



**SUN PRAIRIE**

2025 – 2029  
Fiscal Roadmap

## Acknowledgements

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District 1

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**Jeremy Cramer**  
Wastewater Conveyance and  
Treatment Director

# City of Sun Prairie Fiscal Roadmap (2025 to 2029)

## Background and Purpose

In 2005, the Wisconsin legislature passed a law limiting the amount of property taxes that local municipalities can levy each year. Under the law, municipalities are allowed to increase their levy over the amount levied the prior year by the percentage increase in equalized value resulting from net new construction. It does not apply to the city's debt service authorized on or any time after July 1, 2005. Due to various exemptions provided in state statute, Sun Prairie has not reached levy limits since the law has been adopted. The city will be at levy limits starting in the 2025 budget and beyond.

The City of Sun Prairie annually updates its five-year Financial Management Plan (FMP) which is a comprehensive plan and financial projection of the city's operating budget. The FMP provides the city a snapshot of the tax levy for the next five years based on a series of projections and assumptions. The 2025-2029 Financial Management Plan indicates that the city's levy will exceed levy limits starting in the 2026 budget. Below is a summary of the amount the city's budget is predicted to exceed levy limits based on the current FMP:

- 2026 Budget: \$2,019,065
- 2027 Budget: \$1,085,091
- 2028 Budget: \$2,125,761
- 2029 Budget: \$2,083,786

Over the course of the last three months, the Mayor and Council met in working sessions to determine how to address the city's anticipated fiscal challenges.

## Themes and Considerations

There are limited tools available to local communities in Wisconsin to increase funding to meet service needs once that community has reached levy limits. These tools include:

- (1) Reducing expenditures through service reductions and efficiencies
- (2) Reducing expenditures by spending down the community's savings or fund balance
- (3) Increasing revenues by implementing new fees like a vehicle registration fee or increasing existing fees as allowed by state law
- (4) Increasing property tax revenue by passing an operating referendum

When assessing the viability of these tools, the following guiding principles were developed to sustain Sun Prairie's vision, priorities and values while maintaining a balanced and responsible budget:

- Maintain high quality city services as the city continues to grow
- Engage the community to determine their priorities
- Evaluate existing services to determine if efficiencies and cost savings can be achieved



## Direction: 2025 through 2029

A three-step approach was developed to balance the budget over the next five years. Staff expertise will be used to provide defined cost savings over several years while ensuring minimal impact on residents. A combination of cost savings and new revenue sources will be used to continue Sun Prairie's current direction and level of service for the next two years (2025 and 2026). During this time, an extensive public engagement process will be conducted so residents can fully consider and share their preferences for Sun Prairie's future services and expenditures. Information learned from the public engagement process will inform the city's direction for the following three years (2027 through 2029). This three-step approach would be achieved through employing the remaining tools available to municipalities – municipal vehicle registration fee and an operating referendum.

The municipal vehicle registration fee would be charged on the registration of vehicles under 8,000 pounds. Municipal vehicle registration fees are collected by the state at the same time a vehicle owner pays their annual vehicle registration. The collected fees would be placed in a segregated fund to be used only for transportation-related purposes and would provide the city with a consistent source of funding for transportation. Municipal vehicle registration fees are currently imposed by 54 jurisdictions in Wisconsin, including 13 counties and 41 municipalities.

Operating referendums are a mechanism to seek voter approval to exceed the state-imposed levy limits to secure additional funding. An operating referendum would include significant public engagement to determine the best path forward for a referendum. A referendum would be planned for Spring 2026.

## Cost Savings Policies

Prior to approaching the community to ask for additional funding, budget efficiencies will be identified through cost-savings policies and efforts. Some of these policies have already been implemented by administration and others will be implemented starting with the 2025 Budget.

- Savings (unspent dollars) from city departments do not remain with the department and go to Fund Balance (*existing policy*)
  - Requests to internally reallocate savings must be approved by Council (*existing*)
- Proposed ongoing initiatives must also propose a net-neutral source of revenue for that initiative whenever possible (*existing*)
- Council only funds essential services (*new*)
- City staff evaluate expenditures and identify opportunities for efficiencies and service reductions (*existing*)



## Direction by Budget Year

	2025	2026	2027 - 2029
<i>Cost Savings</i>	Continue cost savings policies	Continue cost savings policies	Continue cost savings policies Staff implements \$500K in additional cost savings
<i>Fund Balance (or Existing Savings)</i>	If needed, use up to \$500K in Fund Balance (consistent with policy)		
<i>Vehicle Registration Fee to support transportation-related costs</i>	\$30 annual vehicle registration fee	\$30 annual vehicle registration fee	\$30 annual vehicle registration fee
<i>Public Engagement and Referendum</i>	Public engagement	April 2026 referendum vote	Referendum-driven revenues & services in place (if approved)

## Process

The Sun Prairie City Council was supported in this process by external facilitators Alison S. Lebwohl and Tom Wilson, city staff, and a senior municipal advisor from Ehlers. Discussions took place over three facilitated sessions with additional information gathered and shared between, including presentations, surveys, and analysis. Throughout, the work was grounded in the financial analysis and projections of Sun Prairie’s Financial Management Plan, the City’s Strategic Priorities, and the Mayor and Council’s ongoing commitment to the welfare of the residents of Sun Prairie.

As with any plan, this document represents a snapshot in time. The city will continue to evaluate and monitor its finances and approach as part of the annual update to the Financial Management Plan. Revisions to this approach may be made in response to resident guidance, emerging community and organizational needs, and changing policy direction.

