

Why You Should Vote “No” On The 7-Mill “Public Safety Millage”

In a rare moment of candor at the August 10, 2026, city council meeting, Clarkston’s treasurer explained the real reason for the November 3 “public safety millage” ballot proposal: “[W]e just need another source of income.” That’s why I’ve put “public safety millage” in quotes. This millage is definitely not about public safety.

I’m Susan Bisio, and I’ve lived in Clarkston for 23 years. I’m sending this letter at my own expense because I want you to know this tax increase will not give you more or better public safety services. It’s simply a way to give the city “another source of income” - to spend on other things.

The primary purpose of the proposed “public safety millage” is to increase the amount of general fund money available to the city to spend however it wants. The city plans to shift the payments it would have made for police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) out of the general fund to another source – the new 7 mills it wants you to agree to. The city manager claims this will result in a net tax increase of “only” 1 or 1.5 mills next year because the city will reduce the 11.4107 general millage by some amount. It’s, quite frankly, a lie. Your city government has made no fixed promise about what it will do with the amount of your general millage taxes for the duration of this “public safety millage” next year or any other year. The city’s lawyer corrected the city manager when he’s made this false claim.

You will get nothing more in public safety services in exchange for paying more. The biggest complaints residents have is with the lack of police services to address speeding cars and e-bikes on downtown sidewalks. The Oakland County Sheriff issued only 28 traffic tickets from January to August 2026. The sheriff sergeant assigned to Clarkston told city council the sheriff will not be doing anything more because they have all of Independence Township’s streets to patrol in addition to ours.

You pay the maximum general property tax allowed under the city charter - 15 mills, the amount voters approved in 1992. The Headlee amendment limits the property tax collected each year. It’s designed to give the city the dollar value equivalent of what 15 mills was in 1992 plus an annual inflationary adjustment. That’s why the current Clarkston general tax rate is 11.4107 mills. (This is no different than a dollar in your pocket, which is also worth less than it was worth in 1992 – it’s all relative.) You pay additional taxes for state, county, and other assessments, spelled out on your tax bills. Using the 2025 figures in the city’s budget presentation (since we don’t have all the 2026 figures yet) Clarkston property owners pay a whopping 37.2027 mills after Clarkston’s current property taxes are added in. Renters are equally burdened by high taxes because landlords pass them on in annual rent increases.

Clarkston is proposing to raise our total tax burden an additional 7 mills over the duration of the “public safety” millage, which amounts to about a 61% increase in just our Clarkston property taxes. You can calculate how much more this will mean for you by multiplying the amount in the taxable value box of your tax bill by .007. If you are planning to sell your home, you can approximate the amount of additional taxes your buyer will be paying by multiplying the number in the state equalized value box by .007. It might be enough to make them walk away from the sale when the 37.2027 mills in other taxes are added in.

Does the city really need more of your money? The city claims it needs more revenue yet significantly raised salaries for three of our six city employees (city manager, clerk, and treasurer) on July 1, 2025, adding expensive health insurance as a brand-new benefit for everyone working 32 part-time hours per week. The clerk’s salary was increased far above the top of her salary range, the treasurer raised almost to the top of his salary range, and the city manager threatened to quit if we didn’t give him a \$13,000 raise. These three also get every Friday off, a retirement savings match, paid conferences and professional dues, 14 paid holidays, 6 sick days, 15 days of vacation for the city manager and treasurer (increasing to 20 days next year), and 10 days of vacation for the clerk. Two Department of Public Works (DPW) employees get the same benefits but work 40 hours and have lots of opportunities for overtime pay. (The sixth employee works a handful of hours a week and receives no benefits.) The city broke a lifetime promise to residents to credit us .691 mills every year (the library millage rollback) and raised our taxes by that amount to partially pay for the 2025 salary and benefit increases for all six employees. **Almost half of every city property tax dollar our 880 or so residents send to Clarkston is used for salaries and benefits for six employees who provide almost no city services, so any revenue discussion should address this elephant in the room.**

The city has not been a good steward of the money it's been paying from the general fund for police, fire, and EMS. For 14 years, the city paid more than it should have for these services - \$171,799.59 more! The current city manager and treasurer were responsible for the last 8 of those years. The city council held multiple, secret closed sessions discussing settling the matter with Independence Township. We were only able to recover 6 years of overpayments plus interest. Taxpayers lost \$84,497.66 because of this city employee negligence. We recently learned the city has been underpaying for police services for the last year (\$15,000 total), exposing the city to interest penalties. In both cases, neither the treasurer nor the city manager double-checked what we should be paying under the contract against what we were billed. And the city didn't discover the errors in either case – my husband did. But the city wants us to pay more money for police, fire, and EMS even though it can't responsibly handle the funds we've been paying through the general millage. FYI, no city employee was disciplined for either screw up, and the big raises I mentioned earlier were awarded less than a year after the \$171,799.59 overpayment matter was settled with a significant loss of taxpayer funds.

The city is trying to trick you into approving the 7-mill "public safety millage" by telling you it will lower the general millage (currently 11.4107) by an almost equal amount - 6 mills for a net increase of 1 mill. Well, it was 6 mills in August when city council approved the ballot proposal. A month later, the city manager now says the 11.4107 general millage will be reduced by 5.5 mills for a net property tax increase of 1.5 mills. That's the basis for his claim that a home with \$100,000 in taxable value will see "only" a \$150 increase on their tax bill next year, using an example of a hypothetical home with a taxable value that is far less than average. You should do your own math by multiplying .0015 by your home's taxable value (and I bet you'll come up with a number that's higher than \$150).

As confirmed by the city's attorney on multiple occasions, the city is not promising you "only" a 1 mill, 1.5 mill, or any other net tax increase number for next year or any other year. If you vote "yes" on the "public safety millage," you're giving the city permission to raise your general millage taxes up to 7 mills more through a majority vote of city council – at any time and in any incremental amount they choose (even up to the full 11.4107 max next July) with no additional vote from you – plus you'll also be stuck paying the 7-mill "public safety millage" in addition. City officials admitted they plan to take the full 7 mills before the "public safety millage" expires because they claim 7 mills won't be enough for future police, fire, and EMS contract increases, even though they have no idea what those increases will be and relied on bad data to come up with the 7-mill request. The only thing that's certain is there will be no rolling this back when the millage expires because the city will have spent all 18.4107 mills on other things at that point.

The city could have had an honest discussion with the public about revenue issues and asked for a Headlee override that would raise taxes to 15 mills in current dollars (a 3.5893-mill increase). Or it could have asked for a charter change to raise our general millage from 15 mills to the allowable maximum of 20 mills (a 5-mill increase). Instead, it resorted to trickery to try to get "another source of income" that doesn't count against the charter millage maximum using the pretense that this 7-mill millage request is only about "public safety." And they've threatened us that if we vote "no" in November, they will force us to pay for a special election to put this issue on the ballot again in May. And if we vote "no" again, city council plans to forcefully shove it down our throats through a city-wide special assessment. The city manager neglected to tell the public in his "educational" millage slide presentation that city council does not have the final say - we can easily petition to put any special assessment on the ballot and vote it down a third time. The city manager also failed to provide a chart showing how the city's general fund will benefit from an eventual 7-mill increase.

Mayor Sue Wylie is soliciting funds for a sign campaign to support the "public safety millage." No doubt the signs will deceptively claim they're paid for by "Clarkston Citizens for Public Safety" or some other made-up name to hide the fact that the mayor and her friends bought them to try to convince us that lots of people think this millage is a great idea.

Empty promises, deception, and threats are no way to win public trust.

I've written about this millage on my website at clarkstonsecrets.com, and I encourage you to visit to learn more. **But most of all, I encourage you to vote "no" on this deceptive "public safety millage" proposal.** There are other more honest and forthright ways to address the city's claimed financial problems, including more reasonable ballot proposals and realistic budget cuts.

Your neighbor,

Susan Bisio