



# CRC Notes



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## LOCAL BALLOT ISSUES IN THE 2006 GENERAL ELECTION

Michigan electors were asked to vote on a large number of issues in the 2006 general election, including five statewide ballot proposals and 436 local ballot issues<sup>1</sup> in various counties, cities, villages, townships, school districts and local authorities throughout the state. Through information on local ballot issues gathered from the Michigan Electronic Voter Guide (which contains a list of local ballot issues compiled by the Michigan Department of State and [publius.org](http://publius.org)) and consultation with numerous county clerks to confirm ballot language and results, CRC analyzed the results

of 436 ballot issues—40 county, 120 city and village, 231 township, 14 special authority, and 31 public school district—to create the following summary of the issues voted on in the 2006 general election. While CRC gathered as much information as possible, not all local jurisdictions were responsive to requests so there is a possibility that CRC's compiled database may be missing data from a small number of local jurisdictions. Since the November election constitutes only a snapshot of voter sentiment on local issues, no attempt is made to draw long-term conclusions.

### Tax Issues

Over 70 percent of the local ballot issues presented to voters in the November 2006 general election were tax or bond issues. Local governments placed tax issues on the ballot for several reasons (See Table 1).

*Permissions to Increase Taxes.* Local governments are required to obtain voter approval before enacting any increases in the tax rate above those in effect in 1978 (Michigan Constitution, Article IX, Section 31). Over

<sup>1</sup> Even though the total number of local ballot proposals was 436, the number of ballot issues discussed in the paper adds up to 444 because seven city issues and one special authority issue encompass both governance and tax questions and therefore are counted twice.

**Table 1**  
*Tax-Related Local Ballot Issues on the November 2006 General Election Ballot*

	<u>Counties</u>			<u>Cities</u>			<u>Townships</u>		
	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Tax Increases	26	9	34.6	25	14	56.0	114	35	30.7
Headlee Overrides	1	0	0.0	5	0	0.0	21	8	38.1
Tax Renewals	13	9	69.2	12	10	83.3	55	50	90.9
Bond Issues	-	-	-	7	4	57.1	11	3	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>47.8</b>
	<u>Authorities</u>			<u>School Districts</u>			<u>Total</u>		
	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Proposals</u>	<u>Approvals</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Tax Increases	10	4	40.0	9	2	22.2	184	64	34.8
Headlee Overrides	2	0	0.0	9	4	44.4	38	12	31.6
Tax Renewals	2	2	100.0	9	9	100.0	91	80	87.9
Bond Issues	-	-	-	5	2	40.0	23	9	39.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>49.1</b>

Note: There were actually only 323 tax-related ballot issues. The issues proposed in one county, two cities, nine townships, and one school district are counted twice because they were seeking millage renewals along with new taxes or Headlee overrides.

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half of the tax issues were requests for the authority to levy new property taxes or to increase the rate of existing taxes. Only about one-third of these tax issues were approved by voters.

**Permissions to Increase Taxing Authority.** Local units of government are subject to tax limitations through state laws, locally adopted charters, county allocation boards, or fixed limitations adopted by electors. Over 60 percent of the proposed tax increases were by local units requesting authority to increase their applicable tax limitations. Less than one-third of these issues were approved by the voters.

**Special Assessments.** Voter approval is not required for most special assessments (unless specified in a city charter); however, seven townships asked for voter approval as a good faith measure and to be consistent with the requirements of other taxes. Of these seven requests for special assessments (which are considered tax increases in the table), only two were approved: one in Standish Township (Arenac County) for the purpose of gar-

bage collection and one in Caseville Township (Huron County) for the purpose of a district library.

**Headlee Overrides.** Section 31 of Article IX of the Michigan Constitution requires that if the growth in existing property tax base in a unit of local government increases faster than the rate of inflation, the maximum authorized rate must be reduced, or “rolled back,” by a commensurate amount so as to produce the same property tax levy as would have been obtained from the old base adjusted for inflation. The limits set in Section 31 are designed to prevent the property tax revenues of local governments from growing more rapidly than the inflation rate unless voters explicitly endorse such growth. While hundreds of units had millage rollbacks in 2006, only 38 units requested voter approval of overrides. The requested millage restoration in these units would have increased taxes by an average of 0.8045 mills or approximately 80 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value.

Only 12 units received voter approval for a Headlee override. The average Headlee override ap-

proved was 0.2369 mills, approximately 24 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value, well below the average requested (See Table 2).

**Millage Renewals.** The General Property Tax Act requires local governments proposing the issuance of bonds, the imposition of new millages, or the increase or renewal of existing millages to specify 1) the millage rate, 2) the estimated amount of revenue that will be collected in the first year levied, 3) the purpose for the millage, and 4) *the duration of the millage in years*. At the end of the duration, local units may let the millage expire or request voter approval for renewal of the millage.

At the 2006 general election, millage renewals once again proved to be popular with voters. Only 11 millage renewal proposals were rejected while 80 units received voter approval for their renewal requests. Voters in school districts and special authority districts approved one hundred percent of their millage renewal requests.

**Bond Issues.** Nine out of 23 proposals authorizing local units to sell bonds were approved. Bond issues for cities were more successful than those for townships and school districts. Approved city bond issues for the purposes of sewer and water improvements, fire station and community center buildings, and general capital improvements averaged \$4.2 million. Township voters approved library, emergency services, and water system bonds worth \$1.2 million on average. Rejected city and township bond issues included three fire station proposals, two

**Table 2**  
**Requested Override of Headlee Rollback Millages**

	Number of Units	Average Override	Number Approved	Average Override
Counties	1	0.2851	0	0.0000
Cities/Villages	5	1.5748	0	0.0000
Townships	21	0.2111	8	0.1506
Special Authorities	2	0.2880	0	0.0000
School Districts	9	1.6634	4	1.0339
Total	38	0.8045	12	0.2369

**Table 3**  
**Purpose of Millage Requests in the 2006 General Election**

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Millage Requests</i>	<i>Issues Receiving Voter Approval</i>	
		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Public Safety	86	53	61.6
Roads	55	20	36.4
General Operations/Personnel	46	14	30.4
Public Schools/Colleges	34	16	47.1
Capital Improvements	31	12	38.7
Parks and Recreation	27	10	37.0
Libraries/Cultural Facilities	26	14	53.8
Senior Citizens Services	12	4	33.3
Public Transportation	8	5	62.5
Airport Operations and Maintenance	7	5	71.4
Ambulance	6	6	100.0
Mosquito/Gypsy Moth Control	6	5	83.3
Refuse/Trash Collection	5	4	80.0
Increase Tax Limitations	5	3	60.0
Sidewalks/Bike Paths/Trails	5	3	60.0
Acquire Property	5	2	40.0
Cemeteries	4	1	25.0
Hospitals/Medical Care Facilities	3	2	66.7
Conservation	3	1	33.3
County Jail/Prisons	3	0	0.0
Planning/Zoning Costs	3	0	0.0
Juvenile Delinquent/Child Protective Services	2	2	100.0
Water/Sewer	2	2	100.0
Animal Control	2	0	0.0
Recycling	2	0	0.0
Street Lighting/Electrical Services	1	1	100.0
Veterans' Affairs/Services	1	1	100.0
Historical Preservation	1	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>47.6</b>

Note: There were actually only 323 tax-related ballot issues. The proposals in some units were counted multiple times because they were for multiple purposes.

city hall proposals, two community centers, one senior citizens services building (rejected by three townships), and a police facilities proposal. The average value of rejected city and township bond issues approximated \$8.6 million and \$2.6 million respectively.

Hartland and Negaunee schools each passed a bond for capital im-

provements valued at more than \$23 million and \$6 million respectively. Menominee's school bond issue failed for the second time in February 2007. The Bay City District and Crestwood School District (Dearborn Heights) issues will be on the May 2007 ballot. In total, proposed school bonds averaged \$16.8 million.

**Millage Purposes.** The most common purpose for which local governments sought voter approval was public safety—fire, police, emergency medical services, and 9-1-1 dispatch services. Nearly two-thirds of the 86 public safety millages were approved. Voters in 50 percent (five of ten) of cities and villages, 62.3 percent

(43 of 69) of townships, and 71.4 percent (five of seven) of counties approved public safety millages. Similarly, ambulance millages, all on township ballots, received 100 percent (six of six) approval. The next most frequent purposes for which millages were proposed were road improvements (55 proposals) and general operations and personnel (46 proposals); however, these issues did not fare as well and were only approved approximately one-third of the time.

Public school proposals were prevalent in 2006 with 31 school

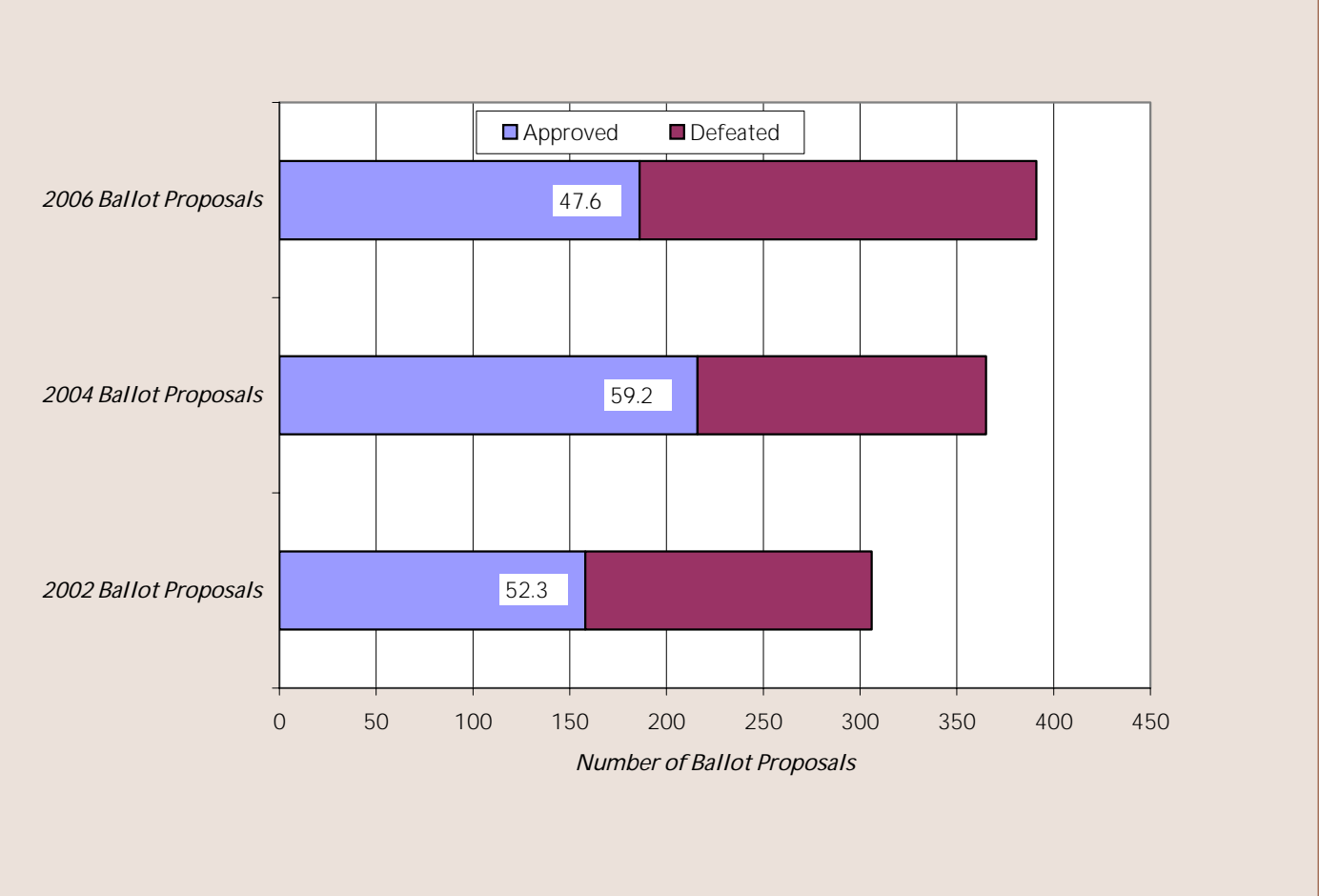
districts, two intermediate school districts, and one community college bringing issues before the voters. These proposals passed almost 50 percent of the time. Capital improvements, parks and recreation, and libraries and cultural facilities were the subjects of millage requests 31, 27, and 26 times respectively. Between 37 percent and 54 percent of these issues were approved by voters.

A number of issues received approval at least 80 percent of the time (i.e. mosquito and gypsy moth control, refuse and trash collection, juvenile delinquent

services, water and sewer, street lighting, and veterans' affairs). However, these high percentages can be deceiving because the issues were put before voters in a small number of jurisdictions.

*Summary.* At the 2006 general election, local governments received nearly universal voter approval for millage renewals. However, bond issues, tax increases, and Headlee overrides were not as popular, receiving only 32 to 39 percent approval. Overall, tax and bond issues were approved by voters less than 50 percent of the time.

**Chart 1**  
*Success of Local Proposals Appearing on General Election Ballots: 2002, 2004, 2006*



## Governance Issues

Just over one quarter of the issues on general election local ballots asked for voter approval on matters of governance. The various governance issues ranged from the adoption of a new city charter to the institution of term limits to an advisory question on smoke-free work site regulations.

**Charter Amendments.** Fifty-six of the 121 governance issues in the 2006 general election proposed either a new charter or amendments to a current charter. Voters approved nearly 80 percent of these issues. Two cities asked voters to approve new or revised city charters: Bridgman electors accepted a revised charter while Inkster voters rejected a new charter. The remaining 54 issues were requests to amend charters.

Eight cities and one village presented multiple charter amendments to their voters dealing with a variety of issues:

Charlevoix placed 11 charter amendments (plus one ordinance question) on the ballot, including changes in election procedures, limiting severance payments, allowing the deputy mayor to vote when the mayor is absent or disabled, and limiting the city manager to a three-year term. All proposed amendments passed except for a request to amend the

charter to relieve the city assessor from attending all Board of Review meetings.

Martin Village placed eight charter amendments on the ballot. Five of the eight amendments increased the power of the village council through authorizing the council to appoint officers, determine their own compensation, establish commissions, and negotiate terms with public utility franchises. Electors passed each of these amendments and also voted in favor of ending term limits. The single failed charter amendment proposed to raise the cost of the purchase and sale of personal property requiring publication and competitive bidding from \$500 to \$25,000.

Frankfort, Hillsdale and Perry each placed three charter amendments on the ballot. Of these nine proposals, all but two were approved. In Frankfort, voters disliked proposals regarding council member compensation, but approved a proposal on competitive bidding. Hillsdale electors approved amendments to hire four full-time firefighters, limit the term of the city manager, and authorize vacant city offices to be filled by elections. Perry electors voted to give more power to the mayor by strengthening the mayor's veto power and to change the city budget proposal dates.

Four cities—Ann Arbor, Davidson, Portage, and Traverse City—each put two charter amendments on the ballot. All proposals were approved by the local electorate. Two of these charter amendments were also tax issues as electors were asked to guarantee specific tax rates for park maintenance and street reconstruction. Other amendments dealt with changes to the terms and elections of council members, elimination of primary elections, and changes to the submission of capital improvement plans.

**Recalls of Officials.** Another common governance issue in the 2006 general election was the recall of local elected officials. These included twenty township and one city proposals to recall elected officials. Nine of the 21 recall proposals were approved.

**General Referenda.** Eighteen cities and villages placed referenda on the ballot to ask voters to approve issues ranging from city zoning to the expansion of alcohol sales. Eleven of these referenda were successful. Merrill Village had two referenda to change the elected offices of village clerk and treasurer to appointed positions, but both initiatives failed. East Lansing, Keego Harbor, and Midland all passed initiatives authorizing the city to sell or dispose of

### Note on Term Limits

Two questions regarding the establishment of term limits for city managers appeared on the November 2006 ballot. Both were adopted. While term limits for elected officials are relatively common, the proposals in Hillsdale and Charlevoix represent the first time petition initiated charter amendments have asked voter approval for term limits for appointed officials.

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land. Voters in Camden Village and Grandville approved the sale of alcohol on Sundays, while voters in Zeeland reversed a ban on alcohol sales. Other referenda included approval for the fluoridation of water in Grand Ledge and permission to expend assets from a capital reserve sinking fund for the Regent Theatre in Allegan.

Thirty-five townships asked for voter approval on issues such as planning and zoning, construction and renovation of township buildings, the sale of liquor, annexation, and contracts for police services. Of these 35 proposals, 17 were approved. One of the rejected proposals asked voters in Crystal Township (Montcalm County) to approve the incorporation of parts of the township into the "Village of Crystal Lake."

Lenawee County put an advisory question before voters regarding possible smoke-free worksite regulations, which was approved.

The Iosco Regional Education Services Agency (which encompasses Alcona, Arenac, Iosco and Ogemaw counties) asked for voter approval to establish an area career-technical educational program. The request, which was accompanied by a tax increase, failed to receive voter approval.

***New Ordinances.*** In addition to the ordinance question mentioned above in Charlevoix, four other cities or villages placed new ordinances on the ballot for voter approval. Three of these five proposals passed, including a Human Rights Ordinance in Ferndale which assured "equal opportunity to all persons in the area of employment, housing, public accommodations and public services."

***Township Trustees.*** Since 1958, townships with populations of 5,000 or more, or with 3,000 or more qualified and registered electors, may increase the number of elected trustees from two

to four (Michigan Election Law, MCL 168.358). An increase in the number of trustees must be approved by the voters at a general November election or by a majority of the voters attending an annual meeting. In the 2006 general election, Richland Township (Kalamazoo County) and Algoma Township (Kent County) voters approved increases in the number of their trustees. In addition, electors in Deerfield Township (Lapeer County) approved a proposal to hold an annual meeting of electors.

***Annexation.*** Voters in East Lansing and Meridian Township approved the annexation of a section of Meridian Township by the City of East Lansing.

***Summary.*** The electors were willing to approve most changes presented in governance issues, approving 81 of the 121 (66.9 percent) governance issues presented to them.