

Albert Lea: Renewal of local sales tax



The City of Albert Lea and the Shell Rock River Watershed District are jointly seeking legislative authorization to allow voters to renew the existing 0.5% local sales tax. This request represents the next era of successful stewardship of local dollars in Albert Lea.

This proposal maintains the 0.5% rate, requires voter approval before any extension occurs, and funds specifically identified capital projects that serve the Albert Lea community and broader region.

Since voters first approved the sales tax in 2005, the Watershed District has focused on restoring Fountain Lake and improving water quality throughout the watershed. Sales tax revenues have served as the required local match to secure significant state and federal funding, multiplying the impact of local investment. These efforts have reduced sediment and nutrient loading, strengthened dam infrastructure, mitigated flood risk, improved fisheries and habitat, and protected both public and private infrastructure.



Improving water quality in Fountain Lake has supported increased recreational use including boating, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Local partners cite this recreation as a key contributor to Albert Lea's tourism appeal and downtown vitality, even helping attract high-profile events such as the 2019 Governor's Fishing Opener.

As the current sales tax authorization nears its conclusion, the Watershed District and the City are proposing a renewed framework that continues critical watershed work while expanding investment to additional regionally significant capital projects.

Investing in regional community infrastructure

The renewal proposal includes defined City capital projects that serve a broader regional population.

Albert Lea Public Library expansion: As the only public library in Freeborn County, it serves the surrounding region as an educational and workforce resource, with one-third of patrons residing outside City limits. This resource supports job searches, youth and adult programming, and lifelong learning. With demand for its services exceeding its space capacity, the library needs to expand to keep increasing its impact.



Songbird Trail construction: This proposed 50-mile route in southern Minnesota would convert a former rail corridor into a trail for walking, biking and rolling, connecting Albert Lea, Manchester, and Hartland in Freeborn County to the nearby Blazing Star State Trail and the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail in Waseca and Le Sueur Counties.

This trail would attract more visitors to several rural towns and boost their economies, along with expanding recreation access and enhancing the quality of life for the surrounding region and beyond.



Snyder Sports Complex: Improvements would modernize a long-standing regional tournament venue that draws visitors from across southern Minnesota, generating activity for local hotels, restaurants and retail establishments.

Miracle Field: This inclusive ballfield for people of all abilities would build on the success of the adjacent inclusive playground, both unique amenities in the immediate region. Constructed in 2024, the inclusive playground at Edgewater Park has already become a regional destination.

Water resource protection: The Shell Rock River Watershed spans 246 square miles and extends to the Iowa border. Conditions within the watershed directly affect downstream communities, agricultural producers, transportation corridors, utilities, and shared water resources across the region.

Local sales tax dollars would continue to provide the required local match to secure significant state and federal funding, multiplying the impact of local investment and unlocking larger restoration efforts that benefit the watershed and those downstream.

The Watershed District operates under a statutorily adopted management plan, coordinates with state agencies, and is audited annually, providing accountability and long-term planning discipline.

Moving forward responsibly

This proposal maintains the existing 0.5% rate, continues a voter-approved structure, and funds clearly defined capital investments. It reflects coordinated leadership between the City of Albert Lea and the Shell Rock River Watershed District, and will continue to advance a regional investment strategy that:

- Strengthens recreation and tourism
- Supports community infrastructure
- Protects downstream assets
- Improves long-term environmental resilience

For more information

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