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# LARGO VOTES TO LEAVE PROPERTY TAX RATE UNCHANGED

## BUT TAXES WOULD STILL GO UP SLIGHTLY FOR MOST PROPERTY OWNERS

/BY: **Carlos Moncada**

**L**ARGO—For the fourth straight year, city commissioners have decided to keep Largo's property tax rate where it is, although most property owners are expected to see slightly higher taxes anyway. The commission on July 15 voted 6-0, with Mayor Woody Brown absent, to tentatively maintain the tax rate, or millage, at 5.52 mills.



*Largo City Manager John Curp has proposed maintaining the tax rate in his \$299.4 million budget submittal. Photo from City of Largo.*

A mill equals \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of assessed taxable property value.

The tentative millage rate, which would amount to a tax increase of 4.78 percent, will be submitted to the Pinellas County Property Appraiser's Office so it can appear on so-called Truth-in-Millage (TRIM) notices that will be hitting mailboxes in August.

It may not be the final millage rate that Largo property owners will see on tax bills in November.

Under state law, the tentative tax rate can be reduced at public hearings but cannot be increased without costly re-advertising. The commission is scheduled to formally adopt



*Largo resident Meloni Wood reminds commissioners that people are struggling to make ends meet. Photo from City of Largo.*

next year's rate at a second and final public hearing on Sept. 16. The initial hearing will be Sept. 2.

Commissioner Michael Smith made the motion to tentatively adopt the current rate, which City Manager John Curp has recommended in his proposed \$299.4 million annual budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year that starts Oct. 1.

Earlier, Smith and Commissioner Mike DiBrizzi said they would not support an option to raise the tax rate to a maximum of 6.05 mills—a tax increase of nearly 15 percent that would require a super majority vote.

They voiced concerns about how the higher rate would be perceived by taxpayers on TRIM notices even though it could still be lowered as the proposed spending plan comes into focus.

"This is just a proposed possibility," Smith concurred. "But also, when people see their TRIM notice, that's the first perception they're going to get of their tax bill from us."

DiBrizzi echoed those remarks, saying "I would not support proposing the maximum here, even if it's not binding.

over the previous year, according to the 2025 tax roll. That increase would enable the city to bring in an additional \$2.35 million of property tax revenue with no corresponding millage increase, figures show.

Another option was to set the millage to the "rollback" rate of 5.26 mills. The rollback rate would generate the same amount of revenue as the previous year, excluding new construction. But there was no discussion among commissioners about rolling back the tax rate, just keeping it the same or possibly raising it.

"Our taxes are already going up with increased property values," said one speaker, Meloni Wood. "Please consider that."

Wood reminded commissioners that some people are struggling to make ends meet, and that "not everyone that lives here comes from New York with millions of dollars from their home sales."

"We have people starting families that are living in apartments," she said.

"We have our teachers living with multiple teachers in the same apartments because they can't afford to live in Pinellas County. So what's happening is the people who work here can't afford to live here."

Another speaker, Matt Faustini, told commissioners that TRIM notices are not "a maximum rate of notice."

"It's not to tell taxpayers, 'This is the max,'" he said. "It's to tell taxpayers what they actually might

be paying."

The TRIM notice is not a bill, but rather an estimate of taxes based on proposed rates of various governmental agencies, property value and any exemptions. The notices, which include public hearing dates, are expected to go out the third week of August.

Commissioners have scheduled a work session on Aug. 12 to discuss the proposed budget and where to make cuts, although some said it won't be easy.

"I don't know right now where the cuts would be made to go down [on the millage rate]," Commissioner Chris Johnson said. "But I do think we need to think about those things."



*The city's property tax rate has fluctuated since 2015 but has been stable the last 3 years. Chart from City of Largo.*

I think this commission should send a message that we need to start looking at our costs."

But even with keeping the tax rate constant, most property owners are expected to see higher taxes due to increases in property values. The average homesteaded household would pay about \$2 more a month, or nearly \$25 annually, under the current rate, budget figures show.

When property values increase, the assessed value of a property often increases as well. So even if the tax rate stays the same, the higher assessed value will result in a higher property tax bill.

The property appraiser's office estimates that as of May 30, Largo's taxable property value increased 5.4 percent