

Fire Department

To: Finance Committee

From: Fire Chief Tanya Reynen

Date: 2/5/2025

Subject: Capital Replacement of Fire Department Ladder Truck

Background

The Watertown Fire Department requests approval to order a replacement ladder truck, as our current apparatus is reaching the end of its operational life. This essential piece of equipment is vital to the safety of our community and firefighters, and given current industry-wide manufacturing delays, it is imperative to begin the process to secure a place in the production schedule. **Payment will not be required until the vehicle is delivered**, making this a proactive yet fiscally responsible decision.

The ladder truck is an **integral component of the department's emergency response plan**, serving as:

- **A primary tool for fire suppression and elevated rescue operations**, especially in multi-story buildings, industrial facilities, and large residential structures. In addition, it provides the above and below-grade access needed for specialized rescue incidents.
- **A critical asset for firefighter safety**, ensuring rapid egress and improved operational effectiveness during structure fires in multistory structures. A ladder truck provides an expanded complement of ground ladders required in multiple rescue scenarios.
- **A support unit for mutual aid**, allowing us to fulfill our responsibilities in regional response and township fire service agreements.

The Department ladder truck is nearing the end of its service life, as defined by *NFPA 1911: Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles*. According to NFPA guidelines, fire apparatus should be assessed for replacement when they approach 15 years of frontline service. Our ladder truck has been in service since 2007, and we are experiencing increased service costs and a challenge finding replacement parts. Given the demanding operational requirements placed on our ladder truck, continued use beyond its serviceable life increases the risk of mechanical failure, raises maintenance costs, challenges timely procurement of replacement parts, and creates potential safety concerns.

The department committee members have performed a comprehensive assessment of possible replacement options, which included:

- Visiting a fire apparatus manufacturing facility to evaluate current build quality, product safety and performance features, and technological advancements.
- Visiting a certified service center to evaluate maintenance capabilities and post-delivery manufacturer support that aligns with our department's needs.
- Consulted with multiple fire departments currently operating similar ladder trucks to gather feedback on reliability, response effectiveness, and total cost of ownership.

The committee has recommended the replacement process with Emergency One as the preferred vendor.

Budget Goal

Maintains a safe and healthy community, with an eye toward future needs and trends

Financial Impact

The projected impact on the capital improvement budget is \$2,600,000.00, which includes the purchase of the vehicle, expanded warranty coverage to minimize future maintenance costs, and loose equipment for the vehicle.

Recommendation

The Watertown Fire Department respectfully requests that the Finance Committee approve the process of ordering a replacement ladder truck. Approval of this request is essential to maintaining a safe, effective emergency response fleet while proactively managing financial resources. The safety of our firefighters and our community depends on having reliable, mission-ready equipment.

Additional Financial Considerations

- **Ordering now does not require immediate payment;** funds will not be due until the truck is delivered, allowing the city to plan appropriately for the expense.
- **Delaying this purchase risks increased costs** as apparatus pricing rises due to material shortages, labor costs, and supply chain constraints. With very few exceptions, industry manufacturing lead times are as high as 50 months.
- **Investing in a reliable, modern apparatus reduces long-term maintenance costs.** It minimizes the risk of unexpected catastrophic failures, which could lead to costly emergency repairs and a lack of critical department resources. In addition, it will provide additional capability to the community as we experience growth and increase demand for our current service model.