

DATE: December 6, 2016

TO: Supervisor Theodore Lipscomb Sr., Chairman, County Board of Supervisors

FROM: County Executive Chris Abele

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION AMENDING THE LANGUAGE OF THE VRF REFERENDUM

REQUEST

The attached resolution amends the wording of the Advisory Referendum scheduled for April 4, 2017 to provide a fuller picture of the impact of the VRF on the services the citizens of Milwaukee County demand and rely on so that they may be allowed to make a better, more informed decision on their support of the \$60 VRF.

BACKGROUND

The adopted 2017 budget contains the following advisory referendum question scheduled for April 4, 2017 – *“Do you support County Executive’s Chris Abele’s proposal for a \$60 Vehicle Registration Fee (wheel tax) to provide designated funding for transit and transportation-related projects?”*

This resolution amends that question and replaces it with the following language – *“An independent fiscal analysis has indicated that a \$60 vehicle registration fee is necessary to maintain County roads, parkways and bus operations. Do you support the County Executive’s plan to implement a \$60 vehicle registration fee to prevent deterioration of roads, cut to bus routes and increases to bus fares?”*

My concern with the wording of the proposed referendum is that it does not provide enough context to the voters to make a fully informed decision. The question “Do you support a \$60 VRF for transit and roads?” is as likely to get a no vote as is the question “Do you support cutting bus routes?” These one-sided questions should be asked in a more balanced way. In isolation and with no context, no one would vote to increase the VRF. If a one-sided referendum does not pass, the County will be under enormous pressure to follow that recommendation by the public. This would lead to a dangerous situation where the County is left with no options but cuts to critical services.

This request follows my request to you earlier in the budget process to have a dialogue about how to word the referendum in a way that will help the public understand the impact their decision on this referendum will have on the ability of the County to financially sustain services they depend on. Changing the language will help the voters better understand what is at stake when they record their vote.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this or any other ideas you might have to ensure that this referendum has as much benefit to the public who is paying for it as possible.

Your action is requested in the December cycle as the question on the ballot must be determined at least 70 days prior to the election, according to the County Clerk. I encourage and recommend that this resolution be taken up without delay.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Executive recommends adoption and action on the attached resolution.

Chris Abele
County Executive

CC: Raisa Koltun, Chief of Staff, County Executive
Scott Manske, Comptroller
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
Steve Kreklow, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Collen Foley, Interim Corporation Counsel
Joe Czarnezki, County Clerk