

SPRINGFIELD POLICE LEVY

Ballot measure would fund police department and jail

Chad Anderson was tired of being the victim of break-ins. He moved from Eugene, where his property was broken into five times, to Springfield, where it hasn't happened once.

"If you call the police in Eugene, they aren't going to come unless it's life threatening," Anderson says. "The Eugene police are underfunded, so they are stretched too thin."

Springfield residents will vote on ballot measure 20-273 on Nov. 4. If passed, the measure will continue to fund the Springfield Police Department and jail so they can maintain current service levels. The measure proposes a tax levy of \$1.40 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value, which would cost about \$325 a year for a median-value home, up from the current \$300 payment.

The current levy funding SPD and the jail expires next June.

Some residents are reluctant to approve another levy. Since Springfield instituted a levy of \$0.66 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in 2002, the tax has increased to \$1.09 in 2006 and to \$1.28 in 2012.

Anderson doesn't mind the additional tax, even if the number of officers and other employees wouldn't increase with the extra funds.

"What it is, is you aren't losing what you paid for," says Anderson, a local business owner. "I own two houses in Springfield. I'll be paying for this. I don't mind. They were effective with the money they got."

Lt. Scott McKee is a 32-year police veteran who says Springfield residents have a sense of security because they know there are consequences for criminal behavior. "With all my years of experience, there is a connection between that sense of safety and an environment where there is a consequence — that is, a functioning jail," McKee says.

The 100-bed facility in Springfield, which recently incorporated space for up to 18 female inmates, is the largest municipal jail in the state. The levy will fully fund the jail along with 40 jail, police and court positions.

Since the jail opened in 2010, property crime in Springfield has dropped 30 percent. "A 30 percent reduction is really significant," McKee says. "If you look around, it's hard to find an agency that has experienced that much success in that short a period of time."

Anderson says he had a customer express doubt that the levy will help. According to Anderson, she said that putting people in jail doesn't necessarily fix them. Prison skeptics would prefer to see police departments take measures to prevent crime rather than react to it.

McKee says the levy does just that. Before the jail became "efficient," McKee says, offenders had a failure-to-appear rate of about 60 percent. That rate has dropped to about 26 percent since the prison overhaul.

"My position is that a consequence environment, where there are consequences for criminal behavior, is also a crime prevention aspect," McKee says.

Beyond crime prevention, McKee says, the original levy gave SPD the resources to send more officers in response to calls. "In order to maintain the ability to send an actual police officer when you call for police assistance," McKee says, "it's imperative that you have the ability to have a functioning, operating police budget."

McKee adds, "I think there's an expectation, especially in Springfield; they expect they will get a police officer who will get there in a timely manner."

Officer response time in Eugene was Anderson's biggest complaint about EPD. In 2016, the median response time from dispatch to arrival for SPD officers responding to a priority 1 call — one with a threat to life — was 2 minutes and 53 seconds; the median response time for priority 2 calls — which involve a threat to property — was less than 5 minutes.

Over the same period of time, EPD officers took anywhere from 10 to 14 minutes to respond to priority 1 and 2 calls; the department issues only combined statistics on its response time.

Anderson says he is happy with the overall direction Springfield is moving. His quality of life has improved, he says, and he feels confident that SPD is keeping his community safe.

"In Springfield, you will go to jail," he says. "In Springfield, you'll get caught and you'll sit in jail for a while. And they have room." ■



LT. SCOTT MCKEE

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