

## Fire Department

To: Council Members

From: Fire Chief Tanya Reynen

Date: 3/11/2026

Subject: Capital Replacement of Fire Department Engine

### Background

The Watertown Fire Department requests approval to begin the replacement process for one fire engine as part of the department's long-term apparatus replacement plan. Several engines in our fleet are approaching or exceeding their recommended service life. Our primary engine is scheduled to move to second-out status in 2027, while our current reserve engine is already 29 years old and well beyond the recommended operational lifespan.

Fire apparatus manufacturing timelines remain significantly long across the industry. Current build times are approaching three years from order to delivery. Ordering now secures a position in the production schedule and helps ensure the department maintains a reliable apparatus fleet as older engines transition out of frontline service. Similar to the department's recent ladder truck and ambulance purchases, the apparatus will not be delivered for several years after the order is placed. Payment is not required until delivery.

Beginning the ordering process now also protects the City from further cost escalation. Fire apparatus pricing has increased significantly in recent years due to supply chain challenges, material costs, and manufacturing demand. Securing a production slot today helps stabilize long-term capital planning and reduces the likelihood of higher replacement costs if the purchase is delayed several more years.

The fire engine serves as one of the department's primary response units and is routinely the first apparatus deployed for emergency incidents. It functions as the primary platform for fire suppression while also carrying the equipment necessary for rescue operations, patient access, stabilization, and extrication. The engine supports a wide range of incidents including structure fires, rescue operations, and emergency medical responses.

Beyond fire suppression, the engine plays a direct role in firefighter safety by enabling rapid deployment of hose lines, ground ladders, and scene support equipment that allow crews to operate safely and maintain reliable egress during structure fires, including incidents involving multi-story buildings. Fire engines are mission-critical infrastructure for emergency response,

and their reliability directly impacts firefighter safety and the protection of lives and property in our community.

The department maintains a responsible apparatus replacement plan in which engines typically serve approximately 10 years as a frontline apparatus and an additional 15 years as a second-out or reserve unit. Our reserve engine has reached 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 guidance, apparatus should be evaluated for replacement when approaching 15 years of frontline service.

Currently, the department's reserve engine has been in service since 1996 and is now 29 years old. The second-out engine is 22 years old, and the primary engine is 9 years old (12 by the time we take delivery). As these vehicles continue to age, the department has experienced increased maintenance costs and growing difficulty obtaining replacement parts. In several cases, mechanics have had to fabricate parts because they are no longer manufactured. This results in longer out-of-service times, higher maintenance costs, and increased risk of mechanical failure during emergency response.

Delaying the replacement process risks creating a gap in the apparatus replacement schedule that could leave the department relying on aging vehicles with declining reliability and rising maintenance costs.

To ensure a responsible and informed recommendation, a department apparatus committee conducted a comprehensive evaluation of replacement options. This process included:

- Visiting multiple fire apparatus manufacturing facilities to evaluate build quality, safety features, and current technological advancements.
- Visiting a certified service center to evaluate maintenance capabilities and manufacturer support following delivery.
- Consulting with fire departments currently operating similar apparatus to gather feedback regarding reliability, operational performance, and long-term maintenance experience.

Following this evaluation, the committee has recommended proceeding with Emergency One as the preferred manufacturer through a Sourcewell cooperative purchasing contract.

## 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 \$1,700,000.00, which includes the purchase of the vehicle, expanded warranty coverage to minimize future maintenance costs, and required emergency response equipment for the vehicle.

## Recommendation

The Watertown Fire Department respectfully requests that the Finance Committee approve the process of ordering a replacement engine. 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.