

MEMO

TO: Mayor Robert Stock and Members of the Common Council

FROM: Tanya Reynen, Fire Chief

DATE: September 30, 2026

RE: Approval of the 2027–2028 Collective Bargaining Agreement with IAFF Local 877

Background

The City of Watertown and Local 877 of the International Association of Fire Fighters have completed negotiations on the labor agreement covering January 1, 2027 through December 31, 2028. The current agreement, extended by side letter through December 31, 2026, expires at the end of this year. The Finance Committee reviewed the agreement and forwarded a positive recommendation.

This agreement accomplishes three things. It modernizes how we calculate and oversee pay and leave, it puts real structure behind firefighter health and wellness, and it keeps our wages and insurance terms consistent with the rest of the City's represented workforce and external comparables.

Pay and leave administration. Several changes make pay and leave easier to calculate, audit, and oversee, and bring the Fire Department into line with City payroll practice. Sick leave will accrue at 12 hours per pay period instead of 24 hours per calendar month, so accruals post with each paycheck the same way they do for other City employees; the 1,440-hour cap does not change. Step increases will now take effect on two fixed dates, pay period 1 for anniversaries between January 1 and June 30 and pay period 14 for anniversaries between July 1 and December 31, which makes step movement predictable for payroll and for budgeting. The paramedic premium is written as a defined percentage of the equivalent EMT-B step with set effective pay periods, and the unused Fire Inspector stipend and Fire Mechanic premium are removed. Shift trade language had minor updates, and probation for Firefighter/EMT-B hires is extended to 18 months to make up for time spent at Paramedic training.

Health and wellness. This contract makes significant progress in protecting the health of our firefighters, and it reflects a shared commitment from both Local 877 and the City. A new Wellness/Fitness Program article adopts the IAFF/IAFC Joint Labor-Management Wellness-Fitness Initiative, providing annual medical examinations built on NFPA 1582, including cancer screening, cardiac and pulmonary testing, and fitness assessments that are not included on lay person general annual medical exams. A new Mental Health Screenings article provides one confidential annual screening by a licensed mental health professional. Cancer and heart disease are the leading causes of death in the fire service, and early detection is the most effective tool we have.

Both programs are mandatory, non-punitive, and confidential. The City receives only de-identified, aggregate data for program planning, and the Fire Chief's authority to order a separate fitness-for-duty evaluation is preserved. These programs support the medical evaluation obligations that already apply to firefighters and

give us a consistent, defensible process for meeting them. The contract also adds a Pregnancy article that incorporates the protections of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, PUMP Act, ADA, and FMLA, and a Tobacco Use article prohibiting regular tobacco use on or off duty.

Wages and insurance. Wage increases are 2.5% at pay period 1 and 2.5% at pay period 14 in each year of the agreement, the same split structure provided to the Police Department. This keeps Watertown in the middle of our comparable communities for firefighter wages. The paramedic premium increases from 4.5% to 4.75% at pay period 1 of 2027 and to 5% at pay period 14 of 2027. Call volume, the training load on our paramedics, and a difficult recruiting market for paramedics all support this adjustment.

The health insurance article replaces the prior language, which tied the City's share to the lowest-cost State plan in Jefferson County, with the same structure used for the City's other represented employees. The City pays 90% of the premium, employees pay 10%, and the City retains the right to select the plan and plan administrator. The employee share is capped at \$100 per month for single and \$240 per month for family coverage in 2027, and \$110 and \$250 in 2028. The dental article moves to a 90% City contribution for single and family coverage. The 48/96 schedule trial continues through 2027 with a joint review of its effectiveness.

Financial Impact

Wages increase 2.5% at pay period 1 and 2.5% at pay period 14 in both 2027 and 2028. These costs are included in the proposed 2027 budget.

The paramedic premium increase is included in the wage figures above.

Health insurance removes the tie to the lowest-cost Wisconsin State Health Insurance Plan offered in Jefferson County. The City will pay 90% of the premium, with employees paying 10% subject to established monthly caps, and the City will select the plan, administrator, and plan design.

The dental change removes the prior \$29.31 limit on the City's contribution.

The wellness program and mental health screenings are City-funded. Estimated annual costs are approximately \$27,000 for physicals and \$6,500 for mental health screenings. These are offset in part by removal of the Fire Inspector stipend of \$600 per designated inspector and the 3.75% Fire Mechanic premium.

Recommendation

I recommend the Common Council approve the 2027–2028 Collective Bargaining Agreement between the City of Watertown and Local 877 of the International Association of Fire Fighters as presented, and authorize the Mayor to execute the agreement.

I want to thank the Local 877 bargaining team for working through these issues in good faith. This agreement strengthens how we administer pay and leave and invests in the long-term health of the people who serve this community.