DETROIT ISSUES GUIDE 2026

UPDATED EDITION

How state and local policy impacts the issues you care about

CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

DETROIT FUTURE CITY

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

By voting in elections, you help choose local, state, and national representatives and influence the decisions that shape your community. When more Detroiters vote, more Detroit voices are represented in the decisions that affect our neighborhoods, schools, public safety, and overall quality of life. Your vote is your opportunity to make your voice heard.

21% *Share of registered voters in Detroit who cast their vote in Michigan's August 2026 Primary Election – that's fewer than 1 in 4 people.*

Michigan's General Election in November is your chance to vote in federal, state, and local races, as well as on ballot proposals shaping the issues that matter most to you.

The Primary Election concluded on August 4th and has determined the candidates advancing to November's General Election. Your vote will impact the things you and your community care the most about, from affordable housing and public education to public transit, public safety, and taxes.

This issues guide, developed by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan and Detroit Future City, provides an educational and non-partisan overview of 5 issues that directly impact Detroit residents. It outlines why each issue is important, what's happening locally and statewide, and how your vote impacts it.

While this guide does not endorse any candidates/parties or tell you who to vote for, we hope this helps you understand the importance of your vote and how it influences the issues you care about.

ELECTIONS MATTER AND DIRECTLY IMPACT WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY!

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

PUBLIC TRANSIT

In August, Wayne County voters approved a 10-year public transit millage ballot proposal.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

On the ballot this November: Election of Detroit Community School District board members

TAX POLICY

State laws and municipal ordinances dictate the local taxes levied on Detroiters.

RENTAL AFFORDABILITY

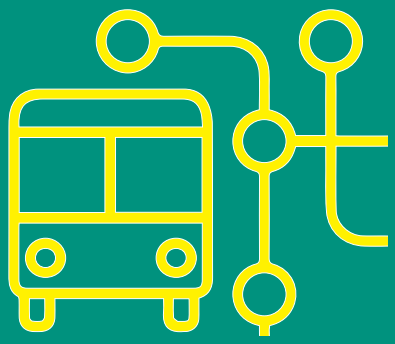
State and local policies directly shape housing affordability and home repair solutions.

CRIME AND SAFETY

Federal, state, and local funding determines how resources are allocated to address crime.

We recognize that these aren't the only key issues of significance to Detroiters, and we encourage you to research other topics that are important to you as well.

PUBLIC TRANSIT



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Reliable public transit helps connect people to education, jobs, healthcare, shopping, and other essential services. It is especially important for youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and anyone who cannot or chooses not to drive. Public transit also reduces transportation costs, supports local businesses, and strengthens the regional economy.

The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) provides public transit services in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Monroe counties. For many decades, individual municipalities in Wayne and Oakland County could choose to opt out of SMART services and the property tax that funds it. Oakland County ended this policy in 2022 when residents approved countywide SMART funding. In Wayne County, however, 26 out of 43 municipalities participated in this bus system while 17 "opted out", leaving many suburbs without SMART access.

10-year Transit Millage | Wayne County | SMART Bus System | Wayne County Transit Authority | Detroit Department of Transportation

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WAYNE COUNTY?

PASSED

In 2025, Michigan enacted legislation that eliminated the ability of individual municipalities in Wayne County to opt out of the SMART transit millage. In the August Primary Election, Wayne County voters approved a 10-year, county-wide public transit millage ballot proposal, similar to the millage approved by Oakland County voters in 2022.

16% Share of households in Wayne County that are transit-dependent.

$8 / MONTH Tax that will be levied for 10 years for a home with a taxable value of $100,000.

$57 MILLION Funds that the Wayne County transit millage is expected to generate in its first year.

$8 MILLION Approximate funds from the millage that would go to DDOT per year.

The approved proposal authorizes the Wayne County Transit Authority to levy a countywide millage of up to 0.9831 mills for 10 years, starting with the 2026 tax year. This means, in addition to their property taxes, property owners in the 17 "opt out" cities, villages, and townships, including the City of Detroit, will pay a new tax — about $8 per month (or $99 annually), for a home with a taxable value of $100,000, until 2035. For the 26 communities that are currently serviced by SMART and already pay this tax, this proposal will renew the millage at the same rate.

The tax is expected to generate roughly $57 million annually and will be distributed to Wayne County, SMART and other community, regional and local transit providers like the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT).

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS PUBLIC TRANSIT

Using the millage revenue, SMART aims to improve and expand operations in the region through multiple new fixed-service routes, extensions, and additional on-demand (flex) zones, connecting Detroit to western and downriver suburbs like Livonia, Canton, Lincoln Park, and others. In Detroit, DDOT seeks to invest the funds in closing service gaps and improving the safety, reliability, and frequency of its existing bus system.

Influences existing and new services

Impacts access for non-driving population

Adds costs for some municipalities

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

1. What would be the estimated total cost to you per year based on your property's assessed value?
2. In what ways would you and your community benefit – car savings, access to employment centers, added mobility?
3. What communities, regions, or activity centers would the expanded service connect?
4. What types of public transit options and services would the improved or expanded service offer in your local area?

Sources and additional resources

- SMART - Wayne County Transit Evaluation (2026)
- Wayne County Transit Authority

PUBLIC EDUCATION

01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Since the mid-1990s, school funding has been a state responsibility in Michigan. Today, roughly 60% of school funding comes from the state, 30% from local government, and 10% from the federal government. The Michigan legislature annually determines the amount of base per-student funding (called the foundation allowance) for each school district. Since the 2020-21 school year, every district in the state (other than "hold-harmless" districts) receives the same foundation allowance. Under Michigan's cost-sharing formula, local districts contribute to the foundation allowance through local taxes and the state covers the gap to reach the full allowance through the School Aid Fund. A district's annual operating budget is largely a function of this per-student foundation allowance and the number of students enrolled in that district.

The base foundation allowance is also used to drive additional state dollars to districts to meet the added learning and health needs of low-income students and English learners. For the 2026-27 school year, additional funding for low-income students ranges from 20% to 26% of the foundation allowance ($2,000 to $2,700 per student), depending on the amount of student poverty.

School Funding | Local Non-Homestead School Tax | Foundation Allowance | School Aid Fund | Detroit Public Schools Community District

$10,300 Foundation allowance per student for DPSCD's upcoming 2026-27 school year.

$1.1 BILLION DPSCD's budget for the upcoming 2026-27 school year, supporting 49,000 students.

18 MILLS School operating tax that would be levied by DPSCD.

$112 MILLION Funds that the school tax is expected to generate in 2026.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MICHIGAN?

When Michigan reformed its school finance system in 1994 and shifted primary funding responsibility to the state, a key goal was to close the wide gaps in funding for basic school operations. Providing every district with the same foundation allowance became the number one priority of the state's annual school budget. Since achieving this objective in 2020-21, the state's funding priorities have shifted to a focus on more equitable funding.

State lawmakers adopt budgets to ensure that school funding is both equal and equitable across Michigan schools. Recent budgets have poured in additional dollars recognizing that some students come to school with additional learning needs that require added resources to sufficiently serve. While the foundation allowance has seen increases for inflation since 2021-22, the state has tripled its investment in the Opportunity Index to serve low-income students. Additionally, the state K-12 budget has provided substantial funding increases for English learners and students with disabilities to improve the funding equity.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS EDUCATION FUNDING

Detroiters elect state representatives who determine operational funding levels for Michigan's schools through the annual state K-12 budget. This November, Detroit voters will elect five members to the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) Board of Education. The seven-member, at-large board is responsible for overseeing district operations, including the development and maintenance of a balanced annual budget.

PASSED

This August, Detroit voters voted to renew the local school operating property tax levied on non-homestead properties, such as rentals or businesses. Revenue from this tax represents the local share of the district's foundation allowance. Proposal S on the August ballot asked Detroiters to vote on renewing DPSCD's school operating tax (18 mills) to raise $112 million in 2026, about 10% of the district's total budget. The tax will generate about $2,300 per student toward the district's $10,300 foundation allowance in 2026-27, with the School Aid Fund providing the remaining $8,000 per student.

Influences operational funding levels for schools

Decides members of the district's school board

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

1. What are candidates' priorities for improving public education in Michigan and Detroit?
2. How do candidates propose to fund K–12 education and support student success?
3. How will candidates help prepare students for college, careers, and the workforce?

Sources and additional resources

- Detroit Ballot Issue: Proposal S – School Operating Millage Replacement

TAX POLICY

01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Today, Detroit residents and businesses are among the most heavily taxed in the nation. The city's property tax rate is among the highest in Michigan and second highest among big cities in the nation. The city, school district, and library make up a large share of these taxes, but Detroiters also pay property taxes to the county, intermediate school district, several special authorities, and the state. City residents also are burdened by city income tax and city utility users tax.

This high tax rate affects both residents and businesses, contributing to the loss of population and employers while reducing Detroit's competitiveness as a place to live, work, and invest. Without some level of tax incentives, investments in Detroit housing and business properties will be very slow.

Lowering the tax burden will allow families to invest more in their homes and other household needs and help businesses compete with competitors located in other cities. It can also help attract more investment in the city to continue improving city and school services.

Property Taxes | City Income Tax | City Utility Users Tax | Temporary Tax Relief | Tax Abatement

HIGHEST Detroit levies the highest city income tax rate in Michigan.

25% Approximate share of property taxes paid to retire city and school debt.

2ND HIGHEST Property taxes levied on Detroit property owners is the second highest among the biggest cities in each state.

LESS THAN 1/4 The city controls less than 1/4 of the total property tax rate.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ADDRESS TAXES IN DETROIT?

Leaders engaged in efforts to lower taxes have two options: reduce city services to Detroit residents who are arguably underserved relative to suburban neighbors or identify alternative revenue sources that would support property tax and/or income tax relief. The new administration is seeking new revenue sources to lower the rates for existing taxes. Enacting new taxes, including those that would increase the share of taxes paid by city visitors, requires authorization by the state legislature before the city can act.

In place of tax reform, Michigan law allows cities to use several tools, such as tax abatements, to provide targeted relief as part of the economic development efforts and to retain and attract families and businesses. Tax abatement programs allow the city to either freeze the pre-development property value of a development for tax purposes or to cut the tax rate in half. This form of tax relief generally is limited to 12 years. In exchange for this public investment, Detroit often requires investors to provide community benefits as compensation for the city's participation in project financing.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS TAX POLICY

Because Michigan law governs many local taxes and how cities are funded, state lawmakers play a major role in shaping Detroit's tax system. They can authorize new taxes that Detroit leaders may choose to levy and create programs that support city services. Detroiters also elect city representatives who determine the services provided with city and state resources and the cost/benefit of providing tax incentives.

Shapes Detroit's tax system

Influences new taxes and programs

Impacts services and tax incentives

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

1. What strategies are candidates proposing to reduce taxes for Detroiters?
2. Who benefits from these tax reductions?
3. Do the businesses investing in downtown and midtown provide job opportunities, amenities, or services you qualify for?

Sources and additional resources

- An Assessment of Detroit's Economic Condition and a Critique of its Economic Development Efforts
- Allowing the Detroit DDA's Captured Tax Revenues to Again Fund Government Services
- Detroit's Use of Tax Abatements and Alternative Strategies to Improve Competitiveness
- Evaluating Local-Option Admission Taxes in Michigan Cities
- Evaluating a Local-Option Sales Tax Policy for Detroit

RENTAL AFFORDABILITY

01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Housing touches almost every issue on the ballot. Affordable, stable, and safe housing is the foundation for health, education, employment, and community. In Detroit, across Michigan, and around the country, that foundation is unstable for many people.

In Detroit, 62% of renters spend too much on housing, putting additional pressure on household budgets and often forcing difficult tradeoffs to cover other basic needs such as health care and food. More permanently affordable rental housing solutions are needed, along with home repair resources, to ensure rental housing is both affordable and safe.

Affordable Housing | Rental Housing | Home Repair | Zoning Reform | Housing Opportunity Tax Credit

02 WHY DETROIT IS DIFFERENT

Housing affordability in Detroit is not just a housing market problem; it is also an income problem and a policy problem at every level of government. Unlike many other places in Michigan and around the country, Detroit's housing affordability crisis is driven less by a shortage of housing and more by the low incomes of many residents.

1. Low incomes are the primary cause of the city's affordability crisis.
2. Much of Detroit's aging housing is in poor condition and may not always be safe or livable.

$31,133 Median annual income of renters in Detroit.

$778 Monthly rent and utilities that are affordable for the median renter household in Detroit.

$1,091 Median monthly cost of rent and utilities in Detroit.

62% Share of renters in Detroit who spend too much on housing.

3. Low rents in Detroit make repairs and renovations, which have become more expensive, difficult to finance.
4. High construction costs and low rents make the creation of new housing difficult.

04 WHAT IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

Decisions by state and local elected officials and policymakers directly shape whether these challenges improve or worsen. State departments such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority set goals and policies that affect housing production and affordable housing across the state.

The Michigan Legislature passed legislation that would:

1. Create a Housing Opportunity Tax Credit to help fund affordable rental housing.
2. Limit the number of homes large institutional investors can own.
3. Allow some multifamily buildings to have a single staircase to help reduce costs.

There is also pending legislation that would place statewide limits on zoning and regulatory restrictions to help increase housing production.

At the local level, officials set rules and regulations, such as zoning, that guide what development can take place and how rentals are regulated.

Determine tax incentives

Shape zoning and regulatory reform

Decide investor ownership limits

05 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

1. What are candidates' positions on providing subsidies for affordable rental housing development?
2. Do candidates support policies that would increase or limit new housing production?
3. Do candidates have plans to improve the quality of existing housing?

Sources and additional resources

- State of Michigan Housing Data Portal
- City of Detroit Housing and Revitalization Department - Strategic Plans, Reports and Data
- Detroit Future City - Research

CRIME AND SAFETY

01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Compared with peer cities, Detroit has relatively high crime rates, including high rates of homicide and motor vehicle theft. Public safety in Detroit is funded primarily at the local level through city income, property, casino, and utility users taxes. Policing alone receives almost one-third of the City of Detroit's General Fund budget.

The state of Michigan also plays a role in the resources available to local governments for public safety through state revenue-sharing programs and state appropriations, such as the recently created Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program. Launched through the fiscal year 2026 state budget process, the program provided $43 million to local governments for public safety and distributed funds based on violent crime levels. The program requires local governments to use at least 75 percent of the funding they receive for law enforcement agencies or law enforcement officers. Up to 25 percent may be used for non-law-enforcement public safety purposes, such as training, recruitment, and programs designed to reduce identified public safety risks. Michigan also receives federal resources for public safety, law enforcement, and emergency management through federal grants.

Law Enforcement | Violence Prevention | Detroit Police Department | Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program | Community Violence Intervention

31 Homicides per 100,000 people in Detroit in 2024.

1,270 Motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 people in Detroit in 2024.

$10.6 MILLION Funds received by Detroit through the Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program

$446 MILLION Detroit Police Department's budget for fiscal year 2027.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MICHIGAN?

Federal, state, and local legislators determine not only how much money is allocated to public safety, but also which approaches are used to address crime. In Michigan, state legislators are prioritizing both law enforcement and violence prevention, while also seeking to give communities the resources to tailor public safety solutions to their needs. Although efforts to create a Public Safety and Violence Prevention Fund were unsuccessful, new public safety funding moved forward in the 2026 budget through the creation of the Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program. Through this program, Detroit will have more resources for law enforcement officers, as well as funds that can be directed to other public safety priorities, including the Community Violence Intervention Program.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS PUBLIC SAFETY

Investments in public safety, policing, and crime prevention affect quality of life in Detroit. Public safety also influences the city's economic and population growth. A safer city can help retain current residents and attract new ones. This, in turn, can help increase property values and support economic growth, creating more opportunities for Detroiters.

Detroiters will elect congressional and state representatives who determine how much federal and state funding goes to local governments for public safety and influence the types of public safety initiatives local governments can pursue. They also elect city representatives who decide how federal, state, and local resources are spent to support public safety in Detroit.

Impacts quality of life and safety in the city

Affects population and economic growth

Drives resource allocation and safety initiatives

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

1. What are each candidate's plans to improve public safety in Detroit?
2. How will candidates measure whether public safety investments are working?
3. What types of public safety strategies do candidates believe should be prioritized in your neighborhood?
4. How do candidates plan to reduce violent crime while building trust between law enforcement and the community?

Sources and additional resources

- City of Detroit Budget
- Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program
- Community Violence Intervention
- Crime in the City – Identifying Detroit's Peer Cities
- Detroit Leads on Property Crime: Larceny and Motor Vehicle Theft on the Rise
- Detroit's Reduced Homicide Rates - Peer City Analysis

VOTER RESOURCES

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER

Deadline for mail/online voter registration
July 20
** Voter registration after this date must be done at the local clerk's office.*

Early voting begins
July 25

Deadline to request absentee ballot by mail
July 31 - 5pm

Primary Election
August 4

Deadline for mail/online voter registration
October 19
** Voter registration after this date must be done at the local clerk's office.*

Early voting begins
October 24

Deadline to request absentee ballot by mail
October 30 - 5pm

General Election
November 3

Register to vote and check registration status

Any U.S. citizen residing in Michigan and of 17.5-18 years of age by Election day can register. You can register online, by mail, or in-person at your local clerk's office using a valid ID.

Apply for an absentee ballot

Registered voters can request a mail ballot using a valid ID, up to 40 days before the election. You can apply online, by mail or in-person. Ballots must be received by 8pm on Election Day.

See what is on the ballot before you vote

Use your sample ballot to identify all the races you will be voting in, who the candidates are, and where they stand on issues.

Find your voting precinct and polling place

If you are casting your vote in-person early or on Election Day, look up your polling precinct and assigned polling place to ensure it has not changed.

Michigan Voter Information Center
https://mvic.sos.state.mi.us/

City of Detroit Department of Elections
https://detroitmi.gov/departments/elections

Detroit's Early Voting Challenge
https://early.onecivic.org/

PRIMARY ELECTION

The August 4 Primary has concluded. Voters nominated candidates for the General Elections and decided on 2 ballot proposals.

ON THE BALLOT: GENERAL ELECTION

Selected candidates from the Primary Election will run against each other for the following races at the November General Election.

1. Governor and Lieutenant Governor
2. Secretary of State
3. Attorney General
4. U.S. Senator
5. Representative in Congress
6. State Senator
7. Representative in State Legislature
8. Member of the State Board of Education
9. Regent of the University of Michigan
10. Trustee of Michigan State University
11. Governer of Wayne State University
12. County Executive
13. Justice of Supreme Court
14. Judge of Court of Appeals
15. Judge of Circuit Court
16. Judge of Probate Court
17. Judge of District Court
18. Detroit Community School District Board Member

PROPOSAL #1 Proposal to convene a constitutional convention for the purpose of drafting a general revision of the state constitution

PROPOSAL #2 Proposed initiated law to prohibit campaign contributions from certain regulated utilities and government contractors and apply campaign finance laws and regulations to additional types of political communications

PROPOSAL #3 Renewal of Wayne County Zoological Authority Millage in Support of the Detroit Zoo

PROPOSAL #4 Southeast Michigan Public Historical Museum Authority Millage Proposal

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