

CITY OF RACINE FIRE/EMS REFERENDUM



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE PROPOSED FIRE/EMS REFERENDUM ON THE BALLOT APRIL 2?

The referendum will ask voters to decide whether to support a \$1,500,000 annual increase in the property tax levy to maintain funding for nine full-time Paramedic/EMT positions. These positions are currently funded through a federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant that ends in March 2026..

WHAT WILL APPEAR ON THE BALLOT?

The formal resolution requesting permission to exceed the state revenue limit will appear as follows on the April 1 ballot:

"Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Racine for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2026, is limited to .679% which results in a levy of \$59,288,390. Shall the City of Racine be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2026, and on an ongoing basis for the purpose of enhancing, strengthening and equipping those Emergency Medical Services personnel for the Citizens of Racine by retaining Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians by a total of 2.53%, which results in a levy of \$60,788,390 and on an ongoing basis include the increase of \$1,500,000 for each fiscal year going forward?"

WHY IS THE CITY ASKING FOR THIS INCREASE NOW?

When the federal SAFER grant funding expires in spring 2026, the City's existing fire and EMS budget will be insufficient to maintain full staffing levels needed to meet both current demands and the community's projected future needs.

Despite implementing significant efficiencies and innovative solutions over the last 20 years, the Fire Department continues to see a rising number of emergency calls. With an aging population, limited staffing, and temporary funding set to expire, the City requires additional ongoing funding to maintain adequate emergency services.

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.

WHAT WILL IT MEAN IF A MAJORITY OF VOTERS VOTE "YES"?

If the referendum is approved by a majority of voters on April 1, the City of Racine will be able to maintain funding for nine full-time Paramedic/EMT positions currently funded through the SAFER grant. This will maintain staffing levels to ensure that there are adequate staff to sufficiently respond to calls for emergency services from City of Racine residents.

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 Paramedic/EMT services with potentially nine fewer Paramedic/EMT personnel. A rejection of the referendum would result in increased emergency response times, significant gaps in coverage and limited ability for personnel to attend to residents in an emergency.

As response times are a factor in Insurance Service Offices (ISO) scoring, a failed referendum may lead to an increase in insurance rates for commercial property owners.

WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS IF THE REFERENDUM PASSES?

If the referendum is approved, taxpayers will see an estimated property tax increase of \$31 annually, or \$0.60 per week per \$100,000 of assessed value, starting with bills issued in December 2025.

WHY IS THE INCREASE IN STATE SHARED REVENUE NOT THE SOLUTION?

The increases in shared revenue helped fund the 2024 budget and will be used to continue to fund those services. The proposed resolution will cover the expiring SAFER grant funding that currently pays for nine existing full-time staff through March of 2026.

WHY DO WE NEED TO KEEP THESE PARAMEDIC/EMT PERSONNEL?

Over the past two decades, Racine's staffing levels have remained the same — even though the calls for service have increased by 50%. This has made it increasingly difficult for the Department to respond to calls for service and remain compliant with the national standard of response time to an emergency.

WHAT ALTERNATIVES WERE CONSIDERED TO FUND FIRE/EMS SERVICES?

The City of Racine has explored and secured alternate funding sources whenever possible, but they do not provide the consistent, reliable funding that is needed to maintain the ideal level of emergency response services. One example is our use of SAFER grants — approved through the Common Council — to fund nine Paramedic/EMT positions. These types of funding sources, however, are temporary and not a sustainable source for long-term staffing needs. After carefully assessing the limited revenue options available to Wisconsin municipalities, we determined a referendum is the best path forward to ensure high-quality service to the community.

CAN THE INCREASED LEVY DOLLARS BE USED FOR ANYTHING OTHER THAN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PERSONNEL?

No. These funds will be overseen by the City of Racine Common Council when it approves the budget and will only be used for Fire Department Emergency Medical Services personnel. The funds will go to a segregated account that can only be used for this purpose.

I'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT FIRE/EMS REFERENDUMS RECENTLY. WHY IS THIS A TOPIC IN THE NEWS?

The situation we are facing in the City of Racine is not unique. Across the state, the needs of fire/EMS responders have grown, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the growing demands for service without additional resources. This requires more municipalities to seek funding for their fire/EMS departments through a referendum.

WHEN AND WHERE DO I VOTE?

City of Racine voters can cast their vote in one of three ways: through absentee mail-in ballots, early in-person voting at the City Clerk's office or one of the designated Community Centers, or in-person voting on Election Day, April 1, 2025.

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, March 27, 2025. 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, April 1, 2025. Absentee ballots may be returned to City Hall, Room 207 on election day. Absentee ballots received after the close of polls will not be counted.

In-person early voting will take place at City Hall on regular business days March 18–28 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturday, March 22, Saturday, March 29, and Sunday March 30, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. For additional locations and times, please visit voteracine.org.

On April 1, all polling places will open at 7 a.m. and will close at 8 p.m. Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote. For additional information on polling locations and absentee ballot requests, please visit MyVote Wisconsin at myvote.wi.gov.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS REFERENDUM?

Additional information about this fire/EMS referendum is available online at cityofracine.gov/fire/referendum.

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Send any questions or feedback to the City of Racine Fire Department at RFD_info@cityofracine.org.