



## FREQUENTLY ASKED

# QUESTIONS



## PUBLIC SAFETY REFERENDUM APRIL 4, 2023

### What is the proposed public safety referendum that is on the ballot for Tuesday, April 4?

The referendum will ask voters to decide whether or not to support an increase in the Village's annual tax levy, beginning with tax bills issued in December 2023, to cover the cost for six additional firefighter/paramedics and eight additional police officers, and the personal protective equipment they require.

### What will appear on the ballot?

The formal resolution requesting permission to exceed the state revenue limit will appear as follows on the April 4 ballot:

*"Under state law, the increase in the levy of the Village of Caledonia for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2024, is limited to 1.96%, which results in a levy of \$17,497,645. Shall the Village of Caledonia be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2024, for the purpose of hiring and retaining additional sworn police officers and fire and rescue personnel, by a total of 10.179%, which results in a levy of \$19,278,645, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$1,781,000 for each fiscal year going forward?"*

### When and where do I vote?

Election Day is Tuesday, April 4, 2023. All polling places will open at 7:00 a.m. and will close at 8:00 p.m. Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote. Additional voting information, including polling places and

information about requesting an absentee ballot, can be found on the Village's website at [caledonia-wi.gov/voter-information](https://caledonia-wi.gov/voter-information)

### Why do we need a referendum to raise the tax levy limit?

The State of Wisconsin statutes limit the amount of property taxes a municipality can collect each year. In order to exceed the levy limit, the municipality needs voter approval through a village-wide referendum.

### What will it mean if a majority of voters vote "yes"?

If the referendum is approved by a majority of voters on April 4, the Village of Caledonia will be able to add six additional firefighter/paramedics and eight additional police officers – to ensure adequate staff to respond to calls for service from Caledonia residents, ensure our community has the resources necessary to meet the growing needs of our community and provide modern, professional public safety services.

If approved, the annual property tax would increase by \$57 per year, or \$1.10 per week, for every \$100,000 of property value, starting with the bills issued in December 2023. The impact to a property valued at \$300,000 would be \$171 annually, or about \$3.30 per week.



## What does it mean if a majority vote “no” and the referendum fails?

If the referendum is rejected by a majority of voters, the Village will be faced with difficult decisions about how to address the growing need for public safety services. Caledonia received a three-year grant that leveraged federal dollars to fund six firefighter/paramedics through March 2023. While the federal funds will run out in March, reducing the number of Fire Department staff the Village can maintain, Caledonia has effectively budgeted to cover the cost for three of those six positions, but will still lose three firefighter/paramedics if the referendum fails.

Additionally, if the referendum fails, the Caledonia Police Department will not be able to hire additional officers. As a result, the Police Department will be unable to meet the growing needs of the community, nor will it be able effectively patrol its extremely large geographic area or handle more than one call at a time that has moderate complexity and/or requiring a moderate level of resources.

## Why are we proposing this referendum now?

Current public safety funding is insufficient to meet the current and projected needs of the community; the Village of Caledonia Police Department ranks last in officers per square mile and in officers per 1,000 population, when compared to surrounding peer communities. Caledonia is unable to effectively patrol its extremely large geographic area with current staffing nor is it capable of effectively handling more than a single call for service at a time of moderate complexity and/or requiring a moderate level of resources.

The fundamental challenge driving the need for funding to support additional firefighter/paramedics is an increase in calls for service - a trend that is projected to continue as the Village of Caledonia continues to grow and population ages.

## Why do we need additional firefighter/paramedics?

Between 2015 and 2021, calls for service to the Caledonia Fire Department increased by 56 percent, largely due to increased calls for EMS service. Despite this increase in demand, without a referendum total staffing will decline as federal grant dollars the Department relies on to fund staffing expire in 2023 – further straining public safety response capabilities.

Current staffing levels make it difficult for the Caledonia Fire Department to provide a consistent, high-quality response, and hiring six additional firefighter/paramedics would increase the Department’s minimum staffing to 13 per shift, enabling a second ambulance at Station 12 – which has the highest call volume – to be available at all times.

## Why do we need additional police officers?

Current funding is insufficient to enable officers to effectively patrol the large geographic area of the Village or effectively handle more than a single call for service at a time that has moderate complexity and/or requires a moderate level of resources. The Caledonia Police Department ranks last in officers per square mile and in officers per 1,000 population in comparison to peer communities, forcing each officer on duty in Caledonia to patrol about 11.5 square miles of the nearly 46-square-mile Village - an area larger than many entire municipalities in Wisconsin.

In addition, the Department is facing more complexity in their calls for service which require more staff time to investigate, draft search warrants and conduct searches, digitally and forensically analyze computer and cellular devices, review video, collaborate with criminal justice partners, interview witnesses and suspects and bring to conclusion.

Increasing the number of officers by eight would enable the Caledonia Police Department to augment its shift staffing to meet peak demand, adequately patrol the Village while balancing proactive and reactive duties and having a greater presence in the community.



### **What alternatives were considered to fund public safety?**

The Village of Caledonia has consistently evaluated a range of options to fund public safety. It has adjusted other departmental budgets to add one officer to the Police Department in 2020 and one officer in 2021. It was determined that the level of cuts that would be required to meet public safety needs would significantly impact other services provided by the Village.

The Village has also increased its fee for service to help cover costs, including through increases in ambulance fees to support the Fire Department. The Village has also secured outside funding for public safety, including applying for and receiving federal SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Emergency Response) grants.

The Village of Caledonia Police Department has been very active in applying for federal grant programs, including the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant, but has not received funds.

### **Is the Village considering consolidating the Fire Department? I have heard there was a report about a partnership with neighboring departments? If we are considering consolidation, why is a referendum necessary?**

The Village of Caledonia is exploring all options when it comes to providing high-quality services to the Caledonia community, including potential partnerships with neighboring departments. A study was recently conducted by McMahon Associates, Inc., indicating that the Village of Caledonia Fire Department is currently understaffed and would need to add additional staff to the Department for consolidation with neighboring agencies to be feasible. In other words, even if the Village does pursue further partnership with other Fire Departments in the future, a referendum is necessary to increase our staffing level and enable a partnership to move forward.

### **I recently saw that the Village is going to spend \$10 million on Crawford Park. How can the Village pay for upgrades to the park, but needs to increase taxes to fund public safety services?**

The Village has not allocated or expended any funds from the tax levy on Crawford Park. In October 2022, the Board of Trustees approved a plan that will guide the Village in how to prioritize future upgrades and improvements to the Park – upgrades that will be funded through park impact fees, donations and other sources.

### **I've heard a lot about public safety referendums recently. Why is this a topic in the news?**

According to a study from the **Wisconsin Policy Forum**, many municipalities across the state are facing budgetary challenges. The state generally has limited annual increases in municipality operating budgets to the previous year's rate of local net new construction – a metric that has lagged inflation in recent years. This is requiring more municipalities to seek funding for their public safety departments through a referendum.

### **Why do we need to go to referendum for these funds? Can't the Village borrow to help fund public safety services?**

Funds necessary to support ongoing public safety costs, including the salaries and benefits for additional firefighter/paramedics and police officers, are part of the Village's operating budget. This means that the funds are necessary on a recurring basis. While the Village can borrow for one-time expenses, like the new Public Safety building, it is not permissible to borrow for ongoing staffing expenses.

### **Where can I learn more about this referendum?**

Additional information about this Public Safety referendum is available online at: [caledonia-wi.gov/referendum](https://caledonia-wi.gov/referendum)

### **Who can I contact to get information about the referendum?**

Send any questions or feedback to the Village of Caledonia at [referendum@caledonia-wi.gov](mailto:referendum@caledonia-wi.gov)