



OAKLAND AND WAYNE COUNTY BALLOT ISSUE SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN PUBLIC HISTORICAL MUSEUM AUTHORITY MILLAGE PROPOSAL

Ballot Question: *Shall a 0.2 mill tax on all taxable property located within Wayne County/ Oakland County be imposed by the [Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum] Authority for a period of ten (10) years, being years 2026 through 2035, inclusive, to provide historical museum services for the benefit of the residents of the Counties?^a*

If the Proposal passes: The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and the Detroit Historical Society would have a sustainable revenue source for the next 10 years, bringing them financial stability. Residents in Oakland and Wayne would see a slight increase in their property taxes as a result of the new millage. A parcel of property with a taxable value of \$100,000 would pay an additional \$20.0 per year in property taxes.

Residents of these counties would gain free admission at the Wright Museum, Detroit Historical Museum, and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. Other benefits include free transportation for students and seniors, expanded exhibitions, new curriculum guides, training teachers in regional history, and preserving publicly owned collections for both museums. Fifteen percent of revenue raised in each county via the millage will support other public history museums in Wayne and Oakland.

If the Proposal is rejected: Without a sustainable funding source to close the financial gaps, these Detroit museums will continue to operate on admission fees, grants, and donations and may have to scale back operations to avoid deficits which could involve laying off staff, reducing hours of operations, or scaling back exhibits.

Major issues to consider: While these museums are based in Detroit and owned by the City of Detroit, their historical significance and their artifacts and collections go beyond Detroit proper, covering both the regional history of metro Detroit and African American history and culture generally. While the cost of this proposal may be small relative to the various property taxes that residents in Wayne and Oakland residents already pay, property owners should consider how this new millage will impact their overall property tax bill and determine if the cost is worth the benefit.

The Historical Society and the Wright Museum play an important role in educating metro Detroiters about this region's history. They are not self-sustaining operations and have relied on external grant and donor revenues to balance their annual budgets.

In July 2026, the Wayne County Commission¹ and Oakland County Commission² voted to create a new joint recreational authority under Public Act 321 of 2000 to "to seek voter approval of a tax levy to support the operations of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Detroit His-

^a The entire ballot proposal language can be found on Oakland or Wayne County sample ballots through the Michigan Department of State [website](#) or through [local media](#) reporting.

torical Museum, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum and other public historical museums in Wayne and Oakland Counties.”

Museum leaders for the Wright Museum and the Historical Society sought an alternative to a proposed millage after a bill³ that would have allowed any county in Michigan to establish a history museum authority and allow that authority to levy and collect a property tax was vetoed⁴ by Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Local media has reported that both the Historical Society and the Wright Museum have struggled to keep up with operating costs and have a backlog of needed capital improvements.⁵ A Detroit City Council memo⁶ from 2023 notes that the Historical Society has nearly \$4.5 million in needed capital improvements.

At the November 3 election, Wayne and Oakland County voters will be asked to approve or reject a new 0.2 mill tax (a mill is equal to \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of taxable value) on all non-exempt taxable property within the two counties to support Southeast Michigan public historical museums for a period of ten years. For the millage vote to succeed, the majority of the electors voting on this question across the authority (both counties in total) must vote for approval.

Background

The Wright Museum was founded in 1965 to preserve and celebrate African American culture. The museum is home to over 35,000 artifacts, holding the world’s largest permanent collection of African American culture.⁷

The Detroit Historical Society was founded in 1921 to preserve the history of metro Detroit and manages both the Detroit Historical Museum and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. The Detroit Historical Museum was founded in 1928, and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum was founded in 1960 to highlight the Great Lakes maritime history.

The Detroit Historical Museum, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, and the Wright Museum are owned by the City Detroit. They are managed by non-profits (the Wright and the Detroit Historical Society) via operating agreements with the City of Detroit.⁸ The city provides operational grants or general fund contributions to the Wright Museum and Historical Society in its annual budget.

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The Recreational and Natural Resources Authority Act, Public Act (PA) 321⁹, allows municipalities and counties to establish a recreational authority for the purposes of acquisition, construction, operation, maintenance or improvement of parks, recreation centers, and public museums. Section 11 of PA 321 allows the authority to levy a tax for recreation purposes.

Analysis

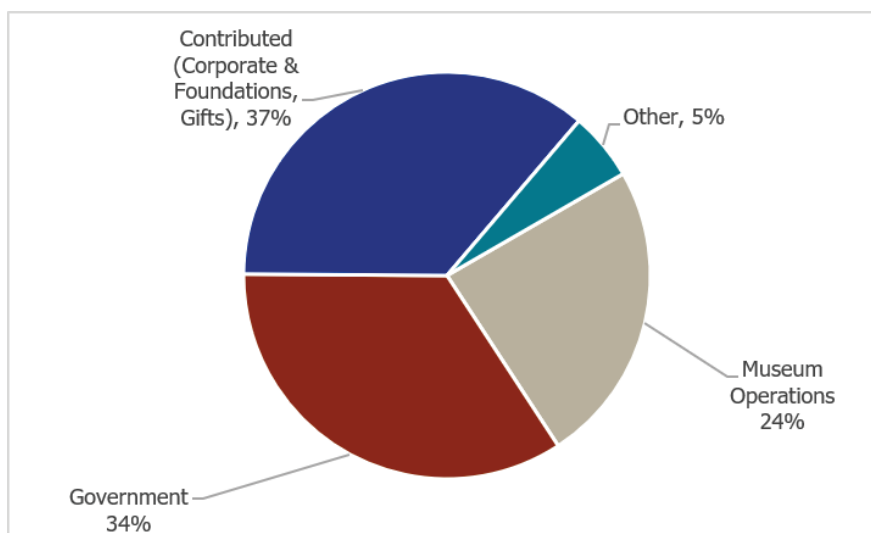
The Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority Millage Proposal would levy a 0.2 mill (20 cents of tax for every \$1,000 of taxable value) on taxable property in Wayne and Oakland counties.

Residents of each county would gain free admission at the Wright Museum, Detroit Historical Museum and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum.¹⁰ Other benefits include free transportation for students and seniors, expanded exhibitions, new curriculum guides, training teachers in regional history, and preserving publicly owned collections.¹¹ Fifteen percent of revenue raised in each county via the millage will support other public history museums in both Wayne and Oakland counties, distributed by the new museum authority.

Financial statements indicate a difficult financial picture for the museums. The Historical Society ended its fiscal year with a deficit of more than \$1 million with total operating expenses at \$7.6 million and total revenue at \$6.2 million.¹² Only 24 percent of the museum nonprofit's total revenue comes from museums operations with the majority coming from government grants and donor support (see Chart 1).¹³ The largest portion of government contributions comes from the City of Detroit. This financial picture indicates that the Historical Society cannot support its current operations on its earned revenues sources alone.

Chart 1

Detroit Historical Society FY2025 Total Revenue

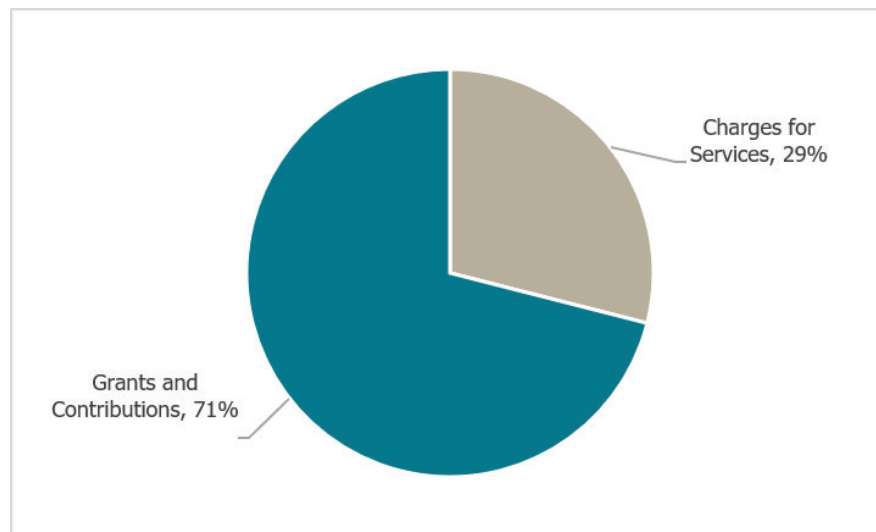


Source: Detroit Historical Society Annual Report 2024-2025

The Wright Museum has a similar financial picture with a net deficit of more than \$1 million with total expenses of \$13.9 million and total revenues of \$12.5 million.¹⁴ The majority of its revenues (71 percent) come from grants and donations (see Chart 2). Among contributions to the Wright, the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan provided the most financial support.¹⁵ The remaining 29 percent comes from program revenue. This also suggests that the Wright cannot sustain its own operations on earned revenue alone.

Chart 2

Charles H. Wright Museum FY2025 Total Revenue



Source: Charles H. Wright Museum, Report on Financial Statements, Year Ended June 30, 2025

Attendance numbers for the museums listed in their annual reports are not broken out by county, so it is unclear how many Oakland and Wayne residents visit the museums annually, or how many museum patrons come from other counties or states. There were over 53,000 visitors to the Wright Museum in 2024.¹⁶ Historical Society had more than 110,000 visitors at both of its museums in 2023.¹⁷

The Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority will levy the millage.¹⁸ Oakland and Wayne Counties will receive a “discretionary amount” annually equaling 15 percent of the funds actually received from each county (minus any amounts for tax financing districts). The remaining 85 percent of funds will be distributed by the authority in the following amounts: 60 percent to support the Wright Museum and 40 percent to support the Historical Society.

The new millage would generate \$12.2 million in Wayne County in 2026. In Oakland County, the millage would generate \$17.7 million. In total, almost \$30.0 million would be raised with \$25.5 million (85 percent) of that revenue slated for the Historical Society and the Wright Museum alone. Nearly \$4.5 million of raised tax revenue would support other local history museums in both counties. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority Proposed Millage

	Wayne County	Oakland County	Total Revenue
Total Revenue Raised	12,219,200	17,733,800	29,953,000
Revenue slated for Historical Society and Wright museums (85%)	10,386,320	15,073,730	25,460,050
Revenue slated for other museums in Oakland and Wayne (15%)	1,832,880	2,660,070	4,492,950

Source: Secretary of State: Michigan Voter Information Center

The revenue raised from the proposed millage would easily address the deficits observed in both museums' fiscal year 2025 financial statements. Of the nearly \$30.0 million generated, the Historical Society would receive \$10.2 million (40 percent of the net remaining funds). This amount could easily cover Historical Society's \$7.6 million annual expenses in Fiscal Year (FY)2025. The \$15.3 million (60 percent of the net remaining funds) allocated to the Wright would be more than enough to cover the \$13.9 million of total expenses in FY2025. Additional funds not needed for operations could be used for ongoing and backlogged capital improvements at the museums or used to replenish financial reserves.

As a result of this new funding source, the City of Detroit may no longer have to provide operational support from its General Fund to support the museums. The City of Detroit provided \$2.0 million in operational support for the Historical Society and \$3.3 million for the Wright Museum in its most recent budget.¹⁹

Both the Wright Museum and the Historical Society have received funding from the state budget in the past, but the funding has not been a reliable funding source. The Wright received \$500,000 in the FY2027 state budget.²⁰ However, this funding was a one-time allocation, and Historical Society received no support. In the FY2024 state budget, the Wright Museum and Historical Society each received \$4 million in one-time grants.²¹

Endnotes

- 1 Charter County of Wayne, [*Journal of Commission*](#). No. 15. (State of Michigan), July 2026.
- 2 [Approval of the Articles of Incorporation Establishing the Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority](#), Resolution #2026-6793_26-36, (2026).
- 3 [History Museum Authorities Act](#), House Bill No. 4177, 102nd Legislature. (2023).
- 4 Simon, Schuster, "[Gretchen Whitmer vetoes Democratic bills that Michigan House had blocked](#)." Bridge Michigan, July 10, 2026,
- 5 Walker, Micah. "[Detroit museums to ask Wayne, Oakland voters to back 10-year millage](#)." Bridge Detroit, August 18, 2026.
- 6 "RE: Memorandum from Councilmember Scott Benson - Request For Report On City Investment In The Detroit Historical Society" (memo, City of Detroit, 2023), 1-5.
- 7 Heather, Davis, "[13 destinations for African-American history and culture](#)." National Geographic, May 23, 2019.
- 8 "[Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History: Financial Statements](#)" (Financial Statement, Charles H. Wright Museum, 2024), 1-11.
- 9 [Recreational and Natural Resources Authority Act](#), Mich. Comp. Laws § 123.1131-123.1157 (2000)
- 10 [Detroit museums to ask Wayne, Oakland voters to back 10-year millage](#), Bridge Detroit, August 18, 2026.
- 11 "[Oakland County Millage One Pager](#)." Oakland County Board of Commissioners, July 16, 2026.
- 12 Detroit Historical Society [Financial Statements](#) June 30, 2025.
- 13 Detroit Historical Society [Annual Report 2024-2025](#).
- 14 Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History Detroit, Michigan [Report on Financial Statements](#), Year Ended June 30, 2025
- 15 The Wright, Annual Reports, [FY 2025 Annual Report](#).
- 16 The Wright, Annual Report, [2024 Fiscal Year](#).
- 17 "[Response to CP Sheffield from Detroit Historical Society](#)" (memo, City of Detroit, 2024).
- 18 [Articles of Incorporation](#) of the Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority.
- 19 City of Detroit, [Fiscal Years 2027-2030 Four-Year Financial Plan](#).
- 20 [Line Item and Boilerplate Summary, Labor and Economic Opportunity, Fiscal Year 2026-27](#), Article 9, Public Act 21 of 2026, Senate Bill 878 as Enacted, September 2026.
- 21 [Line Item and Boilerplate Summary, Labor and Economic Opportunity, Fiscal Year 2023-24](#), Article 9, Public Act 119 of 2023, House Bill 4437 as Enacted with Vetoes.