League of Oregon Cities

Local Story Template

How to Use This Template

- Use this template to build one short story about a service cut or funding shortfall in your community, then reuse it across an op-ed or letter to the editor, a social post, a newsletter, or other communications materials.
- Adapt the template below, swapping out the words in [blue] for details about your community.
- Keep it factual and specific.
- Show what your city has already done. In LOC's 2026 focus groups, concerns about waste, mismanagement, and inefficiency came up in every group. Before you describe a cut, name one or two concrete steps your city has taken to reduce costs, improve efficiency, or strengthen accountability. Residents are more open to hearing about revenue challenges once they see the money they already pay is well managed.
- Tie the example to the underlying cause. Property tax rules written more than thirty years ago cap the revenue available for local services, no matter how fast a community's costs or needs grow. City leaders are making the responsible choices with the resources available, but the system didn't keep up.

Step 1: Gather Your Details

Before you start writing, get these on paper. You will drop them straight into the template in Step 2.

- City, county, special district or community name
- What your city has already done: one or two specific steps taken to reduce costs, improve efficiency, or strengthen accountability (for example, sharing services with a neighboring city or district, consolidating departments, energy or technology upgrades, an outside audit, or a public budget dashboard), and the result if you know it, such as dollars saved or hours kept open
- Service affected: the specific service or program
- What changed or was cut: specific and concrete (a position, a program, an hours reduction, a closure)
- Timeframe: when this happened, or how long it has been happening
- Impact on residents: who feels this, and how
- Optional data point: a local budget or staffing figure, if you have one

- Closing line: one sentence connecting your story to the statewide challenge of a property tax system that is making it harder for Oregon communities to provide basic services we count on

Step 2: Drop Them Into This Template

Property tax rules written more than thirty years ago make it harder every year for Oregon to provide basic services we count on. For more than a decade, cities have cut spending, found efficiencies, and reduced staff and services to balance budgets while avoiding serious impacts to residents.

[City/community name] has done its part. Over the past [number of years], the city has [steps taken to reduce costs, improve efficiency, or strengthen accountability], [result, such as dollars saved or services protected].

But like many cities, [city/community name]'s revenue has grown far more slowly than the cost of providing basic services. The city has had to make tough decisions to [service affected], [what changed or was cut], [timeframe].

As a result, [impact on residents]. Without changes to our property tax system, communities like [city/community name] are at risk of losing what has made them a great place to live.

Example

Property tax rules written more than thirty years ago make it harder every year for Oregon communities to provide basic services we count on. For more than a decade, cities have cut spending, found efficiencies, and reduced staff and services.

Like many cities, Baker City's revenue has grown far more slowly than the cost of providing basic services. The city has had to make tough decisions to eliminate ambulance service and cut police and finance positions over the past several years. As a result, residents in an emergency may wait longer for care that used to be close to home. Without changes to our property tax system, communities like Baker City are at risk of losing what has made them a great place to live.

Where to Use This Story

- Op-ed or letter to the editor
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Public presentations
- Meetings with state legislators

Proof Points: Why This Works

In message testing, stories built exactly this way, one person, one service, one concrete consequence, tested as some of the most convincing reasons to fix the property tax system:

- A fire chief with unfilled positions due to locked-in tax rates: 81% total convincing.
- A parks director ordered to halt routine maintenance: 74% total convincing.
- A city that has deferred road maintenance for six years running: 80% total convincing.

Source: DHM Research statewide survey for League of Oregon Cities, July 2026.

Showing what your city has already done matters too. In the statewide survey, 82% of Oregonians said they were concerned that cities have already cut costs, found efficiencies, and reduced staff, and that there is no more fat to trim. In focus groups, residents raised waste, mismanagement, and inefficiency in every group, so concrete local examples of cost savings help residents trust the rest of the story.

Source: DHM Research focus groups and statewide survey for League of Oregon Cities, 2026.