



WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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Spending in Major Wisconsin Cities, Villages Up 3%

MunicipalFacts18 Study Analyzes Per Capita Spending, Taxes, and Other Trends in 248 Municipalities

MADISON—Total spending on operations in Wisconsin’s largest cities and villages increased 3% in 2016, rising from \$870 to \$896 per resident, according to a new study by the Wisconsin Policy Forum. This was the fourth straight year of spending increases for the group.

The report, *MunicipalFacts18*, compares spending in Wisconsin’s 248 municipalities with populations over 2,000. The report breaks out the five largest cities -- Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Racine, and Appleton – for separate examination. The 2016 spending figures are the most recent available from the state; the report also draws on property tax levies for tax bills mailed in 2017 and payable in 2018.

The operating figures represent key government services, such as general government operations; police; fire and ambulance services; and road maintenance, plus other programs such as health and human services, recreation, and public works.

Police expenditures accounted for the largest share of total operational spending (26.2%), followed by fire-ambulance services (15.9%) and street maintenance (12.9%). General government comprised roughly 10% of the total, while other services made up the remaining 35.4%.

The report also examined the first four categories—defined as “basic spending”—which rose 2.9%, from \$563 to \$579 per resident; basic spending had declined 0.7% in 2015.

On the revenue side, property tax levies for the 248 municipalities rose 2.9% on December 2017 bills paid in 2018, which is tied with 2017 for the largest increase since 2009. Property taxes per resident rose from \$579 to \$595, the study found.

Property taxes are the single largest revenue source for municipalities, followed by state aids. State per capita shared revenues declined 0.3% in 2016, to just over \$125 per resident. General transportation and mass transit aids rose 4.3%.

Other key findings from the report include:

- Net fire and ambulance spending rose 2.5% to \$143 per resident in 2016, following a decline in 2015. Fire and ambulance spending tends to vary the most among municipalities, as some communities rely on volunteer services, others share services with another community, and still others have full-time paid staff.
- Total per capita spending on law enforcement increased 2.1% in 2016, to \$239. Again, these costs may vary substantially.
- Street maintenance, a core municipal service, rose 4.5% to \$116 per resident. These costs have fluctuated in recent years, rising 7.3% and 0.5% in 2013 and 2014, respectively, before declining 4% in 2015.

The full report can be purchased for \$19.95 by ordering online from the [Wisconsin Policy Forum](#). Purchasers of MunicipalFacts18 can also order customized reports showing information for any 10 municipalities for an additional \$14.95 (plus tax and shipping).