



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Date: July 23, 2025
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New Berlin Mayor Issues Statement on Wheel Tax and Levy Referendum Discussions

NEW BERLIN, WI – During the July 22, 2025, Common Council meeting, two agenda items were introduced as part of the City's ongoing efforts to address long-term financial planning: Item D, a discussion on gathering information about a possible wheel tax, and Item I, consideration of beginning the legal process to potentially place a levy limit referendum on the April 2026 ballot.

It is important to note that no motions were made, and no decisions were approved at the meeting. The Common Council directed staff only to explore these options further and return with additional information. This preliminary step enables the City to assess potential solutions to address a projected \$3.7 million budget shortfall in the upcoming year.

As part of the City's financial planning process, the Finance Director has responsibility for presenting all viable options to the Mayor, who then brings those items forward to the Common Council. Together, the Mayor and Finance Director placed these items on the agenda to initiate a public and transparent conversation, both with the Council and with the community. Exploring these options is not an indication that action will be taken, but rather a step to ensure every possibility is understood before any decisions are made.

"It is our duty to examine every option that may allow us to maintain services, invest in infrastructure, and uphold public safety without compromising long-term financial stability," said Mayor Ament. "This is about understanding what tools are even available to us under current state law."

New Berlin's largest revenue source, the property tax levy, is tightly constrained by state law. Current statutes do not permit municipalities to adjust their levies in response to inflation. Without voter approval via referendum, the only allowable increase is based on the 'net new construction' percentage within the community. For 2025, preliminary figures show that New Berlin's permissible increase will be just 0.1%, or approximately \$31,650, a figure that falls far short of what is needed to maintain current service levels.

These limited increases are no longer sufficient to meet the community's growing expectations for services, staffing, and infrastructure.

The City of New Berlin has consistently demonstrated fiscal discipline and strategic resource management, maintaining lean staffing levels and a more conservative financial approach compared to many communities of similar sizes. Our Aaa bond rating reflects this strong financial standing, which is earned by only a small percentage of municipalities nationwide. Strategic investments have been delivered thoughtfully and cost-effectively through private partnerships, repurposed infrastructure, and long-term planning.

The purpose of these agenda items is to begin gathering facts. No financial measures are currently being implemented. Any formal action would require further review by the Council, and in the case of a referendum, direct voter input. If the Council decides to move forward, the referendum would appear on the April 2026 ballot and, if approved by voters, would impact the 2027 budget. Similarly, if the Council opts to implement a wheel tax, it would take effect in 2026.

"Municipalities are not immune to rising inflation and increasing costs," said Mayor Ament. "That's why our approach to budget planning is so important. We've made sure the process remains open and transparent, because residents deserve clarity and accountability when it comes to city finances."

All Committee of the Whole and Common Council meetings are open to the public, and agendas are posted in advance at www.newberlinwi.gov. Members of the public may also speak at meetings during the Privilege of the Floor or submit written comments via email to citizencomments@newberlin.org. All correspondence is forwarded to the Mayor and Common Council members.

We welcome your input," the Mayor added. "Whether it's speaking at a future Council meeting, reaching out to my office or your alderperson, or submitting a comment, your voice matters in this process. We are committed to thoughtful decision-making that reflects the values and priorities of our vibrant and exceptional community."

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cc: Council
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