

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COMMUNITY SURVEY SHOWS SUPPORT FOR REFERENDUM TO FUND CRITICAL WESTERN LAKES  
FIRE DISTRICT STAFFING, WAGE INCREASES**

*62% of respondents support property tax increase*

**Oconomowoc, Wis.** – Last night at a meeting of the Western Lakes Fire District Joint Owners, elected officials reviewed final results from a community survey on public safety funding. The highlights revealed that nearly two-thirds of the 3,017 survey respondents support a referendum to increase local property taxes to ensure sustainable staffing and increase wages to bring fire and EMS capabilities in line with industry standards and best practices.

"These results demonstrate the value Western Lakes residents place on high-quality fire and EMS services," said Western Lakes Fire District Chief Bradley Bowen. "This data will be incredibly useful as we determine how best to move forward as a District."

In March, WLFD released an options assessment detailing the staffing challenges faced by the District, the identified solutions, and potential options for municipalities served by the District to provide necessary funding. The options assessment cites increased calls for services, a growing population and decreased availability of local paid-on-call firefighters as putting a significant strain on WLFD, resulting in increased response times that put residents and properties at risk. Improving WLFD's staff and increasing wages will require an additional \$6.3 million provided by the communities that receive WLFD fire services, based on a funding formula that accounts for a community's calls for service, population, the value of their facilities and land value.

WLFD worked with Community Perceptions, an independent Wisconsin-based research firm with expertise in conducting community surveys, to administer and analyze the survey. The full survey report will be available on WLFD's website, and high-level takeaways include:

- 93 percent of respondents believe it is either extremely important or somewhat important to have high-quality emergency services;
- 62 percent of the respondents indicated they are in support of a referendum to increase property taxes to fund necessary staffing and wage increases; and
- 21 percent of respondents indicated they are in support of a wheel tax to fund necessary staffing and wage increases.

Officials will review and consider those results as they discuss the needs of the community and funding options to meet those needs. Individual municipal boards of the communities to which WLFD provides fire protection services will determine how they may raise the additional funds needed to cover their community's share of the necessary funding increase. Should a community decide to pursue increased property taxes through a referendum, a referendum question may appear on August 9, 2022 ballots.

**About Western Lakes Fire District:**

The Western Lakes Fire District has deep roots in Lake Country. In 1968, the Dousman Fire Department changed its name to the Dousman Fire District as it expanded its service area. That began a series of deeper partnerships among area communities to enhance fire protection service. In 2013, the Summit Fire District merged with the Dousman Fire District and in 2017, the City of Oconomowoc Fire Department and Dousman Fire District consolidated to become the Western Lakes Fire District (WLFD). In 2020, the Okauchee Fire Department and Stone Bank Fire Department consolidated and joined WLFD. Together, WLFD serves a population of more than 54,500 from 11 municipalities in Waukesha, Jefferson and Dodge Counties. WLFD provides both Fire and EMS services to the City of Oconomowoc, Town of Oconomowoc, Town of Merton, Town of Ottawa, Village of Dousman, Village of Lac La Belle and Village of Summit. The District provides EMS services to the Town of Ashippun, Town of Concord, Town of Sullivan and Village of Sullivan. Learn more at <https://westernlakesfd.org/>.

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