

# School spending, large farms, nonpartisan redistricting among subjects of spring election referendums

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Wisconsinites will decide on 139 different local referendums in this spring's election.

A WisPolitics.com review found many school spending issues totaling nearly \$1 billion. But also questions such as:

- four calls for establishing a nonpartisan redistricting commission;
- 10 asks to allow residents to drive ATVs on local roads;

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- an effort by a Northwoods community to thwart big animal feeding operations;
- and one to see if the Boaz Village Board should consider limiting pig ownership for residents to no more than one swine per property of at least one acre.

Also, 10 towns and the village of Lublin will all ask residents to move the town clerk or town treasurer from an elected position to an appointed one.

A previous [WisPolitics.com review](#) of election referendums found towns were often seeking to appoint clerks and treasurers due to a lack of interested and qualified candidates in rural communities.

Additionally, the counties of Marquette, Portage and Wood all have questions asking residents if the state should establish in statute a right to clean water “to protect

human health, the environment, and the diverse economy, cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin.”

The town of Chicog, in Washburn County, has a referendum asking residents if the town board should restrict the establishment of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations within its borders. CAFOs have come under fire in recent years for manure runoffs contributing to surface and groundwater pollution in local areas.

Chicog doesn't currently have CAFOs, but Board Supervisor Steve Loiselle told WisPolitics.com some residents have voiced their concerns in meetings enough lately to warrant a full referendum on whether the board should take any action.

Most areas in the state have little regulation in place that could prevent the establishment of a farm that would want to be there. And fighting the businesses in the courts “could cost a lot,” according to Loiselle, more than a small Northwoods town could reasonably set aside for such a battle.

Should the measure pass, and then be approved by the three-member town board, he said it's more of an incentive for CAFOs to “maybe look somewhere else” when setting up shop.

“It's meant to put a stop to it before it becomes an issue,” Loiselle said.

But the bulk of questions on the ballot this spring will be \$988.1 million worth of various school referendums.

Wausau's school district will have the costliest single referendum on the ballot: a \$148.8 million loan to modernize buildings, remodel the elementary, middle and high schools and to construct a new School Forest Environmental Center.

Wausau schools also have a second recurring referendum asking voters to approve a \$4 million yearly boost in district levies for maintenance and staffing purposes.

Last year set a record for school referendums, with residents passing more than 90 percent of the nearly \$3 billion on ballots in 2020, more than any other single year this century.

A [previous WisPolitics.com story](#) found many of last year's referendums came up because lawmakers haven't kept school funding up with inflation and the rising cost of schooling, as well as simply to take advantage of low-interest rates to renovate

or update aging infrastructure.