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**CITY OF BARABOO PLACES OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM QUESTION ON NOVEMBER
BALLOT**

City voters to consider increased property tax levy to fund city services, retain and hire staff

BARABOO, WIS. – Yesterday, the Baraboo City Council voted to place a referendum question on the November 5, 2024 ballot. Voters will be asked to decide whether they support a \$2 million increase in the property tax levy, beginning in 2025, to maintain its current level of service in the face of rising operational costs and to fund additional staff to meet the needs of the growing community.

The referendum comes in response to increasing costs of City services due to inflation and the needs of a growing population. Between 2013 and 2024, the City's population has increased by 7.58%, while the number of full-time employees has decreased by 7% due to budgetary constraints.

"Despite our proactive approach, the City of Baraboo continues to face funding challenges due to increased costs to provide service to a growing population and maintain a high quality of life and services for our residents," said City of Baraboo Administrator John Young. "Since 2014, inflation has increased by 34%, while the City's tax levy has only increased by 12%. Following a thorough review of available options by the City of Baraboo and its Common Council, the City has determined the only way to secure required funding is to increase the local property tax levy through a referendum."

Over the years, the City has found creative ways to reduce expenditures while upholding the quality of services provided to the community. These cost-saving measures over the last decade have included privatizing refuse collection, delaying the hiring of unfilled positions across the City, and contracting for third-party professional services, among others.

“The City has run lean for a long time in an attempt to keep costs low for residents,” said Baraboo City Mayor Rob Nelson. “While that approach worked in the past, years of population growth and rising operation costs have made this approach unsustainable. A referendum is the best path forward to ensure high-quality services to our growing community.”

While increases to shared revenue from the State this year have provided a much-needed boost in municipal funding, it is not enough to offset years of underfunding and rising costs due to inflation. Without additional funding, the City will have to make difficult decisions regarding services to the community such as closing the Ochsner Park Zoo, reducing library hours and considering a closure of the Campbell Park swimming pool.

“We understand that no one likes to see their taxes increase,” Nelson added, “but we’re giving residents the choice to maintain the parks, roads, and public safety services that make Baraboo such a healthy and vibrant place to live.”

If the referendum is approved, the City will be able to maintain its current level of support to the community, and add staff to help maintain the City’s operations. The property tax levy in 2025 would increase by approximately \$2 million, establishing the new property tax going forward. This translates to a property tax increase of an estimated \$206 annually, or about \$3.96 per week per \$100,000 of assessed value.

The referendum will appear as follows on the Tuesday, November 5, 2024 ballot:

Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of Baraboo for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2025, is limited to 3.189%, which results in a levy of \$9,579,603. Shall the City of Baraboo be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2025, for the purpose of funding the ongoing operations and services of the City, by a total of 20.878%, which results in a levy of \$11,579,603, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$2,000,000 for each fiscal year going forward?

The City will be sharing information about the referendum with residents online, through direct mail and at public information sessions ahead of the November election. More information will be available on the City’s website in the coming weeks.

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