

MEMO

TO: Finance Committee
FROM: Chief Tanya Reynen
DATE: May 29, 2026
RE: 2027 Deputy Chief Personnel Request

Background

Historically, the Watertown Fire Department operated with a Deputy Chief position responsible for Fire Prevention, EMS and Training, and Operations. Over time, the responsibilities associated with each of these areas have expanded significantly as the fire service has evolved.

Modern fire departments are expected to provide extensive documentation, regulatory compliance, training oversight, credential management, performance improvement programs, policy administration, data reporting, technology management, fleet management, and employee development in addition to providing emergency response services. These responsibilities have continued to grow while emergency call volume and operational demands have steadily increased.

For many years, these responsibilities remained consolidated within a single Deputy Chief position. As the complexity of the organization increased, it became increasingly difficult for one position to provide the level of oversight, accountability, and support necessary across all areas of responsibility.

In 2026, the City took an important step toward addressing this challenge through the addition of a Deputy Chief Fire Marshal position. This change provided dedicated leadership for Fire Prevention, inspections, code enforcement, and community risk reduction efforts. As a result, those programs are now receiving the focused attention necessary to meet community expectations and regulatory requirements while reducing risk to the city.

Likewise, EMS and Training functions now receive dedicated leadership and oversight. These responsibilities include continuing education, credentialing, quality assurance, onboarding, employee development, regulatory compliance, training delivery, and maintaining readiness for a department that responded to 3,205 incidents in 2025.

While dedicated leadership now exists for Fire Prevention and EMS/Training, a significant gap remains within Operations.

Currently, many operational management responsibilities are distributed among shift officers and line firefighters. Responsibilities such as fleet maintenance coordination, apparatus readiness, station maintenance, vendor management, operational policy accountability, equipment management, response system evaluation, and special projects are shared among multiple individuals throughout the organization. While these efforts have allowed the

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Opportunity Runs Through It

department to continue meeting operational needs, the arrangement creates inefficiencies, duplication of effort, inconsistent ownership of projects, and challenges in maintaining continuity and accountability.

The department's transition into a new fire station has further increased the need for dedicated operational oversight. Facility maintenance coordination, warranty management, building systems oversight, security systems, access control systems, contractor scheduling, technology coordination, and ongoing facility projects require consistent management and accountability. Currently, many of these responsibilities are coordinated through shift officers and command staff in addition to their primary responsibilities.

In addition, many operational management functions currently lack a dedicated administrative owner. Responsibilities such as fleet replacement planning, preventative maintenance programs, apparatus readiness, equipment standardization, operational policy implementation, deployment evaluation, facility oversight, and operational performance management require consistent leadership and accountability. These functions are more appropriately assigned to a dedicated operational chief officer responsible for the daily management and support of department operations.

The City has invested approximately \$14 million in a new fire station, millions of dollars in apparatus, equipment, technology, and communications systems, and relies upon the department to respond to more than 3,000 emergency incidents annually. These assets and systems require active oversight, planning, coordination, and accountability to ensure they remain operational, effective, and properly maintained.

The addition of a Deputy Chief of Operations would establish clear ownership and accountability for operational functions while allowing line personnel and officers to focus on emergency response, supervision, training, and readiness. This position would complete the department's leadership structure by providing dedicated operational oversight consistent with the leadership currently provided for Fire Prevention and EMS/Training.

Financial Impact

The addition of a Deputy Chief of Operations would increase personnel costs associated with wages and benefits. This position would provide dedicated oversight of operational functions currently distributed among shift line firefighters and officers, improving efficiency and accountability for fleet, facility, equipment, and operational management while allowing line personnel to remain focused on emergency response, training, and readiness.

Recommendation

Recommend approval of a Deputy Chief of Operations position to provide dedicated leadership and accountability for department operations, fleet and facility management, operational planning, and organizational support functions. This position completes the department's leadership structure by providing dedicated operational oversight consistent with the leadership currently provided for Fire Prevention and EMS/Training.