

**FOR RELEASE:**

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**VILLAGE OF SOMERS PLACES REFERENDUM QUESTION ON APRIL BALLOT**

*Voters to decide whether to approve property tax levy increase to help fund eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics, improve services, use all three ambulances*

**SOMERS, WIS.** – On Tuesday, January 20, the Somers Village Board voted to place a referendum question on the April 7, 2026 ballot. Voters will be asked whether they support a permanent \$1,300,000 increase in the property tax levy to help fund eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics and improve services.

“The Village has experienced tremendous growth over the past decade, straining the Fire Department’s ability to provide timely fire and emergency medical services. Increased staffing will allow us to provide paramedic-level service and dispatch all three ambulances at any given time, meeting these growing community needs,” said Ben Andersen, Fire Chief, Somers Fire & Rescue Department. “We’ve secured federal SAFER grant dollars to help us make these improvements in the short term, but the Village must also cover costs to improve service delivery and ensure reliable, skilled, and quick emergency responses.”

An approved referendum would result in an estimated \$115 property tax increase per \$100,000 in assessed property value. The average Somers home with an assessed value of \$355,000 is estimated to see a property tax increase of approximately \$405, starting with bills issued in December 2026.

The referendum question will appear as follows on the Tuesday, April 7, 2026 ballot:

*“Under state law, the increase in the levy of the Village of Somers for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2027, is limited to 2.473%, which results in a levy of \$4,420,664. **Shall the Village of Somers be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2027, for the purposes to hire and retain eight (8) additional firefighter / paramedic positions for the Somers Fire Department, and continuing to operate Fire & EMS Services, by a total of 29.407%, which results in a levy of \$5,720,664, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$1,300,000 for each fiscal year going forward?**”*

**Increasing Calls for Service, Critical Need For Increased Staffing**

Increased staff capacity is critical to meet growing community needs and provide timely service in emergencies. Somers has seen a significant increase in calls for service from 2015 to 2025. In 2025, the Somers Fire Department responded to 1,778 calls – a record high – and received simultaneous calls for service 728 times.

The Somers Fire & Rescue Department includes 13 full-time Firefighter / Paramedics and has the ability to assign two of these staff to each station during each shift. One part-time employee is also assigned to work at Station 1 each day to help operate vehicles and respond to calls for service. Based on availability and level of need, responses are supported by additional part-time staff who are not fully certified and are not based in stations during shifts.

Limited staffing impacts service delivery. Based on current staffing levels, the Department can only guarantee operation of two ambulances at any given time – one from each station. Not all staff are paramedics, so patients can only receive the highest-level service when fully trained staff are available and an ambulance can be operated.

By adding eight full-time, fully trained Firefighter / Paramedics, the Department can increase daily staffing, guarantee paramedic-level service and guarantee the deployment of all three ambulances at once to meet growing community needs.

#### **Requirement to Maintain Staffing Levels After Boost From Federal Grant**

Recognizing its need for additional Firefighter / Paramedics, the Village applied for and received the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) SAFER grant. For three years, that grant will partially fund the eight additional positions needed, with the Village required to cover the remaining compensation costs and all necessary equipment for the duration of the grant.

If the referendum is approved, the Village of Somers would be able to permanently increase the property tax levy to meet this federal requirement, cover the costs of equipment, vehicles and related operational expenses and fund the additional staff long term.

If the referendum is rejected by a majority of voters, the Village would not be able to increase the property tax levy to fund the additional positions. Trustees would need to make a decision about how to fund its portion of costs for the duration of the SAFER grant, potentially pulling funding from reserves or borrowing. Without additional revenue, the Village would not have long-term funding to maintain the eight positions and would likely experience additional strain as the community continues to grow.

#### **Community Survey Shows Majority Support Referendum Question**

In the fall, the Village released a report outlining these challenges, potential solutions and the limited funding options available. In part, that report describes how property tax levies are limited by state law. Municipalities are permitted to increase property taxes only up to the amount necessary to repay loans, by an amount tied to increases to a municipality's equalized value from "net new construction," or if approved by voters via referendum.

The Village then worked with third-party, independent survey firm Community Perceptions to administer and analyze a survey sent to all households, which demonstrated that 53% of respondents support the Village pursuing a referendum to help fund additional full-time Fire and Rescue staff.

The Village of Somers will share information about the referendum with residents online, through direct mail and at public information sessions ahead of April's election. More information will be available on the Village website in the coming weeks at [www.somerswi.gov/public-safety](http://www.somerswi.gov/public-safety)

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