

2020 Kalamazoo County Housing Proposal General Information and Frequently Asked Questions

This November, voters in Kalamazoo County will decide whether or not to approve a proposal from the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners seeking roughly \$50 million over eight years to continue funding emergency housing for homeless families with children and to fund long-term, strategic investments throughout the county intended to ensure that Kalamazoo County residents have access to safe and stable housing.

The language on the ballot will appear as follows:

For the purpose of funding housing programs in Kalamazoo County, shall the constitutional limitation upon the total amount of taxes which may be assessed in one (1) year upon all property within the County of Kalamazoo, Michigan, be increased in an amount up to but not to exceed 0.75 mills (\$0.75 on each \$1,000 of taxable value) for a period of eight (8) years (2021-2028 inclusive), to provide rental subsidies, permanent housing and related supportive services for residents of Kalamazoo County? If approved and levied in full, this millage would raise an estimated \$6,375,000.00 in the first calendar year of its levy based on taxable value.

Why now?

In 2015, Kalamazoo County voters approved a 5-year millage to fund long-term homes for homeless families with children. When the 2015 millage expires next year, the funds will have supported more than 500 families and helped provide stability in the lives of hundreds of vulnerable children. **The funding from the 2015 millage will run out after next year!**

A safe and stable home is a basic need for everyone. Despite the tremendous resources our community has to offer, hundreds of our neighbors do not have a place to call home. From families with children to homeless veterans, to older adults struggling on fixed incomes, to essential workers risking their health during this pandemic, our neighbors need help. And while housing discrimination was outlawed over 50 years ago, people of color still face stark disparities in accessing safe and stable housing.

Shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Michigan, local agencies identified more than 700 individuals in our community without a home. Today, that number is growing as we face the worst recession since the 1930's. Many low-income individuals have lost their jobs or are the "essential workers" of the COVID-19 economy, risking their health to go to work each day. Michigan's ban on evictions during the pandemic was

lifted on July 16 and, **as of August 24, there were already 395 eviction cases pending** in Kalamazoo County District Court (WWMT, 8/24/20).

In June 2020, a randomized poll of 500 likely voters in Kalamazoo County indicated that 68% of voters are likely to support a millage of up to 1.0 mills to establish permanent housing for homeless people. Armed with this knowledge, the Public Housing Commission and its community partners determined that a millage of 0.75 mills would provide sufficient resources to replace the funding for families with children from the 2015 millage and address the affordable housing crisis in our community. The County Board of Commissioners voted 9 to 1 to put this proposal on the ballot.

What will it cost?

If approved, Kalamazoo County will assess 0.75 mills over the next eight years. Property owners would pay based on the taxable value of the property, which is typically about half of the market value. A property owner with property with a taxable value of \$50,000 (approximate market value of \$100,000) would pay \$37.50/year, which is \$3.13/month in additional property taxes.

Kalamazoo County property owners currently pay a 0.10 mill assessment for countywide housing initiatives. This amount would not be reassessed if the 2020 millage proposal is adopted.

Who would the millage funding help?

People experience homelessness for many reasons, including, but not limited to, extreme poverty, traumatic household violence, systemic racism, drug addiction, mental health and more. Regardless of the reason, everyone needs a home. Particularly children, many of whom need a place to live, quarantine in place, and even attend school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Millage funds would aide Kalamazoo County residents experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to, families with young children, older adults, veterans, workers laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and low-paid essential workers who have risked their lives to continue working throughout the pandemic but still have trouble paying the rent.

In addition, this millage would invest more than \$6 million into the local economy each year, in the form of rental support, renovation of blighted properties, and construction of new affordable housing units. If approved, this millage would help grow our local economy, creating new construction jobs, and improving the quality and the value of Kalamazoo County housing.

Who would decide how the money is spent?

The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners would levy the tax each year and allocate the funds through its local partners. Since 2015, for example, the County Board has allocated housing millage funds to the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission, which works directly with landlords, service providers, developers and individuals to ensure that the dollars are spent to house families with children according to the voters' wishes. The Public Housing Commission is a publicly accountable authority that provides a report to the County Board of Commissioners each year.

How would the money be spent?

The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners would ensure that funds are spent in accordance with the ballot language, "to provide rental subsidies, permanent housing and related supportive services for residents of Kalamazoo County." Likely areas for investment would include, but are not limited to:

- Rental assistance and rapid-rehousing funds for tenants facing eviction;
- Loans, grants and other funding opportunities for renovation of blighted properties for the purpose of adding new, affordable and efficient housing units;
- Loans, grants and other funding opportunities for private construction of new affordable housing units throughout the county;
- Pathways to homeownership for families and individuals who have previously been excluded from the housing market due to systemic racism, or other institutional barriers to homeownership opportunities;
- Support for older adults and their families;
- Support for people with disabilities and their families;
- Funding to eliminate hazards such as lead pipes or lead-based paint from affordable housing units;
- Job creation and job training opportunities for construction trades;
- And more!

Where Can I Find More Information?

Please contact David Artley, Chair of the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission for more information about the proposal at barrieandmaddie@gmail.com or at (269) 569-1382.