

2022 Referendum Frequently Asked Questions

On April 5, 2022, eligible voters of the City of Washburn will be able to vote on a referendum that would increase the property tax levy by \$200,000. This money would be used to hire two full-time EMTs, provide stipend/expenses to maintain paid-on-call EMTs, and to provide for an increase in police wages. The intention here is to be able to provide additional daytime EMT coverage which is significantly lacking, help to provide incentives to keep the existing paid-on-call EMTs going, and to maintain competitive wages in the police department to avoid losing officers to other departments that offer significantly higher wages. Historically, the City has paid for its ambulance service with the revenues received from the towns we are under contract with and with the revenue received from ambulance billing. The City has used tax dollars for capital expenses such as for new ambulances, but the operations have not necessitated other City revenues. However, now frozen or declining state aid for the past two decades and stagnant property tax growth, the only way for the City to pay for full-time EMTs is with a tax increase.

Why does the City want to hire full-time EMTs? Why don't you get volunteers? The City currently does not have enough "volunteers" (who are actually paid-on-call) to provide adequate staffing to cover all of the ambulance calls. Currently, there are about a dozen people who actively provide coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week; however, they either have other jobs, families, or want to retire because they are over 70 years old. While in 2022, they will be paid \$40 for each call they go on (approx. two-hours) plus \$3 an hour to actively be "on-call" and ready to go at a moments notice, there are still not enough people willing or able to do this. There is a significant commitment to be an EMT with the licensing and certifications that are required, and the on-going training that is required every year. EMTs need to remain active to stay current with the latest techniques and requirements, and to practice their skills. On top of this, dealing with the stresses of Covid, and a call volume that has steadily increased from 254 calls in 2000 to 511 calls in 2021, there are fewer people willing to provide this level of commitment. It is not only an issue in Washburn, it is a nationwide issue.

Why don't you let Ashland take over or contract with a private service? At this time, Ashland is not able to provide adequate coverage to Washburn because of staffing and expense. There have been several instances this past year where Ashland has been unable to provide back-up to Washburn and services from other communities such as Bayfield have been sought. In addition, having an ambulance service from Ashland will increase critical response time which can diminish care. As for contracting with a private service, that would have Washburn divest itself of assets such as its ambulances and equipment. It would also mean giving up the revenue the City receives from it calls to help keep the costs affordable to the taxpayer. If the City contracted with a private service, there would be very little leverage the City would have in order to control costs, and it would be very expensive and difficult to re-establish that service. For those reasons, the Council has not entertained these options.

Why are you only getting two full-time EMTs? Is that enough? It is true that two full-time EMTs will not solve all our staffing issues, but it is a place to start. There is a shortage of EMTs currently, like many other professions. We need to start small and keep realistic recruitment goals as we transition to a blended service. This will hopefully help our worst coverage period which is weekday, daytime hours. It will be important to continue to recruit and maintain paid-on-call staff as well. Unfortunately, the cost of going completely full-time is a cost the City does not believe the tax-payers will support. The City believes that additional advocacy at the State level will be necessary from everyone involved in order to change rules and policies related to funding in order to provide this service into the future.

Didn't the City approve a new contract with the Police already? Why is this part of the referendum? Yes, the City has approved a contract with the Police for 2022 and 2023. In doing so, the City had to commit to using its savings to pay that cost, and it is not sustainable for the long-term. The City will be unable to maintain going into the future without additional staffing cuts if the referendum is not approved. Of the \$200,000 requested, \$25,000 is earmarked to maintain the wages going into the future. For 2021, Bayfield County paid its deputies \$28.08 and the City of Washburn paid its officers \$24.59 per hour and there were four vacant positions within the Sheriff's Department. For 2022,

Bayfield County will pay its deputies \$28.71 per hour, and the City of Washburn will pay its officers \$27.25. While not perfect, we are working to eliminate the likelihood that our officers will leave, and if any would, at least remain competitive for recruiting new ones.

How much will this referendum cost me? Our best estimate indicates that the City's mill rate would increase by \$1.83 per \$1,000 of assessed value. In other words, a property assessed at \$100,000 would see an increase in \$183 per year in property taxes. A property assessed at \$200,000 would see an increase of \$366 per year in property taxes. For a comparison, the 2021 mill rate for the City portion of the tax bill is \$10.05 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The 2021 mill rate for the overall property tax bill is \$22.48 per \$1,000 of assessed value. To see how the City of Washburn compares with overall taxes and tax rates to other communities, you can use this link: <https://wispolicyforum.org/research/2021-property-values-and-taxes/> .

I don't live in the City of Washburn. Will I get to vote on this? How will it impact me? Only the residents of the City of Washburn will get to vote on the referendum. The City of Washburn has contracts with the three surrounding towns to provide fire and ambulance services. Those contracts expire at the end of 2025. Unless the City would seek to amend the contract sooner, the three respective Towns would not be affected until 2026. If the current formula of per capita costs based on actual expenses for ambulance services holds, it would be likely that the Towns would see an increase in costs at the time a new contract is adopted.

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