



Wayne County Commissioner
GARY WORONCHAK

600 Randolph, Suite 450
Detroit, MI 48226



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Wayne County Commissioner **Gary Woronchak**

Serving The 13th District • Allen Park, Dearborn and Melvindale



County property tax renewal to be decided by voters Nov. 3

Commissioner Gary Woronchak wants voters to be aware that a question affecting their Wayne County property taxes will be on the ballot on Tuesday, Nov. 3.

Voters will be asked whether or not they want to renew for 10 years a tax “to continue existing County services,” according to the ballot language.

The tax in question is commonly referred to as operating millage, because it is used for basic county operations and goes directly into the county’s General Fund. The tax, just under one mill, is expected to generate \$43.5 million in 2010. This accounts for roughly 8 percent of the county’s total General Fund.

It was authorized for 10 years by county voters in 2000 as a supplement to the county property taxes allowed under the Wayne County Charter. The charter-allocated county operating millage, about 5.65 mills, accounts for most of the county’s property taxes. The charter millage is collected on summer property tax bills, while the extra millage up for approval Nov. 3 appears on the smaller winter tax bills.

The term “mill” is a unit that is used to calculate how much property tax is paid. A mill is \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of a property’s taxable value. In very approximate terms, if your home is worth \$100,000, the tax renewal would cost around \$48 per year. (Taxable value used to be half of a home’s worth, but each home’s taxable value varies depending on how long its annual increases have been limited under Proposal A.)

To determine how much you would pay on the Nov. 3 millage renewal, multiply your home’s taxable value by .0009529.

This tax will expire after it appears on this winter’s tax bills, to be issued in December and due in February. To continue into the 2010-11 budget and beyond, it would have to be renewed before the following winter’s levy in December 2010.

The tax dollars go toward funding general county services, such as over 1 million meals to seniors annually, health and dental services, mental health services, “one-stop” veterans services and providing thousands of at-risk juveniles with substance abuse counseling and other community-based treatment services.

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How to Contact Commissioner Woronchak

Downtown Office:
600 Randolph, Suite 450
Detroit, MI 48226

(313) 224-0934

Fax: (313) 967-6940

E-mail:
GWoronch@co.wayne.mi.us

The Wayne County Commission is the legislative branch of county government. Its chief role is to adopt a budget and to enact ordinances. It also approves contracts, appointments and rules.

There are 15 Commissioners, elected in individual districts.

St. Frances Cabrini pastor delivers opening prayer at Wayne County Commission meeting



The Rev. Joseph Mallia, pastor of St. Frances Cabrini Church in Allen Park, opens the Aug. 6 meeting of the Wayne County Commission with a prayer while Wayne County Commissioner Gary Woronchak looks on. Every regular meeting of the full Commission begins with an invocation, and the 15 Commissioners invite clergy from their districts to deliver the opening prayer on a rotating basis. While introducing him before the invocation, Woronchak pointed out that Fr. Mallia has deep roots at St. Frances Cabrini, having attended Cabrini schools for 12 years before entering the Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit and embarking on service at numerous other churches before coming home to Cabrini as pastor in 2003.

Issues affecting you inside this newsletter:
County property tax renewal on Nov. 3 ballot

County offices moving to Guardian Building soon; commissioners split on more funding for renovations

The Wayne County Commission and the county administration are expected to have a new home by the end of the year.

More than two years after announcing the purchase of the historic Guardian Building in Detroit, Wayne

County officials say the county will vacate the Old Wayne County Building by the end of December and relocate the headquarters of county government in the 40-story skyscraper at Griswold and Congress.

Wayne County agreed to buy the Guardian Building in July 2007 for \$14.5 million. The county has been leasing space in the Wayne County Building for more than \$5 million a year. In addition to the Guardian Building, the purchase includes a smaller adjacent building for \$2 million and a 1,450-spot parking deck for \$17 million.

The Wayne County Commission in December 2007 approved the sale of bonds up to \$60 million for the deal, which included funds for renovations and the possible purchase of the Wayne County Building if an agreement could be negotiated with its owners. At the time, it was expected that county operations could begin moving to the Guardian Building in summer of 2008.

Along with taking longer than expected to be ready for county offices to move in, the Guardian Building's costs recently increased by millions of dollars.

The administration asked to borrow up to \$30 million more for the Guardian renovations, to work on additional floors to move more county employees there than originally planned. Officials said the current cost of work and borrowing makes it cost-effective to do work now instead of later.

The Wayne County Commission approved the additional \$30 million in bonds on Aug. 27 in a split vote, 8-7. Commissioner Gary Woronchak voted against the bonding.

"It doesn't seem right to take on this much debt now when we just approved a budget that will result in the layoffs of nearly 400 county employees," said Woronchak. "The loan will cost taxpayers \$1.5 million in just the next year alone."

County offices will occupy 15 floors of the building. The rest of the building has tenants who are expected to generate \$2 million in rent income for the county.

The Guardian Building opened in 1929 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

Voters to decide on county property tax renewal Nov. 3

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"I want all voters to be aware this tax renewal question is on the ballot on Election Day in November, so they can decide for themselves whether or not to renew the millage," Woronchak said. "It's important that voters not let someone else decide for them what taxes they will or will not pay."

Woronchak said he wants to spread the word about the tax renewal vote in his district, particularly in Allen Park and Melvindale, where the only local items on the ballot are school board elections, which could result in limited turnout. Higher turnout is expected in Dearborn, where Mayor and City Council elections are on the ballot along with two school board seats.

The county will reimburse Melvindale and Allen Park for the cost of the election, under the provisions of state law, because the school board seats are the only other ballot issues in those communities.

Here is the question as it will appear as Proposition O on the ballot:

OPERATING MILLAGE RENEWAL

To renew the millage authorized in 2000, shall Wayne County be authorized to continue to levy this millage at the estimated 2008 rollback rate of 0.9529 (about 95 cents per \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for ten more years (2010 through 2019), and proceeds used to continue existing County services, including programs for arrest, detention and prosecution of criminals, juvenile court and related services, public health, recreation, County parks, job training, senior citizen services, and programs for meeting medical needs of the poor, the disabled, and the aged? This renewal is projected to generate \$43,495,573 in 2010.

Commissioners take 10 percent pay reduction

Wayne County Commissioners voted unanimously to take the equivalent of a 10 percent salary reduction for the 2009-10 fiscal year budget that went into effect Oct. 1.

"The Wayne County Commission is leading by example and will be taking pay cuts like other county employees," said Chairman Edward Boike, D-Taylor. "We are also making additional cuts to our commission operations that address the severe financial condition of the county and the region."

All elected county officials are due for a 10 percent pay reduction on Jan. 1, 2011, the start of the next term of office. A county ordinance links county officials' pay

to elected state officials, who earlier agreed to a 10 percent cut in 2011. The county charter does not allow salary adjustments for elected officials in the middle of a term.

But commissioners opted to not wait for another year to pass, and took their reduction in the same budget that includes laying off nearly 400 workers and asking remaining employees to take a 10 percent cut through unpaid days off and higher health care premiums.

The move amounts to a reduction of nearly \$6,900 for each of the 15 commissioners. Salary for commissioners has not increased since January 2002.

Woronchak holds 11th Annual Senior Citizen Conference



Nearly 500 seniors were on hand June 10 for County Commissioner Gary Woronchak's Eleventh Annual Senior Citizen Conference. Open to residents of Dearborn, Allen Park and Melvindale, the event was held at the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center in Dearborn. The conference featured an array of speakers, health screenings, information tables and lunch. Featured speaker was WXYZ-TV editorial and public affairs director Chuck Stokes, who later joined Woronchak to pose with the crowd (below).

