



Information on the Ladder Truck Referendum Question 1

Fire Chief B. Michael Thurlow

This fall's local ballot contains referendum question 1 asking Scarborough voters if they are in favor of authorizing up to \$1,200,000 in bonds to fund the cost of a replacing one of our ladder trucks. 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 (NFPA) that govern the design, maintenance, and replacement of fire apparatus.

The apparatus 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 the 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 purchase of a replacement ladder truck will allow for the retirement of the Department's 1998 E-One model ladder assigned as Ladder 1 at the Dunstan fire station. It will be 24 years old, with 130,000 miles, and over 10,100 engine hours when it is finally retired from service.

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 1998 ladder truck that lacks many of the safety components that are today's standard in nearly every vehicle, including fire trucks. When Ladder 1 was purchased stability control and air bag restraint systems weren't available options.



TOWN OF SCARBOROUGH, MAINE

One of the more common questions I receive from the public is why do we need a 100' ladder truck since we don't have many tall buildings? One answer is based on simple trigonometry (remember $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$). Horizontal reach is often more important than the overall height of a building. With modern lot setbacks, landscaping, and parking lots our ladder trucks need to set up many feet from the building so the entire 100' length of the aerial is often used simply to access the 3rd floor bedroom window or roof of a normal apartment building.

Scarborough is a growing community. Since 1998 when the current ladder truck went into service, 110 new 3-story commercial and residential buildings have been built in town. That growth, along with the projected growth of additional new 3-story and taller structures over the next 20 years that this new ladder truck will be in service, helps illustrate the need.

There are several other reasons we need ladder trucks. They are the tool we need to use when flowing large volumes of water from an elevated position to extinguish well involved structure fires safely when the building is no longer safe for firefighters to fight the fire from the inside. These master stream devices are also used to protect exposures (other adjacent structures) from becoming involved which is particularly important in the new dense neighborhoods being built in our community. The aerial device is also the quickest to deploy and safest to work from when rescuing someone from a window or ventilating a building to help clear the heat and toxic gases making it possible and safer for firefighters to extinguish the fire.

Ladder trucks are also mobile tool boxes. They carry the dozens of pieces of specialized equipment that we need for salvage, technical rescue, and search & rescue operations. They contain our lighting tools and provide power for fireground operations including horizontal and positive pressure ventilation fans.

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.