

City of Gresham Measure 26-239

Official Title: Five-year operating levy for police, fire, homeless and crisis response

Question: Shall Gresham increase and stabilize police, fire, homeless, crisis response with five-year levy, \$1.50/\$1,000 assessed value, beginning July 1, 2023? This measure may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent.

Financial Impact: This measure increases current property taxes by \$1.50 per \$1000 of assessed value. The City notes that a homeowner whose property is worth an assessed value of \$228,000 would pay \$28.50 per month, or \$342 per year. The proposed tax will raise approximately \$13 million in the first year (2023-24) with a steady increase of up to \$14.6 million in 2027-28.

Notes: Assessed value (AV) is the value used to calculate property tax. It is shown on the property tax statement. It is NOT the same as real market value (RMV), which is the market price of the home.

Probable Results of “Yes” Vote: If the levy passes, funding will be used for staff and services in the following departments: police (at least 62 percent), fire (at least 35 percent) and homeless services (no more than 2.5 percent).

Probable Results of “No” Vote: If the levy fails, property owners’ tax rates will not change. The City of Gresham will face a shortfall of \$8 million and possible layoffs.

Background:

Currently, according to the City, property taxes fund only 44 percent of the costs of safety services provided by the police and fire departments. Without additional funding, the City will need to address an \$8 million shortfall in July 2023 with budget cuts that it says could reduce the ability of police and firefighters to respond, especially to multiple emergency calls.

The Oregonian reported in 2022 that crime rates in Gresham had dropped from 87.1 per 1000 residents in 2013 to 52.9 per 1000 in 2021. On the other hand, homicides increased from 7 in 2013 to 11 in 2022. Furthermore, police data show 175 reported shootings in 2021 and 195 in the first nine months of 2022.

In 2022, the City of Gresham launched its Safe Gresham initiative, which has been a collaborative effort between Gresham’s Youth Services team as well as partner agencies and was funded in part by the federal American Rescue Plan. Under this initiative, the City worked to provide

- An expansion of the City’s advanced camera program in high crime areas
- Recruiting and retention of City police

- Safety patrols with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and the Portland Police Bureau
- A Youth Services Division to prevent youth violence
- A Special Victims' Investigation Unit
- Over 13 non-sworn support staff

In a KOIN interview in August 2022, Mayor Travis Stovall noted that, despite a rising number of shootings, this prevention and intervention work was reducing homicides.

The increased staffing funded by the levy would allow Gresham police more opportunities to invest in crime prevention strategies like Safe Gresham. Moreover, organizational assessments in the police and fire departments have led to the conclusion that the increased population in Gresham has increased the demand for services.

Summary of Measure:

This operating levy of \$1.50 per \$1000 of assessed value would provide funding for police and fire departments as well as homeless services in the City of Gresham. This funding would allow the City to retain current services and staff and add positions to all three departments. According to the ballot measure explanatory statement, it would

- Restore the Neighborhood Enforcement Team
- Reduce response times
- Enhance crime reduction efforts
- Expand homeless services to evenings/weekends
- Reduce 911 calls with a trained mental health crisis resource, such as a clinician

More specifically, levy funding would be allocated as follows:

- At least 62.5 percent to the Gresham Police Department to retain 13 temporary positions and add 26 in mental health, community safety, support staff and sworn officers.
- At least 35 percent to the Gresham Fire Department to retain four temporary positions and add 16, which would include firefighters, nurses and emergency medical technicians to respond to 911 calls.
- At least 2.5 percent to Homeless Services to retain one temporary position and provide services for nights and weekends.

Overall, the City aims to enhance its ability to respond to emergencies, reduce response times and promote safety through mental health counseling, inspections at schools, and gun violence prevention. The measure stipulates that a citizen committee will oversee use of the funds.

Supporters Say:

- The demands on our first responders have increased as our community's needs have increased. It is imperative that we begin to address our financial challenges and ensure our ability to keep our community safe.
- The new mid-county library provides important new opportunities for the people of Gresham, while this public safety levy, along with the Safe Gresham Initiative, help the community fight crime.

Opponents Say:

There is no organized opposition to this measure.