



WHITewater EMS STAFFING REFERENDUM

Is the EMS Staffing referendum the only referendum on the November 8 ballot?

In addition to the City's ask for a \$1.1M property tax increase to fund EMS staffing and equipment investments, the Whitewater Unified School District is asking voters to approve an extension of the District's \$4.4M four-year operational referendum originally approved in 2018.

What is the tax impact to Whitewater residents if both referendums pass?

If both referendums pass, the net impact will actually be a **reduction in tax bills**. Due in large part to an increase in state per-pupil funding available for students within the District, the School District's annual levy is expected to go down. The reduction in the District's levy in combination with growth in the City's tax base **more than offsets** the increase in property taxes for EMS staffing. If both referendums are approved, tax bills are anticipated to go **down \$141** per \$100,000 assessed property value in Walworth County and **down \$204** per \$100,000 assessed property value in Jefferson County. These estimates account for City and School District taxes, they do not take into account any changes in County or Technical College levies.

Why is the City asking for additional funds now? What has changed?

The Whitewater Fire Department has traditionally relied on a paid-on-call staffing model. This model, which depends on on-call staff to respond first to the station, then to the incident, is no longer providing an adequate level of service to Whitewater. In recent years, the Whitewater Fire Department's inability to staff a response required neighboring communities to respond to a large number of EMS calls - increasing response times and putting Whitewater residents at risk. There is a great need for full-time, paid-on-premises EMTs to immediately respond to the needs of Whitewater residents. This increased level of staffing requires \$1.48M in additional funding - fairly shared across communities that receive service. The City of Whitewater's share of the increase is \$1.1M. Due to state levy limitations, in order to increase property taxes to fund this need, we must hold a referendum vote.

Is the problem only with EMS? What about fire services?

The vast majority of the increase in calls for service are calls for EMS support. However, the additional staff would be dual trained and could assist in fire-related matters as well.

Why are we seeing such an increase in EMS-related calls?

The increase is likely the result of a combination of factors including population growth, and an increasingly aging population of residents. Additionally, current state funding meant to offset the cost of providing services to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (the University) has fallen short. Outside of the University's control, the state funding does not fully cover the level of services provided to the University. In addition to increased calls, the department is seeing more high-acuity incidents.

What is the Department recommending in terms of staffing increases?

A fully funded staff of 17 full-time, paid-on-premises EMTs will make it possible to have a fully staffed, onsite EMS response 24/7, helping to address increased calls for service, surging response times and a lack of available paid-on-call staff.

How is the Department currently funded?

The Department is currently funded through cash payments from the communities that receive services: The City and Town of Whitewater, and the Towns of Cold Spring, Koshkonong, Lima Center, and Richmond. Moving forward, communities' shares of Whitewater Fire and EMS' budget will be based on a funding formula that accounts for a community's EMS call volume and the value of their facilities and land value (called equalized value).

Will referendums be necessary in the other communities served by the Whitewater Fire and EMS?

As the largest community receiving services, our share of the increased cost is proportional to our community's equalized value and our calls for service. We have opted to go to referendum in November understanding our share of the increase is critical to developing a 2023 staffing plan and budget. Other communities may opt to pursue a property tax increase via referendum in 2023, or may find another way to provide their increased share of the budget.

How are residents impacted by the lack of staffing?

In recent years, a large number of EMS responses to Whitewater residents were provided from neighboring communities, greatly increasing the response time to individuals in need. Having on-site EMTs will allow for faster response times, reducing the risk to Whitewater residents.

Wasn't the merger of the Department into the City of Whitewater supposed to address these concerns?

Given the increased financial support that Whitewater Fire Department, Inc. requested as it identified a need to adjust staffing models, the Whitewater Common Council authorized the City Manager to begin negotiations to integrate the department to provide greater administrative support and to enhance accountability to taxpayers.

Merging with the City provided great value to the Department, and in return to Whitewater residents. In addition to administration and oversight improvements, the move helped the District to become more competitive in recruiting and retaining staff, as health and retirement benefits can now be provided through the City.

How did you determine the need for up to 17 additional firefighter / EMTs?

A fully funded staff of 17 full-time, paid-on-premises EMTs will make it possible to have a fully-staffed, onsite EMS response 24/7, helping to address increased calls for service, surging response times and a lack of available paid-on-call staff.

If funding is approved via referendum, will you be able to find 17 firefighter / EMTs in this job market?

It is no secret that the labor market is challenging right now. We know the best way to find highly trained EMTs is to offer competitive pay, health and retirement benefits and reliable hours. If passed, this budget increase will give us the means to do so.

What will hourly wages be if funding is approved?

Wages for paid-on-premises EMS staff will range between \$20-\$22 per hour and will be adapted as needed to staff competitively going forward.

Is the City going to come back to us in two more years saying more funds are needed?

We have diligently analyzed data and strategically planned for this budget increase with the future in mind, including devoting some of the increase to an equipment reserve. If approved, we believe this additional funding will enable the District to thrive for many years.

What is the tax impact on Whitewater residents?

If approved, the annual tax impact would be an increase of \$67 per \$100K homevalue in Walworth County and a \$52 annual increase per \$100K homevalue in Jefferson County. This increase takes into account reduced mill rates tied to increasing levy limits by the amount allowable by state law and the closing of tax incremental districts (TIDs).

What if one of the communities currently served by the District opts to no longer receive services? Will that impact the referendum ask?

The recommendation of up to 17 full time, on-premises EMS staff is necessary to provide the highest level of service to Whitewater residents. As the largest area served, our share of the funding covers the vast majority of the staffing investments needed. If another community opts to no longer receive services from the Whitewater Fire Department, it is likely a staff of 17 would still be recommended.

The original projected increase in community share was \$1.47M, now it is \$1.48M. Why the change?

The Town of Johnstown has opted to no longer receive fire and EMS services from Whitewater Fire and EMS. As a result, the remaining communities are required to cover the Town's \$24,188 share of total costs. Those costs include both the planned increase (\$13,161) as well as the amount the Town was previously funding (\$11,027). The resulting \$24,188 gap was distributed across remaining municipalities receiving Whitewater Fire and EMS services, based on a calculation that takes into account the equalized value of a community, and a five-year average of EMS call volume in that community.

Why did the Town of Johnstown opt not to receive services from Whitewater Fire / EMS?

The Town will be pursuing other fire and EMS responses for its residents primarily because of the distance from the town to the Whitewater fire and EMS station, and the resulting response time - even with a fully staffed team.

Will other municipalities choose not to be served by Whitewater Fire and EMS? How will that impact the referendum amount?

Municipalities are currently considering whether they will continue to receive services from Whitewater Fire and EMS, and be responsible for the increased cost of a fully staffed EMS response. It is possible that other communities will opt to receive services elsewhere. If that occurs, the funding allocation may slightly change, but the referendum ask of a \$1.1M increase from the City of Whitewater will remain the same. If cost allocations put the City above \$1.1M, staffing plans will be adjusted in order to remain within the proposed \$1.1M community share of the budget.