**Fiscal Facts: Record number of levy limit referenda on November ballots**

During the November 2018 elections, at least fifteen communities across the state held referenda to allow cities, villages, towns, or counties to exceed state-imposed property tax levy limits, and voters in 11 of those communities gave their approval. The vote marked the largest number of such referenda on the ballot at once since 2005, when levy limits were enacted. Prior to November, there had been a total of 19 levy limit referenda in 13 years, according to the League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

These referenda and their outcomes may signal a trend. Since 2011, when the limits were made more restrictive, property tax collections for many local governments have largely been frozen except for increases due to new construction.

An analysis by the nonpartisan, independent Wisconsin Policy Forum earlier this year found that only 62 of nearly 600 cities and villages averaged annual new construction rates of 2 percent or more between 2012 and 2016, while 186 averaged 0.5 percent or less. In WPF’s surveys of municipal leaders over the past three years, many reported they had to alternate among spending priorities each year in order to maintain service levels.

Most of the communities where levy limit referenda were held were in east and southeast Wisconsin. Eleven local governments asked to exceed the limits for specific purposes: four for streets; four for public safety; and one for an aquatic center. (De Pere voters approved levy limit referenda in 2006, 2007, and 2008.) Two counties asked to exceed the limits to support their county health care facilities.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*