



# CITY OF OTSEGO

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[WWW.CITYOFOTSEGO.ORG](http://WWW.CITYOFOTSEGO.ORG)

February 1, 2023

## RE: MEDICALS AND PUBLIC SAFETY MILLAGE

Dear Property Owner/Occupier,

The City of Otsego has been providing medical first response services for a very long time. In fact, most can't remember the time when the Otsego Fire Department (OFD) didn't run on those calls. However, the world is a different place than it was decades before. The sheer number of medical calls that the OFD respond to are astronomically higher than years past. In 2022, OFD responded to a record 1,238 calls; 1,238! That is a steep increase from even a few years prior (2020; 1,032 and 2020; 967). By the way, these calls were made by paid on-call firefighters. Meaning that multiple times a day the community is counting on individuals to interrupt their daily lives (and often their sleep schedules) to respond to the emergency. This paid on-call firefighter model was intended to have a capacity of around 500 calls. We are at 240% higher than that. The on-call staffing model should not be expected to handle this workload. Because it can't, at least not for long. The high call volume has contributed to firefighter burnout and the inability to have a sufficient number of firefighters able to respond to calls. Making it more likely that calls will go without response. On top of that high call volume, today's world in 2023 does not promote community service such as firefighting as it did in decades prior. Resulting in less and less firefighters that are willing and able to respond to this increased call volume. We need to change the model to a staffed station model for this service to continue. That change would provide for around the clock staffing by either hiring 3 full-time employees or multiple firefighters (1 working at a time) to cover 4 hour shifts to have 24/7 coverage, or a combination of the 2. There is no way to get around the fact that this plan will increase costs. We must be responsible in making future plans and it cannot be assumed that we can take on substantial additional costs without any financial impact. Not when we are already dealing with financial constraints. So how are we going to pay for this ongoing problem?

## PAST EFFORTS

Public Safety costs have been growing for many years now. During the previous years, it has been put on the backs of the firefighters to find a way to keep everything together until we find a permanent solution, whether that be a grant or an unexpected windfall of revenues. That solution never came. We have researched many options with an understanding that we would be needing to staff the station 24/7 sooner rather than later. A few years back we passed a Cost Recovery Ordinance to help offset the excessive costs, but it never produced a sufficient amount of revenue to make a difference. Unfortunately, since the pandemic began call numbers have sharply increased with no end in sight. Making the need to find revenues even more dire. In the spring of 2022, the City Commission pursued a PA 33 Public Safety Special Assessment District to increase revenues. A property owner petition was submitted that legally made that no longer a possibility. Later in the year the OFD applied for a federal SAFER grant to receive a \$450K grant to pay for 2 additional full-time employees for 3 years, only to be denied. That left only one option left to provide the needed revenue. That option is an increase in our Public Safety millage, or we will have to cut the costly medical services.



## PUBLIC SAFETY MILLAGE

The City of Otsego is in a unique position. There is already a Public Safety millage of 2 mills that is set to expire in 3 years. Those 2 mills are obviously not enough to provide for additional funding to continue on with medical services with the needed staffed station model. With that in consideration, the City of Otsego is pursuing a ballot measure that will repeal the current 2 mill Public Safety millage and replace it with a Public Safety millage of 4 mills that will continue for 10 years. This will make for an overall increase of 2 mills and secure the funding through 2032. This ballot question will appear on the May 2<sup>nd</sup> ballot.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

As referenced earlier, we are at a fork in the road when it comes to paying for medicals. If there is no additional revenue; medical calls will not continue. It is sad but true. OFD would revert back to a department that responds to fire calls and accidents, but no longer Medical Priority 1s and 2s. If the ballot measure is approved, then we can finally set up a staffed station to handle the heavy call load. It is a very difficult position to be in. However, it will be left to the citizens of Otsego to provide the answer. **It should be understood by every resident that a vote for the millage increase, is a vote for a staffed station and the continuing of medical calls. And a vote against the millage would be a vote for the removal of medical first responder services within the City of Otsego.**

## HOW MUCH WILL THIS COST ME?

Measuring the cost of a 2 mill increase can be calculated by multiplying your property's Taxable Value by .002. Please understand that your taxable value is different than your Assessed Value or your State Equalized Value. Please feel free to stop by City Hall for more details. The chart below offers some tiered examples:

Taxable Value	Increase with 2 mills (per year)
\$25K	\$50
\$50K	\$100
\$75K	\$150
\$100K	\$200

It is incredibly important for everyone to know the effect of this millage proposal on medical services in the City of Otsego. If the Public Safety millage repeal and replace is approved then the City will proceed with staffing the station with 24/7 coverage. **If it is turned down, then medical services will no longer be available in the City of Otsego.** The intent is to have the electors make this significant decision. I have attached an additional worksheet with some Frequently Asked Questions related to this ballot question and what the revenue would be going towards. Going forward, in the coming months please keep an eye out for additional information opportunities to provide everyone with all of the facts behind this proposal and get questions answered. And as always, you are free to call (694-6146) or email ([amitchell@cityofotsego.org](mailto:amitchell@cityofotsego.org)) me if you have any questions or comments. Thank you.

*Enclosed: Public Safety Millage FAQ Sheet*

Sincerely,

Aaron Mitchell  
City Manager





***THE CITY OF OTSEGO  
MAY 2<sup>ND</sup> PUBLIC SAFETY MILLAGE  
BALLOT INFORMATION FAQs***



**February 1, 2023**

The City of Otsego is applying a ballot question to the May 2<sup>nd</sup> ballot to potentially increase the Public Safety millage from 2 to 4. There are a lot of questions about this ballot measure and why it is being proposed. Below are a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) with answers to help provide a better understanding of the situation.

**FAQ 1- Why is this Public Safety millage needed?**

This millage request is 100% in response to the large increase in medical calls that have put incredible burdens on the Otsego Fire Department (OFD) and its on-call firefighters in recent years. The increase has gotten to a point that in order to continue to provide Medical First Responder services, the City must change and update the staffing structure. Unfortunately, this will require additional revenue to be possible. In 2022, OFD responded to 1238 calls. That is a total that cannot be expected to be put on the backs of on-call firefighters.

**FAQ 2- How did we get here?**

This is not an easy question. I think the largest cause of us getting to this breaking point is that we failed to respond to the increase to calls years ago with additional employees. Calls have been on an increase for many years but the recent 3 or 4 years have increased at a much sharper rate. As the numbers continued to climb, it was easier to hope that it would somehow get better, or that we would be awarded a grant to cover the costs when it was needed in the future. This was done with hopes of saving money during lean financial times. We are so far down the path there is now no small patches to the system, we need a complete change in the staffing model.

**FAQ 3- What is the problem with a large call volume with an on-call staffing model? Why can't we continue on the current path?**

The current on-call responders' model is not effective when the call volume is too much for our 20+ firefighters to respond. 1200 calls are well over what would be an appropriate amount for a department of our size. The drain that each call causes is not only the 30-45 minutes for a firefighter to respond, but also the potential 1.5+ hour of reporting, cleaning and follow up by firefighters and/or officers for each call. Not to mention the fact that these calls are unplanned and interrupt every aspect of their personal lives. That is now over 1200 interruptions per year; almost 4 per day.

**FAQ 4- Why is Otsego unique in this situation?**

The City of Otsego community has an aging population. Aging populations often require more medical services than others. This is not unlike other small west Michigan communities. However, the fact that we are still operating with an on-call responder staffing model is rather unique. Other communities have already made the jump to either a Public Safety model where there is always a police officer who responds to medical emergencies or they have a staffed station, which is what we are attempting to do. We are by far the highest call volume in the region without a staffed station. So currently we are in a unique position with high call volume and we are also unique in the fact that we have an on-call responder model.



**FAQ 5- What about the township?**

The OFD pulls one license for its jurisdiction, which covers the City of Otsego and Otsego Township. It cannot be divided, meaning that we have to either all be in or all be out. With that in consideration, Otsego Township is pursuing an appropriate ballot measure to assure that they have sufficient revenue going forward to handle these costs from staffing model changes. It will look similar but not identical.

**FAQ 6- What benefits would come with a staffed station over a paid on-call firefighter model?**

The biggest benefit is that we would be certain that a firefighter would be ready and able to respond to any emergency. Considering the fact that they would already be at the station, there would be significant improvement in response time, somewhere around 3-4 minutes sooner than we are currently running.

**FAQ 7- What happens if this millage is not successful?**

If this millage is unsuccessful, the City of Otsego would be left to no longer run on medical first responder calls. A plan would be assembled to begin the phasing out of those calls most likely on September 30, 2023. That is the date that our annual emergency life support agency license is set to expire. Next year's license would not include the medical services. This would be a significant change.

**FAQ 8- If the ballot measure was successful, would we still need on-call volunteers?**

Yes, we would. However, it would be on a much smaller scale. When there are simultaneous medical calls, the paid on-call firefighters would then be toned to respond. They would also be needed in a "large" medical which could occur at any time, but is not terribly common. They would also still be responding to accidents and fire calls.

**FAQ 9- What are we doing immediately until the May election?**

OFD has started sit-times in January to stop the bleeding. These sit times are 2-4 hour shifts for our current OFD members to take and staff the station. Think of it as a trial period for what the staffing model could look like if it is pursued in June if revenues are available.

**FAQ 10- How much will this affect my tax bill?**

It all depends on the taxable value of your property. A 2 mill increase will increase your Summer Tax bill \$100 if your taxable value is \$50K, \$200 if your taxable value is \$100K and so on. If you would like, you can stop by City Hall and we could tell you exactly the effect on your taxes.

For additional information or answers to questions that you may have, feel free to call or email the City Manager Aaron Mitchell at 694-6146 or [amitchell@cityofotsego.org](mailto:amitchell@cityofotsego.org). You can also visit our website at [www.cityofotsego.org](http://www.cityofotsego.org) to find additional information on the ballot proposal and the OFD. There will be additional information and Q&A sessions at public meetings, please consider attending one. Those will be:

**FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup> @ 6 PM**

**CITY HALL**

**MARCH 4<sup>TH</sup> @ 10 AM**

**OTSEGO FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup> @ 1 PM**

**OTSEGO DISTRICT LIBRARY**