



City of De Pere

Press Release

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Binding referendum question coming Nov. 6 for VFW, Legion aquatic facilities

DE PERE, WIS. – Regarding the issue of aquatic facilities, the City of De Pere will hold a binding referendum on the Nov. 6 general election ballot. The decision to host a city-wide referendum on the issue was approved by a unanimous 7-0 vote at the Tuesday, Aug. 21 Common Council meeting.

The referendum, in simple terms, will ask residents if they wish to allow the City to exceed the tax levy limits each year – on an ongoing basis - by up to \$900,000 to first build and then maintain new aquatic facilities at the current sites of both VFW and Legion pools.

Prior to approving the motion for a binding referendum, the Common Council also unanimously rescinded its previous decision to close Legion Pool and construct a singular aquatic center for the City at VFW Park. Here's why this was necessary: A referendum, whether initiated by the Common Council or by citizens through a direct petition, cannot undo a previous Council decision. Therefore, the previous decision related to the aquatic center needed to be rescinded.

ESTIMATED FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Approval of the referendum question to allow the City to exceed the property tax levy limit by \$900,000 to improve and transform pools located at VFW and Legion Park into aquatic facilities and for operating those facilities will increase the City's estimated property tax mill rate from \$6.38 to \$6.84 per \$1,000 in assessed value. This is equivalent to a 7.21% increase in the City's property tax rate.

So, the bottom line for property tax payers: A passed referendum - in conjunction with the City Council authorizing to exceed the levy limit by the full \$900,000 - would increase your City portion of your property taxes approximately \$46 per \$100,000 of assessed property value. For example, if you own a home or business assessed at \$100,000, your property tax could increase \$46 per year if the referendum is approved. If you own a home or business assessed at \$200,000, your property tax could increase \$92 per year if the referendum is approved, etc.

REFERENDUM QUESTION:

With the Council's approval on Aug. 21, the upcoming referendum question will tentatively read as follows (subject to state required adjustments):

"Under state law, the increase in the levy of the City of De Pere for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2019, is limited to 1.98% which results in a levy of \$12,442,502.00 Shall the City of De Pere be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2019, and on an ongoing basis, for improving and transforming the pools located at VFW Park and at Legion Park into aquatic facilities and for operating those aquatic facilities, by a total of \$900,000.00, which results in a levy of \$13,342,502.00 A "YES" vote allows the Common Council to exceed the State imposed levy limits for improving and transforming the pools located at VFW Park and at Legion Park into aquatic facilities and for operating those aquatic facilities. A "NO" vote does not allow the Common Council to exceed the State imposed levy limits for improving and transforming the pools located at VFW Park and at Legion Park into aquatic facilities and for operating those aquatic facilities."

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

As a general summary and clarification, a few things of note to be especially aware of regarding this referendum question:

- The referendum is binding rather than advisory. It provides the City Council the authority to exceed the levy limit by up to \$900,000 annually to improve and transform pools located at VFW and Legion Park into aquatic facilities and for operating those facilities
- Within the question, flexible language referring to “aquatic facilities” is intentional to provide the greatest latitude in determining what facilities are desired and achievable.
- It’s important to note the referendum language of “improving and transforming the pools.” In short, if the referendum were to pass, this indicates that the current City pools would not simply be repaired or rebuilt, as is, in an identical way. By law, any updates would have to bring facilities up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. “Improving and transforming” therefore means that some form of new aquatic facility – pool or otherwise - would be built at VFW and Legion to meet these requirements.
- No actual designs or concepts for what would come to VFW and Legion parks are in place at this time, and would only be developed after the outcome of the referendum is known. The previous proposed aquatic center designs for VFW were never approved on by the Common Council. Whether those plans will be used in the future is unknown.
- The flexibility within this referendum question does not prohibit the City from exploring other sources of funding to help offset the cost of building two new aquatic facilities.
- Perhaps the biggest thing to know is it allows the City of De Pere to exceed the levy limit up to \$900,000 *each* year (not singular, but ongoing) but it does not require the City to do so. With a binding referendum, there are only two choices available - exceed the limit for one year or exceed the limit on an ongoing basis. The City cannot limit it to a certain number of years.
- In summary, if the referendum is approved, the City Council could increase the tax levy to collect up to an additional \$900,000. It is up to the City Council each year to determine how much the City will need. The tax payers currently subsidize operations of the pools each year. If this referendum is approved, up to an additional \$900,000 can be collected by the City for construction and operational expenses, in addition to other budgetary funding sources.
- If the referendum is not approved, the City’s Park Board and City Council will reconsider the pools and aquatic facility issue and determine what actions will be taken in the future.

If there are any updates or changes to this referendum question, the City will post information on its Facebook page and website at de-pere.org.

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