

Information on the Fire Truck Referendum Question

By: Fire Chief B. Michael Thurlow

This fall's local ballot contains a referendum question asking Scarborough voters if they are in favor of authorizing up to \$660,000 in bonds to fund the cost of a new fire truck. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to advocate for citizens to vote a certain way, however it is my duty to provide as much accurate information as possible so that the electorate can make an informed decision when they cast their ballot.

There are three primary reasons that drive the replacement of fire apparatus. The first is a broad category of condition which factors the age, shape and reliability of the truck. The second is the cost of maintenance which generally increases with age, usage, and availability of replacement parts. The third is safety which, as with any other vehicle or mechanical device, is affected by age and use.

The Fire Department has a formal apparatus replacement plan that was first established in the 1940's. In 2019 that plan was updated to reflect current demands on our department's apparatus, and addresses changes required in part by the use of corrosive chemicals to promote rapid ice melt on our roads. The updated replacement plan analyzed ongoing maintenance expenses with cost of ownership including purchase price, replacement cost, and projected resale value. It references the consensus standards from the National Fire Protection Association that govern the design, maintenance, and replacement of fire apparatus. The replacement plan is a proactive planning tool to forecast expenditures for capital items well in advance in an attempt to avoid reactive, unplanned expenses after a failure of a critical piece of apparatus mid-budget. The fire department's replacement plan is considered along with those from police, public works, and other departments as the Town Manager prepares the annual capital improvement budget requests to balance the capital needs of all departments in town.

A copy of that Apparatus Replacement Plan is available on the Town's website at: <http://www.scarboroughmaine.org/departments/fire-rescue>. The plan has much more detailed information than space allows in this article, and I hope the public finds it helpful and informative.

The updated replacement plan outlines an important cost savings measure implemented to ease the burden of taxpayers. Historically, a single standard fire truck design was utilized town-wide resulting in a larger truck, carrying more water, to serve the special needs of the northern section of town not serviced with a pressurized water system and fire hydrants. Improvements and enhancements in Mutual Aid partnerships, along with requiring developers to install rural water supply tanks in new developments, now allows for smaller, more compact, and less expensive trucks assigned to the southern parts of our community which are served by a pressurized water system and hydrants. The funding requested in this referendum will be the first of these smaller, more economical trucks.

The purchase of a new fire engine will allow for the retirement of the Departments 1989 E-One pumper currently assigned as Engine 2. It will be 31 years old, with 139,000 miles, and 3,150 engine hours when it is retired from service. During its life span Engine 2 has served in Dunstan, Black Point, and is currently serving as our reserve pumper. In reserve it is used to maintain coverage when front-line engines are out of service for repairs, routine maintenance, or other assignments. Currently, our reserve engine is used in front-line service nearly 75% of the time.

As mentioned earlier there are three primary factors that drive the replacement of fire apparatus. The third listed, and most significant, is the safety of the public and our personnel. The requested funding is to replace a 1989 fire truck that lacks many of the safety components that are today's standard in every vehicle, including fire trucks. When Engine 2 was purchased in 1989 it came equipped with 2-point lap style seat belts because 3-point shoulder belts weren't available at that time. It also lacks anti-lock brakes, stability control systems, and air bag restraint systems which are now standard equipment in nearly all fire apparatus.

I hope that this information has been helpful as you consider your vote on this particular referendum question. The Town Council unanimously approved sending this project to the voters. If you have questions on our replacement schedule, this article, or would like to personally see our apparatus, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at mthurlow@scarboroughmaine.org or by phone at 207-730-4201. Regardless of which way you vote on this particular issue, I encourage every registered voter to participate in this important process of our democracy. There are many important questions on the ballot and our community is best served when everyone makes their voice heard.