



CITY OF  
**EAU  
CLAIRE**

# PUBLIC SAFETY REFERENDUM

## Q What is the proposed public safety referendum on the ballot Tuesday, November 8?

The referendum will ask voters to decide whether or not to support an increase in the City's annual tax levy, beginning in 2023, to cover the cost of 15 additional public safety positions, including six firefighter/paramedics, six additional police officers, two civilian community service officers and one civilian law enforcement associate to support the 911 dispatch center.

## Q What will appear on the ballot?

*"Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Eau Claire for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2023, is limited to 3.472%, which results in a levy of \$49,178,662. Shall the City of Eau Claire be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2023 for the purpose of employing six (6) additional Firefighter/Paramedics, six (6) additional Police Officers, two (2) Civilian Community Service Officers, and one (1) Civilian Law Enforcement Associate to support Civilian 911 Dispatchers, by a total of 2.945%, which results in a levy of \$50,626,794, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$1,448,132 for each fiscal year going forward?"*

## Q Why is the City asking for this increase now?

**Our current public safety funding level and staffing levels are insufficient to meet the growing current and projected future needs of our community.** While our departments have risen to meet the needs of our community by working smarter, creating efficiencies, collaborating with stakeholders and prioritizing what types of service we can provide, it's gotten increasingly difficult to provide services as expected. Maintaining the current level of service and commitment to the community while balancing the needs, health, and well-being of our employees is becoming increasingly difficult.

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

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

## Q What will it mean if a majority of voters vote "yes"?

If the referendum is approved by a majority of voters on November 8, the **City of Eau Claire will be able to fund 15 additional public safety positions**, including six firefighter/paramedics, six police officers, two civilian community service officers and one civilian law enforcement associate to support the 911 dispatch center. This will increase staffing levels to ensure that there are adequate staff to sufficiently respond to calls for service from City residents.

## Q What does it mean if a majority vote "no" and the referendum fails?

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 have a negative impact on emergency service capacity.

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

If the referendum is approved, the annual property tax would increase by an estimated \$22.55 per year for every \$100,000 of property value, starting with the bills issued in December 2022. For example, **the impact to a property valued at \$200,000 would be \$45.10 annually.**

## Q Why do we need additional police officers?

While the demand for police services has grown, staffing has been stagnant. Despite a **67% increase in calls for service since 2012, staffing levels have not changed in the same period.**

While the Eau Claire Police Department (ECPD) does its best to meet these staffing requirements, there is a razor-thin margin between available staff and the on-duty hours to fulfill. Officers are subject to mandatory overtime at a much higher rate in order to provide basic public safety coverage. In 2018, the Department paid 675 hours of overtime. **In 2021, overtime hours jumped to 3,740 hours - a more than 450% increase overall.**

Police Department staffing has **fallen behind both the national average and peer cities** in Wisconsin. Increasing the number of officers by six would enable the ECPD to augment its shift staffing to meet peak demand, while reducing overtime impacts and ensuring off-duty officers are able to properly rest and recover from their shifts.

## Q Why do we need additional fire/EMS personnel?

Over the past decade, ECFD's staffing levels have remained stagnant - even though the population has grown and calls for service have increased by 25%.

Average response times for emergency calls have increased 12%, from 4 minutes and 41 seconds in 2013 to 5 minutes and 14 seconds in 2021.

Additional staffing would enable ECFD to meet current and future call volume and response time benchmarks.



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## Q Why do we need additional 911 staff?

The Eau Claire County Dispatch Center is operated under the City's Police Department. The Dispatch Center is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is responsible for answering emergency calls in the County and notifying the appropriate emergency service providers to respond.

In only four years, **the Dispatch Center has seen an almost 15% increase in emergency calls. Despite the growing call volume, current staffing levels require dispatchers to spend time on administrative tasks typically outside the scope of their role.**

Referendum funding would provide an additional civilian law enforcement associate to carry out administrative tasks - such as to open records requests and District Attorney office requests - freeing up time for dispatchers to answer calls for service.

## Q What other alternatives were considered to fund public safety?

The City has explored multiple avenues to fund public safety needs. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds have already been allocated and are unavailable to provide relief to our Police and Fire departments.

Referendum is the best path forward to ensure high-quality service to the community without compromising the health, safety and wellbeing of public safety providers.

## Q What other referendums are on the ballot?

The Eau Claire Area School District is asking voters for authorization to issue up to \$98,600,000 in general obligation bonds for a school building and facility improvement project.

The ballot will also include an advisory referendum asking voters if Wisconsin should legalize cannabis for adults age 21 and over.

## Q The school board is also asking for money. How does this affect the City's public safety referendum?

While both the school district and City are putting referendums on the ballot this year, they are different government entities and levy taxes individually.

The City has taken a pragmatic approach to budgeting and making the most out of tax dollars. The needs of our public safety responders have grown, and it is getting increasingly difficult to meet the growing demands for service without additional resources.

Questions regarding the school district's budget and referendum are best directed to the Eau Claire Area School District Office at 715-852-3000, or visit [www.ECASD.us](http://www.ECASD.us) for more information.

## Q You just raised taxes through recent property value assessments - why doesn't this cover the cost of services?

The City assessed city properties in 2021, a process that happens every three years. This process looks to maintain equity in properties that are similar to each other and **does not increase the total amount of taxes** received by the City.

## Q I've heard a lot about public safety referendums recently. Why is this a topic in the news?

The situation we are facing in Eau Claire is not unique. Across the state, the needs of public safety responders have grown, and it is getting increasingly difficult to meet the growing demands for service without additional resources.

Regarding Fire/EMS services, according to a recent study from the Wisconsin Policy Forum, while volunteer-reliant staffing models have successfully served smaller communities for many years, rising EMS call volumes and staffing challenges are causing many smaller municipalities to move toward a model that makes greater use of full-time staff. This is requiring more municipalities to seek funding for their public safety departments through a referendum.

## Q When and where do I vote?

Eau Claire 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, November 8, 2022.

**Voters can request a mailed absentee ballot from the City Clerk's office.** You may request an absentee ballot be mailed to you until 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 3, 2022. 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, November 8, 2022. Absentee ballots may be returned at your poll site on Election Day. Absentee ballots received after the close of polls will not be counted.

**In-person early voting will take place October 25 through November 4** and is open Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. A voting drive-thru will be set up in the parking lot of City Hall. A vehicle is not required to use the service.

**On November 8, all polling places will open at 7:00 a.m. and will close at 8:00 p.m.** Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote.

Additional voting information, including about polling places and requesting an absentee ballot, can be found on [EauClaireWI.gov/Elections](http://EauClaireWI.gov/Elections) and [myvote.wi.gov](http://myvote.wi.gov).