

PUBLIC SAFETY REFERENDUM FAQs



What is the proposed public safety referendum that is on the ballot for Tuesday, April 2?

The referendum will ask voters to decide whether or not to support an increase in the Village's annual property tax levy, beginning with tax bills issued in December 2024, to cover the cost for **ten additional firefighter-paramedics and four additional police officers**. Additional information about this public safety referendum is available online at germantownwi.gov/Public-Safety-Referendum



What will appear on the ballot?

The formal question will appear as follows on the April 2 ballot:

Under state law, the increase in the levy of the Village of Germantown for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2025, is limited to 2.97%, which results in a levy of \$16,212,166. Shall the Village of Germantown be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2025, and on an ongoing basis, for the purpose of hiring four (4) new police officers and ten (10) new firefighter-paramedics, by a total of 8.941%, which results in a levy of \$17,661,634?



When and where do I vote?

Election Day is Tuesday, April 2, 2024. All polling places will be open 7:00 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote. Additional voting information, including polling places and information about requesting an absentee ballot, can be found at germantownwi.gov/104/Registering-to-Vote



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

State of Wisconsin statutes limit the amount of property taxes a municipality can collect each year to the percent increase in equalized value from net new construction. In order to exceed the levy limit, the municipality needs voter approval through a village-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 2, the **Village of Germantown will be able to add ten additional firefighter-paramedics and four additional police officers** – ensuring there are adequate public safety staff to sufficiently respond to increasing calls for service and provide proactive public safety services throughout the community.

If approved, the annual property tax would increase by an estimated \$51 annually, or about \$1 per week, per \$100,000 in assessed property value. The impact to an average Germantown home valued at \$350,000 would be \$178.13 annually, or about \$3.43 per week.



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

If the referendum is rejected by a majority of voters, **the Village will be faced with difficult decisions about how to address the growing need for public safety services.** The Germantown Fire and Police Departments will be unable to increase staffing levels and existing public safety staff will continue to be limited in their ability to respond to calls or provide proactive services.

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Why propose this referendum now?

Current public safety funding is insufficient to meet the current and projected needs of the community. **Between 2016 and 2023, the Village of Germantown Fire Department experienced a nearly 41% increase in calls for emergency services, and nearly 20% of the 2,452 calls for service in 2023 occurred simultaneously.** Due to funding limits, there currently is not enough staff to adequately respond to simultaneous emergencies. If staff is unavailable, the Germantown Fire Department must call a neighboring department to respond. In some cases, ambulances must drive from as far as Sussex – increasing the amount of time before a first responder reaches a patient. The Germantown Fire Department relied on mutual aid 124 times in 2023.

If the referendum is approved, the Fire Department will have 7-8 personnel on duty per shift, enabling four-member crews to immediately depart the station and enter a burning structure rather than having to wait for the arrival of paid-on-call staff or rely on neighboring department support.

The Germantown Police Department is experiencing continued staffing challenges as the community continues to grow. Germantown's type of calls for service has shifted over time, with an increase in drug-related calls – including overdoses – and a nearly 67% increase in retail theft since 2016. **Drug and property-related calls often require multiple officers to respond and necessitate more officer time** from the point of a call to the completion of paperwork.

If approved by a referendum, four additional police officers will increase Germantown's public safety response capabilities by adding two additional officers to the first and second shifts – the busiest shifts of the day. With this increase, the Germantown Police Department will be able to effectively respond to simultaneous calls for service and provide proactive police services that are critical to ensuring the continued safety of the entire community.



What other alternatives were considered to fund public safety?

The Village of Germantown will continue to be a careful steward of taxpayer dollars. To-date, the Village has considered all available options to help mitigate public safety challenges, leverage cost-saving measures and identify funding from outside sources.

To begin addressing public safety challenges and prioritize the safety of our residents, the Village increased the Fire and Police Department budgets for 2024 - making the difficult decision to reduce budgets and services in other departments - to fund four additional police officers and two firefighter-paramedics. This budget increase was a stop-gap measure that still does not provide enough staffing to truly meet the public safety needs of the community.

Every year the Departments apply for applicable funding grants. The Germantown Police Department has applied for COPS grants through the US Department of Justice on an annual basis and hasn't been awarded the grant since 1997. The Fire Department has applied for SAFER grants through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) each year and has not received funding support.



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

Germantown is not alone in experiencing public safety staffing challenges. According to [a study from the Wisconsin Policy Forum](#), many municipalities across the state are facing budgetary challenges that are requiring more municipalities to seek funding for their public safety departments through referendums.

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Q Why do we need to go to referendum for these funds? Can't the Village borrow to help fund public safety services?

Funds necessary to support ongoing public safety costs, including the salaries and benefits for additional firefighter-paramedics and police officers, are part of the Village's operating budget. This means that **the funds are necessary on a recurring basis**. While the Village can borrow for one-time expenses **it is not permissible to borrow for ongoing staffing expenses**.

Q Where can I learn more about this referendum?

Additional information about this Public Safety referendum is available online at germantownwi.gov/Public-Safety-Referendum

Q Who can I contact to get information about the referendum?

Send any questions or feedback to the Village of Germantown at referendum@germantownwi.gov

