

# Frequently Asked Questions – Emergency Responder Levy

Updated 2-8-24

## Q1. Am I eligible to vote on this levy?

If your primary residence is within the city limits of Kalispell, and you are registered to vote, you will receive a ballot in the mail around the first week of March. You can check your registration status or register to vote at: [Vote Montana \(votemt.gov\)](https://votemt.gov). Not all Kalispell mailing addresses are within Kalispell city limits. [Check your address to see if you are in city limits](#). City limits are outlined in black. Regular online voter registration will close February 19, 2024. After the close of regular voter registration, voters can still register, but will need to visit the County Election Department in person at [290B N. Main Street, Kalispell](#). (Registration is not available between noon and 5 pm on March 18.) Call the [Flathead County Election Department](#) at (406) 758-5535 with questions about voting or late registration.

## Q2. When will I receive my ballot and when is it due?

The Flathead County Election Department will be mailing ballots to registered voters in Kalispell city limits on February 28, 2024. Ballots must be received by the Elections Department no later than 8 p.m. on March 19, 2024, to be counted. If mailing, please allow enough time for the ballots to be **received** by the 19<sup>th</sup> and be sure to use 66 cents of postage. Ballots can also be dropped off to the [Flathead County Election Department](#) at [290B N. Main Street](#) (formerly the Centurytel building) in Kalispell Monday through Friday, March 4 through March 18 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or on Tuesday, March 19, between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. Ballots cannot be accepted at City Hall or any other city facility. See Q1. for voter registration information.

## Q3. Why does law enforcement need more resources?

- In the past 4 years (between 2018-2022) workloads have increased by:
  - 22% for citizen-initiated calls - from 25,499 to 31,120, an increase of 5,621 calls.
  - 87% increase in violent crime – from 74 to 138, an increase of 64 violent crimes.
  - A 7% increase in property crimes – from 679 to 723, an increase of 44.
  - A 38% increase in Detective caseload – from 506 to 696, an increase of 190 cases that have become more complex.
- These increases in emergency calls decrease opportunities for proactive and community-based policing.

## Q4. Why does Fire/EMS (Ambulance) need more resources?

- About 1 in 4 times (24%) when an emergency call comes in, all units are already occupied with an emergency call. This often creates long response times and tough decisions to prioritize calls.

- Current staffing on average provides for 3 available responding units at any given time. This is 1 fire engine that can respond to emergency ambulance calls, but not transport, and 2 ambulances.

### **Q5. Why aren't current taxes paying for these resources?**

Property taxes collected by the city have not kept up with the actual costs of labor and supplies in today's market. Taxes cannot be raised to keep up with those costs because State Law limits how much local governments can increase taxes to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the official rate of inflation (CPI) averaged over three years. With the average annual growth (CPI) at about 4%, and actual inflationary costs seen by the City at almost 6% - the math just doesn't pencil out. In addition, calls for service have risen year after year with more people to serve, additional area to cover, and more complex crimes to be investigated.

With Police and Fire taking up 74% of the Kalispell general fund budget, cutting funding for other departments just isn't feasible. The Police and Fire Departments have worked over the years to find efficiencies, establish partnerships and look for other ways to save money but cannot meet the need identified in the reports without the resources from the proposed levy.

### **Q6. What would the money generated from the levy be used for?**

#### **Law Enforcement**

- 1-2 additional officers per shift to reduce response times and increase proactive policing efforts.
- 2 additional detectives and a crime analyst would help solve crimes that have increased and become more complex.
  - In total the levy would fund 11 additional employees in the Police Department.
- Additional officers and detectives would help reduce response times and increase community-based policing.

#### **Fire and Ambulance**

- 1 additional ambulance with fire/EMS staff available 24/7.
- 1 additional fire engine with fire/EMS staff available 24/7.
- An additional station with full staffing located in western Kalispell.
  - In total the levy would fund 27 additional firefighter paramedics & related equipment.
- All of the above resources would help reduce response times when an emergency response is needed. Currently, 1 out of 5 times no one is immediately available as all units are occupied with an emergency call. This often creates long response times and tough decisions on who needs services faster.

### **Q7. Has the City been planning for these needs?**

The city realized a need for more police and fire personnel and resources 9 years ago, but an emergency responder levy was rejected by the voters in 2014. Since that time, call volumes have continued to increase. Staff and Council continue to look for ways to be more efficient with tax money while trying to provide expected levels of service in our emergency response departments. Circumstances have allowed for some incremental hiring but without this dedicated levy we will not be able to meet the recommendations as identified in the public safety reports.

### **Q8. What would the levy cost if passed?**

The levy asks for 60.9 additional mills per year, which is approximately \$4,626,170.00 in the first year, based on FY2024 mill value. In the current year on a home valued at \$200,000, that would be about \$164.43 in additional property taxes per year, or about \$13.70 per month, and for a home valued at \$450,000, about \$369.97 per year, equaling \$30.83 per month.

[Use this interactive map to view the estimated cost of the levy for your property.](#) The estimated cost uses your property assessed value that is used to calculate your taxes. This is not your resale market value. For every \$100,000 of assessed (market) value as listed by the County, the levy will cost \$82.22.

### **Q9. What happens if the levy fails?**

Without additional resources:

- Police, Fire and Ambulance response times are projected to progressively become longer.
- Police and Fire will need to re-evaluate and prioritize the types of calls they respond to.
- Currently, the Fire Department is close to losing the current ISO rating based on response times and available resources. The ISO rating may have an impact on business and commercial insurance costs.
- As citizen-initiated calls increase, pro-active policing opportunities decrease. Police will need to re-evaluate participation in pro-active partnerships based on availability.

### **Q10. Where can I find the third-party reports that evaluated Kalispell Police and Fire Departments?**

- [Kalispell Fire Dept. CPSM Report](#)
- [Kalispell Police Dept. CPSM Report](#)
- [Work Session Video reviewing Kalispell Fire Dept. CPSM Report](#)
- [Work Session Video reviewing Kalispell Police Dept. CPSM Report](#)

## Q11. Can I hear details from Elected Officials and City Staff regarding the levy?

Multiple City Council members and staff recorded videos about the proposed levy from their perspective. [View a levy related playlist on YouTube](#). You can also view additional informational videos and ongoing information on the City of Kalispell social media pages.

[Facebook](#) [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) [Instagram](#) [YouTube](#)

## Q12. What will the ballot wording be?

Updated 2-8-24 to better reflect state code requirements for ballot language.

### OFFICIAL BALLOT

#### CITY OF KALISPELL – EMERGENCY RESPONDER LEVY

**INSTRUCTION TO VOTER:** Fill in the oval before the word “FOR” if you wish to vote for the Emergency Responder Levy; if you are opposed to the Emergency Responder Levy fill in the oval before the word “AGAINST”.

Shall the City Council of the City of Kalispell, Montana, be authorized to permanently levy up to sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills per year (approximately \$4,626,170.00 in the first year, based on FY2024 mill value), for the purpose of funding its Law Enforcement with 11 additional employees, its Fire/EMS department with a third fire station and 27 additional employees and related capital equipment to support these operations?

The impact of levying sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills in the current year on a home valued at \$100,000, would be approximately \$82.22 in additional property taxes per year, equaling \$6.85 per month, or \$0.23 per day. The impact of levying sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills in the current year on a home valued at \$200,000, would be approximately \$164.43 in additional property taxes per year, equaling \$13.70 per month, or \$0.45 per day. The impact of levying sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills in the current year on a home valued at \$300,000, would be approximately \$246.64 in additional property taxes per year, equaling \$20.55 per month, or \$0.68 per day. The impact of levying sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills in the current year on a home valued at \$450,000, would be approximately \$369.97 in additional property taxes per year, equaling \$30.83 per month, or \$1.01 per day. The impact of levying sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills in the current year on a home valued at \$600,000, would be approximately \$493.29 in additional property taxes per year, equaling \$41.10 per month, or \$1.35 per day. An increase in property taxes may lead to an increase in rental costs.

**FOR** authorizing the City of Kalispell to permanently levy up to sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills per year (approximately \$4,626,170.00 in the first year, based on FY2024 mill

value), for the purpose of funding its Law Enforcement with 11 additional employees, its Fire/EMS department with a third fire station and 27 additional employees and related capital equipment to support these operations.

**AGAINST** authorizing the City of Kalispell to permanently levy up to sixty and nine tenths (60.9) additional mills per year (approximately \$4,626,170.00 in the first year, based on FY2024 mill value), for the purpose of funding its Law Enforcement with 11 additional employees, its Fire/EMS department with a third fire station and 27 additional employees and related capital equipment to support these operations.

**Check back for more answers to frequently asked questions.**

**Version 2 posted 2-8-24**, added levy cost calculator, Q11, updated ballot language, and misc. wording revisions.