



## IN BRIEF

### ON THE BALLOT

Jefferson Parish Library Tax, April 29, 2017

April 2017

#### Overview of the Proposition

Voters parishwide will decide whether to renew the existing property tax that supports the Jefferson Parish public libraries (the Library). The renewal would have a 10-year term, beginning in 2018, and set the maximum tax rate at the previously authorized level of 6.5 mills. The Parish currently levies the tax at a rate of 6.17 mills. The renewal therefore could result in a 0.33-mill tax increase.

#### Key Findings

- The parishwide millage has supported the Library's operating and capital needs for decades. In 2004, as part of a package of millage rededications, the Parish Council reduced the Library tax from seven mills to 6.5 mills. Voters last renewed the millage in 2008, and it expires after 2017.
- As property assessments have grown since 2008, the Parish Council has further reduced the Library's tax rate from 6.5 mills to its current level of 6.17 mills. Renewal of the tax will reset the maximum rate at 6.5 mills for 2018. If the council levies the tax at the new maximum rate, taxpayers would see an increase of 0.33 mills. The Parish administration told BGR it will initially need the full 6.5-mill levy to offset anticipated inflation in operating and maintenance costs. Ultimately, though, the council must approve the annual tax levy.
- According to the proposition, the tax will yield an estimated \$21.4 million at the full 6.5-mill rate in 2018. This would increase revenue from the tax by \$386,000, or 2%, over the 2017 adopted budget amount.
- The millage provides almost all operating and capital funding for the Library system. The system consists of two regional libraries and 14 branch libraries, evenly divided between the East and West banks.
- The millage first funds operations and maintenance, providing 95% of the Library's \$22.2 million budgeted revenue. The Library directs the remaining revenue to capital investments. As of February 2017, the Library had \$38 million in its capital fund.
- The Library has taken a cautious approach to spending. It has kept growth in operating costs at a modest 3.1% average annual increase. It has also avoided borrowing for the Library's capital needs.
- The Library administration has prepared a new strategic plan for the years 2019 to 2021 to guide future expenditures. Proper planning is especially important for public libraries because information technology continues to evolve rapidly. It has changed how people gather information and read, thereby changing the role of public libraries in the community. In recent years, the Jefferson Parish Library has been working to respond to these changes. It has increased Internet access and expanded electronic resources.
- If voters renew the tax and the council imposes the full 6.5-mill in 2018, a homeowner with a homestead-exempt property valued at \$200,000 would pay about another \$4 per year, an increase from \$77 to \$81.
- If voters ultimately do not renew the tax, the loss of 95% of the system's revenue would be ruinous.

#### BGR Position

FOR. The Jefferson Parish Library has kept growth in operating costs at a reasonable level and has provided for its capital needs without incurring debt. The Library's new strategic plan and spending priorities will guide future investment in the system. Voters should preserve the Library's core funding source for the next decade.

Read the full report at [www.bgr.org](http://www.bgr.org).