



## Westfield Township Fire and Rescue District Levy: Frequently Asked Questions

On Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, Westfield Township voters will have an opportunity to vote for or against a 5-year, 2.5Mill operating levy in support of Westfield Fire and Rescue (F&R) District. After careful consideration and budget cuts in 2024, the Trustees, along with the Fire Chief examined the current and future state of the District to determine the levy amount. The overall goal is to continue the service and timely response to emergencies when seconds matter.

### **If passed, the levy will:**

- Help the F&R District plan and prepare for the future – We need to retain the dedicated fire and rescue staff we have, plus grow the team based on community needs. As an example, the cost associated with bringing on and hiring a new Fire & Rescue employee can start at approximately \$8,800. Onboarding a new paramedic is significantly more.
- Provide the quality and timely service your family has come to expect – Since August of 2023, the Fire & Rescue team has not missed a single call.
- Replace older fire trucks and equipment, eliminating the rising costs to repair aged equipment – The Fire Chief has defined two vehicles that need replaced, costing approximately \$1.3M.
- Grow Fire District services to adjust to an aging community – According to **2020** Census data, 55% of adults (people over age 20) in Westfield Township are aged 55 or older.

### **Q: How does the Fire District determine the millage to ask for?**

The F&R District didn't start out with a particular millage in mind. Instead, the Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, and Township Trustees determined the need for additional funding based on operating budget review and the capital spending plan. By using these numbers as a guide, they determined the dollar figure required to run the District at current operating levels for the next several years, then projected operating cost increases and future capital spending.

The Township Trustees sent this information to the Medina County Auditor's Office to determine the millage needed to meet the projected figures. The Auditor's Office responded that the need will be 2.5Mill.

### **Q: How much will this levy cost?**

A new 2.5Mill levy will produce revenue of approximately \$522,700 per year for 5 years. Based on figures from the County Auditor's Office:

\$310,000 Each homeowner in the Westfield Township (unincorporated) would pay an additional **property tax** cost of \$87.50 per year based on a home valued at \$100,000.

\$212,700 Westfield Village pays for Fire & EMS service out of their general fund. This will increase their payment to the Township by 2.5Mill over 5 years.

There is also a 2.5Mill continuous levy that passed in 2012 that is still collecting at a rate of 1.662, costing taxpayers \$51.10 a year based on a home valued at \$100,000.



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*Additionally, the Township is still collecting on a 20 year, \$3M bond passed for the Fire & Rescue building in 2018. The collection rate is 1.25Mill costing taxpayers \$43.75 a year based on a home value at \$100,000.*

### **Q: What will the Fire District use this money for?**

The Fire District has had a strict capital spending plan in place for the last 5 years. However, like most plans, things change. The majority of the new funding will be used to upgrade equipment. One fire truck and one ambulance currently utilized by the District are aging, and the cost of operating those vehicles is increasing. As time passes, maintenance costs will continue to rise. It will be less expensive to replace these aging vehicles than pay mounting repair costs.

- The NFPA (National Fire Protection Agency) 1901 Standard states that the life expectancy for fire apparatus is approximately 20 years for front line apparatus, with a 5-year reserve.
- The 1999 Fire truck turns 25 years old this year and repair costs totaling \$32,533 over the past 4 years.
- The 2014 ambulance is currently in need of costly repairs, with repairs costs already totaling \$14,741 over the past 4 years.

### **Expenses are categorized as follows:**

#### **Operating expenses:**

Equipment repairs and maintenance has increased:

- The 2024 maintenance budget is already depleted with several repairs needed:
  - 1999 Fire Truck (wheel hub, power steering, oil leak, pump work).
  - 2014 ambulance in need of repairs (valve cover gasket leak and overall maintenance, oil issues).
- The rise in utility costs (water, electric, gas, insurance) led to the decision to place a levy on the ballot. These costs have increased approximately 62% over the last 5 years.
- Our sheriff's contract for 2024 was \$20,327. This contract goes up 4% annually.
- Contracted services (building, ladder, and hose testing, mowing radios, etc.) have increased more than 4 times the amount over the last 4 years, now totaling over \$53,000 for 2024.

#### **Salary and employees:**

- Competitive Salaries – Through September 2024, the District has saved over \$24,827 in salary reductions. Although this team works extremely well together, retention is a concern. Other surrounding districts pay more in salary while we have made salary costs.
- Rise in employee insurance and education.
- On boarding new employees. As an example, to bring on and hire a new Fire & Rescue employee can cost approximately \$8,800. Onboarding a new paramedic is significantly more.



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### Capital Reserve:

- As of September 2024, the Capital Reserve funds are \$67,872. We need to grow reserves that support a replacement cycle plan for apparatus and position ourselves well for the future.
- Equipment Replacement:
  - The 1999 Fire truck turns 25 years old this year. A new fire truck takes approximately 3 years to build and costs approximately \$1M.
  - While there is no NFPA standard for ambulances, the 2014 ambulance is also in need of repairs and a new ambulance costs approximately \$350,000.

### Q: If the fire trucks in Westfield Township are aging, why do they always look so nice?

The firefighters work extremely hard every day to keep all the equipment they use in good condition. However clean and shiny those vehicles may look on the outside, there are still aging parts on the inside that break and need repaired or replaced.

### Q: How long will it be before the Fire District asks for another levy?

The last Fire District operating levy was in 2012... 12 years ago. The Fire Chief and Trustees project that the new levy will fund the District adequately for the next 5 years or longer barring any unexpected fiscal crisis. They, along with the Fiscal Officer, will continue to monitor and adjust the budget as needed and set reserves for the future. While it's hard to project funding beyond 5 years in today's economy, we will continue to work within our budgets and be fiscally responsible with taxpayer's dollars.

### Q: Are there other avenues of funding available?

Yes, The Chief and Assistant Chief apply for several grants each year. Both State and Federal assistance grants are based on selection criteria established by the agency providing the funding. Since October of 2023, we've applied for nine different grants. To-date, Westfield F&R District has received eight grants totaling \$46,647. The grants awarded helped cover costs for fire gear, equipment, and training.

In addition, The Fire & Rescue District recently received a generous donation of \$50,000 from Westfield Insurance to purchase a new First Responder Vehicle. The current vehicle, a 2011 Ford Expedition, has large rust holes through the frame and doors. And, since 2021, over \$8,800 was spent on repairs. The donation, along with funds gained from selling unused equipment will cover the cost of the new vehicle. We are incredibly grateful to Westfield Insurance for their donation.

- In 2024, the Fire Chief has collected \$21,761 from selling unused and outdated F&R equipment.
- The Fire Chief also bills for cost recovery on motor vehicle accidents and fires. This year, he has billed approximately \$32,464 and received approximately \$7,059. Depending on the situation and insurance claims, cost recover is not a quick process.



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- The Westfield F&R Association also works with the Chief and Assistant Chief to organize fund-raising events that help to upgrade equipment and other District needs.

### **Q: What is the average response time for Emergency Medical Calls?**

The NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) Standard 1710 establishes specific response time goals for emergency medical services. **The standard goal is 9 minutes.** This is based on the time an EMS unit leaves the station and arrives at the incident, while also aiming to achieve this goal 90% of the time.

Thanks to our resolute staff, we are exceeding this goal. Currently, our average response time is **8 minutes, 20 seconds** from the station to the incident. Depending on availability, the current staffing model aims to have two part-time employees on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Depending on the severity of the incident, at times it requires additional people to drive from home, which adds to the response time.

Emergency medical calls account for 64% of our call volume. F&R staff are trained to manage both fire and EMS incidents. Currently, there are twenty-three part-time people on our roster: 9 Paramedics, 2 EMT intermediates and 8 Basic EMTs.

Through June 2024:

- Most calls occur between 8:00 A.M. and 8 P.M.
  - Calls from Township residents: 60 %
  - Calls from Village residents: 19 %
  - Calls to assist other departments: 21 %

Again, no missed calls since August of 2023! The levy will help us pay these hard-working individuals competitively to retain them and plan for the future.

### **Q: I've heard you have several full-time staff members, why is this needed?**

This is a false rumor that's been circulating for over a year.

The fact is, the only **full-time** staff member on the F&R District team is the Fire Chief, who joins the staff by responding to the majority of incidents. All other staff members are part-time only. While we say that there are two people on duty 24 hours a day at the fire station, it does not mean they are full-time staff members.

### **Q: What if the voters chose not to pass this levy?**

If this levy fails to pass, the Fire District will ask the voters for support again in the future, and the next request may be a higher millage to offset the continued loss of revenue. The cost of doing business will continue to increase regardless of the success or failure of the levy.



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Additional cuts to consider if the levy fails:

- Reduce on-duty staffing to 12 hours a day (instead of 24) during times with the most calls, 8A.M. – 8P.M. This may result in longer response times, asking for more mutual aid and loss of revenue.
- Evaluating already tight budgets for additional cuts will be difficult. Additional funding is needed for vehicle repairs and maintenance, growing utility costs and salaries.

### **Q: What has the District done so far to cut costs and/or keep costs down?**

The Chief, Assistant Fire Chief and Fiscal Officer have looked at multiple ways to cut costs over the past year, including adjusting salaries and grants.

Through September, the District has saved over \$24,827 in salary costs by:

- Reducing holiday. Paid holidays now include the four hardest holidays to staff: July 4<sup>th</sup>, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day.
- Implementing a payroll savings strategy.

Additional savings achieved by:

- Researching and applying for all available grants.
- Organizing more fund-raising events through the F&R Association.
- Reaching out to local businesses for donations.
- Adjusting the F&R 5-year business plan.

While these efforts have helped create additional funding, it is not sustainable or guaranteed funding.

### **Q: Why did you decide against having the public comment on the Westfield Township Facebook page?**

As a government entity, it's never an easy decision to take away a popular communication avenue to the public. After advisement from a county prosecutor, we felt the right thing to do was to turn off Facebook commenting for everyone. When online conversations go from sharing constructive comments to forms of bullying or harassment, we needed to act.

**When I retire, I want to leave the F&R District better than it was when I became chief. Right now, we are one significant incident away from breaking the bank” – Fire Chief Jeff Hall**