



Official statement on the 2023 Public Safety Referendum from Howard Village Administrator Paul Evert

This April, the Village of Howard is joining a growing list of communities asking voters to consider increasing the amount of money spent on Public Safety. Voters specifically are being asked to allow the Howard Village Board to increase its levy to pay for improved police, fire, and rescue services. With flat state funding levels for 20 years, levy limit referendum have become much more frequent in Wisconsin, with 25 municipalities placing these measures on the ballot between 2019 and the spring of 2022. In 2022, there were 37 public safety referendum on ballots in Wisconsin.

Since August of 2022, our Village Board has considered how best to proceed as Howard faces increasing demands on our Public Safety services, especially the Howard Fire Department, which is experiencing firsthand what many communities around the country are dealing with – a significant decrease in people able and willing to serve as volunteer or paid-on-call firefighters.

Howard historically has been a fiscally responsible community. Since it became a village in 1957, Howard has been one of the lowest per capita spending communities in the state when compared to other communities of similar size. If approved, Howard will remain one of the lowest per capita spenders in the state on Public Safety, but the efficient services the village provides will be improved.

Most Howard residents are unaware that on a typical night, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., we do not have firefighters at the station. Yet, while the number of structure fires have increased during the evenings, our paid-on-call firefighters leave their homes when dispatched, arrive at the station, and then head out to the emergency. This additional funding will address this critical gap in service.

The village also has experienced increased response times from our contracted paramedic provider. In 2015, there were 380 calls for emergency medical services. In 2022, there were 775 of such calls. In 2022, 19% of those calls took 10 minutes or more for an ambulance to arrive. This additional funding will improve emergency medical response times.

Finally, the service provided by our Police Department, which is contracted through the Brown County Sheriff's Department, will have increased staffing so the village has two fully staffed patrol cars 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The additional patrol hours will free up our directed enforcement officers to concentrate on proactive community policing and the priorities our community sets for them.

The increase in the levy provided by the referendum is \$765,000. The total cost of these service improvements is greater, but anticipated ambulance revenue will be used to offset the total burden on the taxpayer. This translates to a \$33.24 increase in property taxes per \$100,000 of value. The average home in Howard has an assessed value of \$289,000, which means the tax increase from a successful referendum would be \$96.05.

I give a lot of credit to our Village Board for placing this question on the April ballot. So often, the right decision is not the easy one and is avoided or deferred as a result. Asking voters to increase taxes is not easy, and we are prepared to provide detailed information and answer any questions Howard voters may have between now and April 4th.