize depending on your residential address. To determine your polling place and view your options for voting, including early and absentee voting, please visit [myvote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov).

## **How did the City come up with the \$3,593,000 ask?**

The City of Fitchburg determined a referendum ask of \$3,593,000 by first determining the cost of each additional public safety position (11) and administrative position (3) that was to be included in the referendum, including salary, training and equipment costs. Transit improvements, police facility operating costs and other City operating costs as specified in the referendum question were then determined based on City officials' estimations. The sum of these new positions and additional costs was determined to be \$3,593,000.

## **Does the City believe it can hire all new staff right away? What happens to the funds if the City is unable to hire all staff at once?**

In the State of Wisconsin, municipalities do not have the ability to "phase in" referendum-approved property tax increases over time in the way that school districts can.

Instead, the City must request the amount of funding necessary to cover projected costs. Budgeting for a full year of costs minimizes the structural deficit for future year budgets.

If the referendum is approved and the City is unable to hire all staff members right away, any unspent funds will be used on recruitment and pre-employment costs. Any amount that remains unspent will be deposited into the City's rainy day fund at the end of the year and be available for future one-time costs.



## **Q If the City won't have operating costs for the police facility until it's completed in 2027, why are you asking for those funds in 2025? What happens to the funds in 2025 and 2026?**

Because the citywide referendum will be occurring in November 2024, the City has decided to be planful and proactive and ask for the funds as a part of the referendum.

If the referendum is approved and the City includes the police facility operating costs in the 2025 budget, the amount we have allocated for police facility operating costs will be set aside to be available for future police facility costs.

## **Q Why now?**

As the City of Fitchburg community has grown, the demand for City services – including public safety and other core municipal services like infrastructure development and maintenance – has also increased.

City costs have also increased due to many factors including the increasing cost to recruit and retain our professional, service-oriented team, inflationary pressures on equipment, the cost of supplies, materials, and services, and other operating expenses associated with maintaining the high-level of services our community appreciates.

While the City is developing a strategic plan to intentionally guide the future growth of Fitchburg and help prioritize investments – including in staffing – there are additional needs that must be urgently addressed in order to maintain and/or improve services in Fitchburg. Leadership in the City have determined that a November 2024 referendum is the ideal time to address these needs with the urgency they require.

## **Q Why is the City going to referendum at the same time as the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)?**

While both MMSD and City are putting referendums on the ballot this November, they are different governmental entities and levy taxes individually.

The City of Fitchburg has been a careful steward of our budget, making the most out of tax dollars. At this point, the needs of our community – and the costs associated with addressing those needs – have outpaced Fitchburg's current funding capacity and additional dollars are needed to hire public safety and administrative personnel, address growing operating costs and invest in transit.

## **Q If Fitchburg is growing, including with increasing commercial and residential assessed values, why is a referendum necessary?**

The City's ability to respond to changes in the demand for its services is inhibited by external forces. In Fitchburg, as is true for all communities in Wisconsin, the City's revenue growth is restricted by state legislation – limiting property tax levy increases primarily to the percent increase in equalized value from net new construction, or else requiring the City to seek permission from voters through a referendum to exceed levy limits.

Despite Fitchburg's growth, the City's associated tax levy increase (as related to net new construction) was just \$884,441 in 2024. In 2025, the City's growth will only allow for a \$760,458 increase, unless the referendum is approved.

Tax levy increases based on net new construction alone are insufficient to meet the growing needs of our growing Fitchburg community – these dollars are only enough to maintain the status quo of current inflationary pressures.



## **What has the City done to address these service / funding / staffing needs apart from analyzing the need for a referendum?**

Despite careful stewardship of our City budget, Fitchburg continues to face funding challenges due to factors including increased demand for services and statutory property tax levy limits.

In the 2024 Adopted Budget, the City of Fitchburg was able to leverage one-time budget increases from the closure of Tax Increment District (TID) #4 and increased state aid – due to changes to the State’s shared revenue structure and the redirection of state aid from the attachment of the Town of Madison – and a modest increase in the City’s tax levy to add four full-time employees.

## **Why is the Fitchburg Fire Department asking for additional staff?**

Between 2013 and 2023, FFD saw a 15.7% decrease in part-time, paid-on-premise staff active with the Department. With this decrease, responses to emergencies have been challenged and full-time staff have experienced fatigue as they’ve been required to work more overtime hours to meet the service needs of the Fitchburg community.

Adding to FFD’s challenges is a sharp increase in calls for service: between 2013 and 2022, calls increased by 39.8%.

Further, as the number of calls increased – and part-time, paid-on-premise staffing declined – the average response time increased. Longer response times can be attributed in part to an increased reliance on mutual aid. When mutual aid is required, Departments in neighboring communities help provide a response – increasing the amount of time between when a call is placed and when help arrives.

## **Why is the Fitchburg Police Department asking for additional staff?**

Fitchburg Police Department staffing levels are below average when compared to peer communities’ ratio of officers per capita. FPD has just 1.62 officers per 1,000 residents – the second-lowest ratio among its local peers in the MPSIS (Multi Jurisdictional Public Safety Information System).

While staffing levels are comparatively low, calls for service to the Fitchburg Police Department have disproportionately increased over time compared to the number of sworn officers able to respond to those calls.

Between 2013 and 2023, FPD saw a 22.6% increase in calls for police services. As the number of calls increased – and the number of officers did not keep pace – the average response time for FPD to provide service increased.

## **Why are other City of Fitchburg departments asking for additional staff?**

While the population of Fitchburg increased 33.6% between 2013 and 2023, City staffing (not including public safety departments) has increased by just 18.6%. The demands on existing staff have exceeded their capacity to handle the influx of work and responsibilities that come with a growing population.



## **Q Why is the City of Fitchburg asking for additional funds for transit services?**

Community growth has also increased pressure on traffic and the need for additional transit services. In line with the City of Fitchburg Transit Plan adopted in 2022, Fitchburg has identified a need to invest in improved intracity transit service, including between residential areas, City facilities such as City Hall, Senior Center, and Library, and job centers. The City has been contacted by business owners and employers who support additional transit options to ensure employees, particularly shift-based employees, can travel to work.

## **Q Why does this question include funding for several departments? Can't the City pose this referendum as multiple questions?**

According to the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR), Wisconsin municipalities do not have the legal ability to have more than one approved referendum regarding the property tax levy in a given year.

## **Q What other alternatives were considered to fund these staffing needs?**

In Fitchburg, as is true for all communities in Wisconsin, the City's revenue growth is restricted by state legislation – limiting property tax levy increases primarily to the percent increase in equalized value from net new construction, or else requiring the City to seek permission from voters through a referendum to exceed levy limits.

Despite careful stewardship of our City budget, Fitchburg continues to face funding challenges due to factors including increased demand for services and statutory property tax levy limits.

While the City of Fitchburg has experienced growth resulting in net new construction, the corresponding increase in levy must often be used to maintain existing services - including compensation and equipment for existing staff members – which are all impacted by inflationary pressures. Because of this, additional funding is necessary, which requires the City to seek permission from voters through a referendum to exceed levy limits.

Despite Fitchburg's growth, the City's associated tax levy increase (as related to net new construction) was just \$884,441 in 2024. In 2025, the City's growth will only allow for a \$760,458 increase, unless the referendum is approved.

Tax levy increases based on net new construction alone are insufficient to meet the growing needs of our growing Fitchburg community – these dollars are only enough to maintain existing services.

## **Q How can I learn more?**

Additional information about the City of Fitchburg staffing and service challenges, the Options Assessment and the referendum are available online at [fitchburgwi.gov/referendum](https://fitchburgwi.gov/referendum)

