

As volunteer members of the City of Gresham Finance Committee, we review the city budget in detail each year.

Committee members have a wide range of political perspectives. We are coming together to show support for the public safety levy. In May, voters will be asked for approval of a public safety levy. This levy is common sense and reasonable, and we urge support from voters across the political spectrum.

The City of Gresham has a budget structure that raises insufficient property tax revenue to pay for basic government services. Gresham has a permanent property tax rate of \$3.61 per thousand dollars of assessed valuation; that is one of the lowest rates in the state, especially when compared to cities of comparable size. The Eugene rate is \$8.15, \$7.69 in Portland, \$6.81 in Salem, and \$5.39 in Hillsboro. Gresham's property taxes only fund 44% of police and fire costs (with the remainder coming from fees, and grants). As our community grows, staffing levels for Police Officers and Firefighters are insufficient to provide the services that the community needs.

Within the Police Department, lean staffing levels have led to a recent acute staffing crisis; Recruitment and retention challenges following the pandemic triggered a forced decision to disband important teams including the Traffic and Transit Units, the Neighborhood Enforcement Team (NET), and a Special Investigations Unit.

These challenges are not just anecdotal. A recent independent study analyzed the operations of the Gresham Police Department and highlighted a recommendation to increase staffing, commensurate with the demand for services analyzed by the study. Firefighters and mental health crisis response are also staffed leanly, making it difficult to fully meet the needs of the community.

The Gresham Safety Levy will preserve up to 34 police jobs, and 21 fire jobs. New funds will be prioritized for police and mental health crisis response (62.5%), fire (35%), and homeless services (2.5%). The average Gresham homeowner could expect to see an approximate tax increase of \$28.50 per month.

If passed, the City will establish an oversight committee to oversee all levy funds. That oversight will ensure that the funds are spent efficiently, effectively, and on the services that voters approve.

Regardless of one's political views, Gresham residents appreciate the importance of effective local government services -- police officers, firefighters, mental health crisis response, and outreach services to the unhoused. We urge voters to support adequate funding for those basic government services.

Theresa Tschirky, Dave Dyk, Jan Baker, Rusty Allen, Claire Lider, and Mike Schultze (not pictured) are volunteers serving on the City of Gresham Finance Committee

