



Town of Holland Fire/EMS Protection Referendum Questions & Answers

1. How much will this cost?

If passed, the referendum will allow the Town to override the levy limit by \$582,500 to pay for the Town's share of providing full-time firefighter/EMTs to the Holmen Area Fire Department. This increase is expected to add about \$135 per \$100,000 of home valuation, for the first year, and, based on net new construction, decrease each year thereafter.

2. What is the exact wording of the public safety referendum?

"Under State law, the increase in the levy of the Town of Holland for the tax imposed for the next fiscal year, 2023, is limited to **2.479%**, which results in a levy of **\$738,997**. Shall the Town of Holland be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the tax levy for the next fiscal year, 2023, for the purpose of enhancing fire protection, by a total of **78.823%**, which results in a levy of **\$1,321,497**, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of **\$582,500** for each fiscal year going forward?"

This Referendum ballot asks the Town of Holland electors to vote "Yes" or "No" on the Referendum question above.

A "yes" vote supports the Town of Holland's tax levy increase and will provide funding directly for the purpose of hiring additional firefighters/EMS and enhancing fire protection within the community.

A "no" vote opposes the Town of Holland's tax levy increase in excess of the State of Wisconsin imposed limits and sets the fire department budget at \$667,795 of which the Town of Holland's portion is \$226,182.

3. Why haven't you been allocating more funding to these departments over time?

The overall budget of the HAFD has grown from \$512,250 in 2016 to \$995,670 in 2022 (a 92% increase) as the needs of the district required investments in new equipment, renovation of an aging building, but primarily increases in staff salary and benefits.

The Town of Holland has increased our portion of the costs to support the HAFD at percent increases above all other areas in our budget. The Town contributed \$93,912 in 2002 and \$219,131 in 2022, a 233% increase over this period, at the expense of other services such as road maintenance. Despite these increases, we are not at a level of service that we need to meet our current emergency call volume.

4. How many calls for service does Holmen Area Fire Department receive?

In 2021, the HAFD responded to 1250 calls for service. An increase of 51% from 2016. Over 74% of those calls were for emergency medical assistance. We have also seen a 37% increase in overlapping calls (2+ calls for service at the same time.) over this same time. In 2022, call volume has remained consistent, total calls stand at 869 through August. If past patterns continue, we will likely see over 1300 calls this year.

Call volume has a relationship to population increases. The population of the Town of Holland has increased 23% in the last 10 years from 3,752 to 4,603 and the overall fire district population has increased 19% over the past decade to 24,000. Correspondingly, calls for service will continue to increase along with the population.

5. What is the current staffing level in the Holmen Area Fire Department?

The HAFD is staffed by 2 personnel 24/7 with a total of 6 full-time Firefighters and 5 part-time Firefighters. This allows for the 2 full-time Firefighters to respond to calls relying on available part-time staff and mutual aid and automatic aid agreements with other communities to bring enough personnel to the scene and when there are overlapping calls.

These current staffing levels are lower in comparison to other communities similar in size to the Holmen Area Fire District.

See the table below for comparisons of staffing levels for similarly sized communities in Wisconsin. Note the full population of the HAFD is used for comparisons on fire department staffing.

Fire Department Staffing		
HAFD Staffing – 6 FT		
Location	Population	Staffing-FT/FTE
Onalaska, WI (City)	19276	17
Germantown, WI	21040	16
Pleasant Prairie, WI	21948	31
HAFD	24000	6
Watertown, WI	23018	26
Mequon, WI	25141	28
De Pere, WI	25525	29

6. How will this increase in staffing help the Holmen Area Fire Department?

The additional firefighters/EMTs will allow the town to support more effective fire response. This will increase safety for firefighters and the residents for rapid response and better back-up. For fire/EMS services especially, this means that a full engine company crew (4) or rescue vehicle (2) or water tender crew (2) can be dispatched to calls to enact a more rapid response. This will also provide the Fire/EMS staffing to reduce wait times to handle overlapping calls (2+ calls for service at the same time).

7. How will this public safety referendum impact public safety response times in the Holmen Area Fire District?

Response time will improve, especially when the fire department is called for overlapping incidents (2+ calls for service at the same time.). The HAFD has experienced a 37% increase in these overlapping incidents since 2016. Staffing an additional apparatus crew will allow personnel to respond to these simultaneous calls faster. We have already noted an improvement in response time since the department went to 24/7 coverage in August of 2021, however the department is still nowhere near where it needs to be to provide consistently safe responses, especially to multiple call situations.

8. What happens if the referendum fails?

The HAFD partner communities will have to make difficult choices about where risk reduction and response services are modified, curtailed, or eliminated to meet the demands of increasing service. Simply put...emergency services will be limited and responses could become extremely prolonged. We may have to cut 2 full time positions to balance the budget, putting fire/EMS protection below current levels. Additionally, we will be expecting our public safety personnel to cover large populations or to handle serious emergency situations alone at times, without immediate back-up, which is unacceptable and dangerous, thus prolonging responses even more until back-up from other areas arrives.

Furthermore, mutual aid is very important to small communities and with the HAFD current low staffing, we are depending on mutual aid on a regular basis without providing reciprocity. This could lead to the loss of our mutual aid partners.

9. Why does the Town need to pass a referendum? Aren't the new housing subdivisions bringing more tax dollars to support services?

Under the State of Wisconsin's frozen tax levy system all new construction has equated to a median tax levy increase over the past 20 years of only 2.76% or \$9,390 per year. Property taxes from new construction do not keep pace with growing cost demand.

10. What are the other partners in HAFD doing to support these increased demands for Fire and Emergency Medical Services?

The HAFD provides the firefighting and EMS services to the partnering communities. Going forward, these partners include the Village of Holmen and Town of Holland. The Village of Holmen has placed their own tax levy limit referendum question on the ballot for November 8th asking for a similar increase in its tax levy.

The current HAFD operations costs are split across the three communities in proportion to the equalized value of properties covered by the fire district. That split for the 2022 HAFD operating budget was 44.69% Village of Holmen, 31.77% Town of Onalaska, and 23.54% Town of Holland. All communities also provide equal payments of \$25,000 to the capital fund. In 2023 and beyond, the payments will be 66.13% Village of Holmen and 33.87% Town of Holland, since as of January 1, 2023, the Town of Onalaska will leave the HAFD.

11. Why haven't you been adding staff all along to meet these needs?

Staffing within the fire department is a joint decision made by the fire district partners. Over the last decade, the district partners have all doubled their contributions to add more staffing resources, but it simply is not enough. Especially since the staffing model for many years was based on a part-time model. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit, train, and retain part-time firefighters to our district. Due to the increased call volume and growth in the fire district, we need to be shifting toward full-time staffing to meet the immediate and growing needs of our community. Frozen levy limits prohibit us from hiring the full-time or part-time staff our regional community now requires.

12. Does the HAFD still have part-time Firefighter/EMTs?

The HAFD has been making ongoing efforts to recruit and retain part-time firefighters/EMTs to keep staffing levels up. These efforts have not been able to provide the staffing needed to address our call volume. The complex skills needed to serve as a firefighter/EMS and the increase in calls are creating a critical situation that we believe needs to be addressed by hiring full-time firefighters/EMTs.

Newspaper Story on Shortage of Firefighter/EMTs in Wisconsin:

<https://www.thenorthwestern.com/story/news/2022/01/20/wisconsins-volunteer-fire-department-struggling-find-Firefighters/9033824002/>

Wisconsin Policy Forum Report on Shortage of Fire/EMS staff in state:

<https://wispolicyforum.org/research/in-need-of-resuscitation-wisconsins-fire-and-ems-agencies-face-looming-challenges/>

13. Can the increased levy dollars be used for anything other than adding fire/EMS services?

No. These funds will be overseen by the Town of Holland Board when it approves the budget and will only be used for fire/EMS services.

14. If I have a specific question on the referendum, whom would I ask?

Public informational meetings will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 13th and Thursday, October 25th at the Town Hall.

You may contact the Town Chair, Bob Stupi at, 608-397-1191 or the Town Hall at 608-526-3354

For questions related to the Holmen Area Fire Department operations, policies, procedures, you may contact the fire department at 608-526-9363 and ask for Battalion Chief Xiong

15. When and where do I vote?

Election Day is Tuesday, November 8, 2022. The polling place at Town of Holland Hall will open at 7:00 a.m. and will close at 8:00 p.m. Additional voting information, including polling places and information about requesting an absentee ballot can be found online at MyVote.Wi.gov. Please remember that all Wisconsin voters are required to show an acceptable photo ID in order to vote.