

SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT (SFD)

2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

OVERVIEW & POLICY CONSIDERATIONS PAPER

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Table 1. Department Budget Summary

Budget Summary Level	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	% Change	2026 Proposed	% Change
Operating Budget					
Fire Prevention	\$14.7M	\$15.4M	4.3%	\$15.7M	2.0%
Leadership and Administration	\$51.9M	\$54.3M	4.6%	\$57.2M	5.4%
Operations	\$261.0M	\$271.1M	3.9%	\$275.8M	1.7%
Total:	\$327.6M	\$340.7M	4.0%	\$348.7M	2.3%

I. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

A. Operating Budget

The 2026 Proposed Budget for the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) increases by \$8 million (2.3 percent), relative to the 2026 Endorsed Budget. As described in detail later in this document, approximately \$5.5 million of this increment is driven by significant policy proposals, while the remainder is attributable to technical adjustments. The policy proposals include:

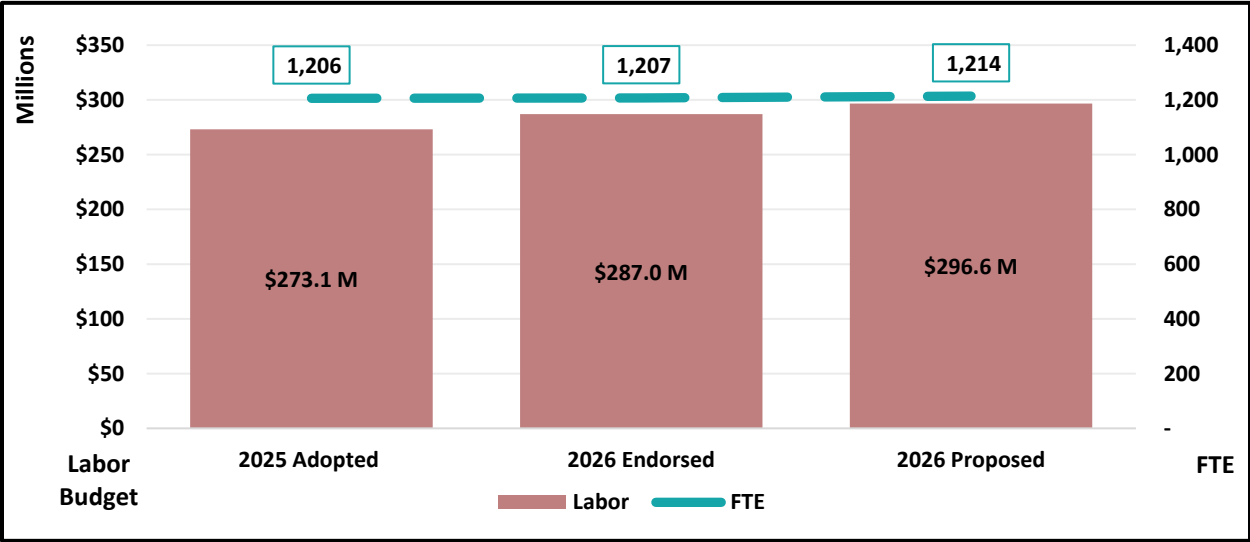
- An expansion of SFD's Health 99 post-overdose response function. At a cost of \$1.15 million, this includes funding for two additional firefighters and a health coordinator position, as well as two response vehicles. Health 99 is part of SFD's Mobile Integrated Health program, a multidisciplinary response approach that combines firefighters with case managers to provide coordinated services to vulnerable populations. This Health 99 expansion is being supplemented by 2.0 FTE case managers being proposed within the Human Services Department budget as well.
- An expansion of the civilian staff that support SFD's emergency response functions, including:
 - 1.0 FTE data analyst (Strategic Advisor 2) to assist in the work underlying the department's commitment to data-driven decision making;
 - 1.0 FTE (Administrative Specialist 2) to assist with recruiting efforts and address other human resource issues;
 - 1.0 FTE (Senior Management Systems Analyst) to support SFD's expanding technology portfolio, including SFD's new timekeeping and payroll system; and
 - 1.0 FTE (Administrative Specialist 3) to enhance the capacity of SFD's Fire Prevention unit to address both nuisance (false) alarms and the abatement of dangerous buildings.
- One-time funding of \$2.1 million to expand SFD's 2026 recruitment class to include 20 additional firefighters (i.e., from 80 prospective firefighters to 100). Expanding the number of fully trained firefighters will not increase the number of first responders on duty at any given time. Instead, it will reduce the amount of overtime needed to achieve the daily minimum staffing necessary to operate all the City's fire stations at full capacity.
- One-time funding of \$1.5 million to support SFD's operational needs related to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Approximately \$800,000 of this total is for equipment and supplies, with the remaining allocated for preparation and training.

Partially offsetting these funding additions, SFD's 2026 Proposed Budget also includes an ongoing reduction of \$1 million in overtime and labor costs.

On the technical side, SFD’s budget includes the addition of \$2.75 million to address the increased compensation costs associated with a new labor agreement with Local 2898 representing SFD’s Battalion and Deputy Chiefs. A portion of this cost is attributable to “retro” payments for 2022 through 2025. Other technical adjustments related to central costs and grants result in a combined reduction of approximately \$350,000.

B. FTE & Labor Changes

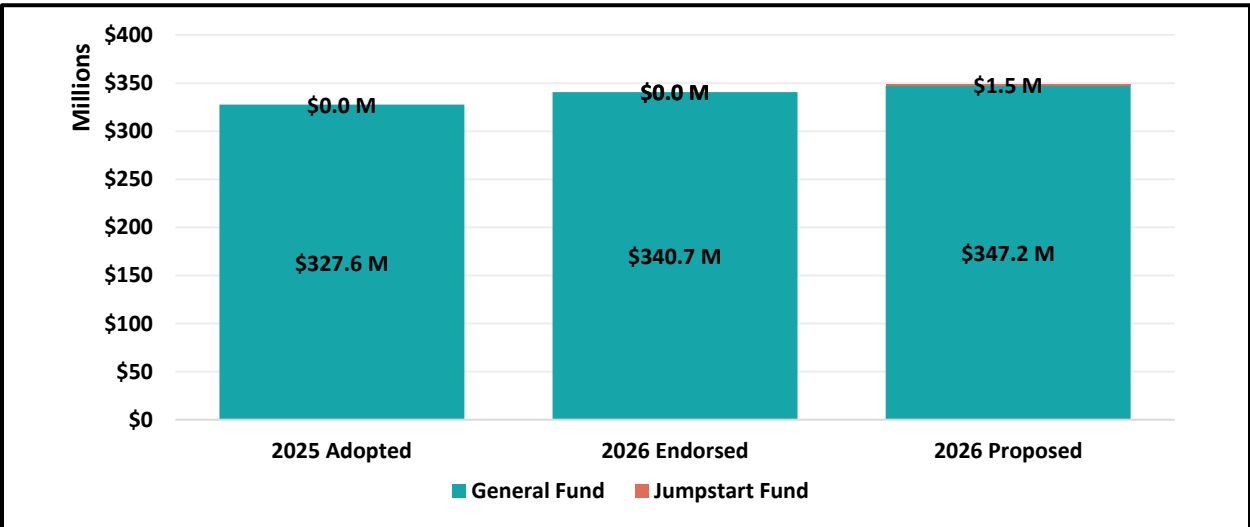
Figure 1. FTE & Labor Budget Summary



Labor costs dominate SFD’s overall expenditures, with 85 percent of the department’s budget dedicated to employee compensation. As detailed above, SFD’s 2026 Proposed Budget includes additional funding to address the cost of seven new FTE and the increased compensation for the department’s Battalion and Deputy Chiefs. Overall, SFD’s authorized staffing levels have remained relatively constant, at just over 1,200 FTE for the last several years.

C. Fund Appropriations Summary

Figure 2. Fund Appropriations Summary



In 2026, SFD will rely on the General Fund for almost 100% of its funding. The only exception is the one-time addition of \$1.5 million of JumpStart Payroll Expense Tax revenue to pay the cost of FIFA World Cup expenses. By way of further explanation, SFD's General Fund revenue appropriation of \$347 million includes \$78 million in voter-approved property tax revenue from the County-wide Emergency Services Levy, and about \$15 million in revenue from various grants and fees.

II. ISSUES FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION DURING BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

1. Aid Cars

The SFD primarily provides Basic Life Support (BLS) services through deployment of its Aid Car units. They perform critical tasks such as cardiac defibrillation to stabilize patients before SFD's Advanced Life Support (ALS) Paramedic units arrive on scene.

SFD has seven Aid Cars: five available for deployment 24/7 and two 12-hour cars deployed during peak 911 call hours. If an Aid Car is not available for deployment, SFD will provide BLS services by deploying an engine or ladder company. The department prefers to deploy Aid Cars whenever feasible as deployment of engines and ladders for BLS calls is inefficient, costly, and reduces the resources available for fire-related deployments. The number of medical calls that could receive an Aid Car response has generally increased in recent years (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: 911 Call Demand Aid Cars 2020-2025

Year	Total Calls	Average Per Aid Car
2020	23,223	3,871
2021	25,273	4,412
2022	30,126	5,012
2023	33,784	5,613
2024	31,836	5,306
2025 YTD*	21,417	3,569

The Washington Surveying & Rating Bureau (WSRB) provides guidelines on community fire defense. The WSRB has noted that a high frequency of alarms reduces the number of available companies for response. A reasonable workload for a company is 2,500 alarms per year, above which additional companies are needed. SFD recommends using a 2,500-call threshold as a means of determining when new Aid Cars should be added.

When adding new units, SFD will normally fill the additional required shifts by deploying firefighters on overtime. Current firefighter staffing issues will preclude this approach in early 2026 because the department has become overly reliant on overtime to fill shifts for minimum staffing purposes, and does not currently have the capacity to extend overtime use to new Aid Cars.

SFD staff indicate that new aid cars should not be added until mid-2026, when its first class of 80 or more recruits is expected to replenish firefighter ranks. At that time, the department's preferred plan would be to add one 24-7 aid car. If the add of one 24-7 aid car is not financially feasible at this time, the department would request one 12-hour aid car to respond to calls during peak hours.

Option 1 below shows the cost of staffing on overtime one 24-7 aid car from July-December 2026, and adding 10.0 FTE to SFD's mid-year recruit class to build staffing capacity to operate the aid car in 2027 and beyond. Additionally, CBO indicates that SFD would need \$520,000 of new appropriation authority in 2026 to place the order for a new vehicle. Once the vehicle is delivered and outfitted for placement in service, SFD will pay ongoing FAS rates for vehicle replacement in the future. (not included in costs below).

Option 2 below shows the cost of staffing on overtime one 12-hour aid car from July-December 2026. SFD indicates that 12-hour cars are staffed exclusively with overtime funding. The annual ongoing overtime costs for one aid car would be \$785,000. The new vehicle add in 2026 will cost \$520,000.

Options:

- A. Add \$2.3 million for one 24-7 aid car:** \$784,000 added one-time to provide overtime funding to staff the aid car between July-December 2026, \$1.04 million to add 10.0 FTE to the July recruit class to provide ongoing staffing for the aid car, and \$520,000 to add a vehicle.
- B. Add \$912,000 for one 12-hour, peak time aid car:** \$392,000 to provide overtime funding to staff one 12-hour aid car during peak deployment hours and \$520,000 to add one aid car. Ongoing funding will be \$784,000 for overtime.
- C. No change.**

2. Ready Rebound

The Seattle Fire Fighters Union Local 27 (Local 27), representing the City's front-line firefighters and paramedics, has requested Council to consider allocating \$400,000 for [Ready Rebound](#) as an additional tool for addressing firefighter injuries.¹ Ready Rebound is a healthcare navigation company that offers expedited access to care and coordinated recovery services for first responders and their families. The company arranges care with sports medicine-trained partner doctors and therapists for musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., strains and sprains, spinal injuries, fractures and dislocations) occurring on-duty and off-duty. The company operates as a concierge service, available 24/7 every day of the year, that is intended to augment an employer's management of injury claims. Ready Rebound describes its services as "VIP priority care" that "treat members like professional athletes" to provide immediate access to care; decrease time to recovery; close cases faster; and achieve savings for workers' compensation claims and overtime costs.

In recent years, the Mayor's Office, in consultation with the Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR), considered retaining Ready Rebound's services but determined: (1) that the company's services are not designed to address what they have identified as SFD's most significant challenges with workers' compensation claims; and (2) that there is a lack of data supporting cost savings for comparable employers in Washington state.

As of May 2025, about 10 percent of all SFD claims (26 of 270 claims) accounted for almost 70 percent of SFD's total claim costs, indicating to the Mayor's Office and SDHR that high costs are more related to complexity of specific cases and conditions rather than scheduling appointments. Ready Rebound's services address straightforward musculoskeletal issues, while SFD's most challenging (and expensive) claims are related to long-lasting and complicated claims that are increasing due to the expansion of the state presumptive coverage law.²

¹ The [City's contracting policies](#) do not require departments to advertise contracts under \$69,000; allows departments to use the City's consultant roster to select a consultant for projects valued at \$410,000 or less; and requires a request for proposal or request for qualification for projects valued at or above \$410,000.

² In Washington state, there is a legal presumption that certain conditions diagnosed in firefighters (i.e., cancer, cardiac issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, and certain infectious diseases) are work-related. Ready Rebound's assistance with musculoskeletal conditions would not expedite or assist with care for complex, presumptive claims. See [RCW 51.32.185](#) and [Presumption of occupational disease for firefighters - Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Ready Rebound also does not appear to have resulted in cost savings for Spokane, a comparable municipality that has retained the company's services for several years and is the only other city in the state that is self-insured *and* self-administered.

Impact of Firefighter Injuries

Firefighter absences due to injury and related claims have significant impact on SFD's operations and budget. In 2024, the City spent approximately \$17.7 million on SFD claims. Of this amount, SFD reimbursed \$14.2 million in workers' compensation claim costs to the City's self-insured claims fund and separately incurred an additional \$7.3 million for associated labor costs (e.g., backfill overtime costs when firefighters are on occupational leave). Trends show that such costs are rising due to an increase in claims related to injuries and exposures covered by expansion of the state presumptive coverage law, economic trends (e.g., recession, inflation), COVID-19 treatment delays in 2020 through 2022 that complicated recovery and extended claim duration, an aging workforce, and claim specific factors. As SFD continues to experience a high vacancy rate, firefighter absences due to injury reduce the department's ability to meet minimum staffing levels, which can lead to unit outages and increased overtime costs. The majority of SFD's overtime is to maintain minimum staffing levels due to unfilled positions or firefighters out on leave (e.g., sickness, vacation, paid parental leave, military, disability). Returning injured firefighters to work sooner would decrease these costs and help the department meet minimum staffing levels.

Administration of Workers Compensation Claims

Under Seattle Municipal Code (SMC), SDHR has the sole authority to administer the City's self-insurance program for workers' compensation, including administration of benefits and contracting for consulting services.³ SDHR is also responsible for ensuring the City's compliance with state laws governing workers' compensation claims. Even though the City is self-insured, the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) retains regulatory authority over self-insured employers and all final claim decisions are made by L&I.

If the City retained services offered by Ready Rebound, the SDHR Director would be responsible for facilitating the contract as well as directing and managing the vendor relationship to ensure compliance with state laws and avoiding conflicts with the City's administration of claims. The City is ultimately responsible for the delivery of workers' compensation benefits to its injured workers and is accountable for all aspects of its workers' compensation program. Accordingly, most of this work is done "in-house" by the City's Claim Analysts. The small number of vendors that currently support the City's work in this area provide services that are governed by L&I's administrative rules and policies. In contrast, the employee advocacy and concierge services provided by Ready Rebound are not governed by L&I and it is not clear whether the provision of these services by a contracted vendor would meet the strict requirements for self-insured employers. As contracting for these services would present liability risks, Central Staff strongly recommends an Executive Session with the City Attorney's Office for a complete overview of legal considerations.

³ See [SMC 4.44.070](#).

Analysis

Ready Rebound offers concierge services that expedite care for firefighter injuries related to musculoskeletal conditions. The company's services may decrease the time to recovery for these conditions but there are trade-offs to consider: the services do not appear to support the medical conditions or complicated issues that are the source of the SFD's greatest challenges with firefighter injury claims; have not resulted in cost savings for a comparable municipal employer; and present legal considerations for the City's administration of workers' compensation claims

Getting injured firefighters back to work is a complicated process. There are elements of this overall process that intersect with SDHR's administration of the workers' compensation program and can also implicate mandatory or permissive subjects of bargaining.⁴ A comprehensive approach to addressing firefighter injuries and returning firefighters to work would need to involve, at minimum, collaboration with SFD, SDHR, and union partners. As another approach to addressing these issues, Council may want to consider requesting SFD, in consultation with SDHR, union partners, and other relevant entities, to report on developing or enhancing programs to strengthen the City's response to firefighter injury claims to return employees to work sooner, improve employee health outcomes, and achieve cost savings.

Options

- A.** Add \$400,000 to SDHR to support contracting with an organization, such as Ready Rebound, that offers expedited access to care and coordinated recovery services for firefighter injuries (subject to bargaining).
- B.** Pass a Statement of Legislative Intent requesting SFD, in consultation with SDHR, union partners, and other relevant entities, to comprehensively report on ways to develop or enhance programs to strengthen the City's response to firefighter injury claims to return injured employees to work sooner, improve employee health outcomes, and achieve cost savings.
- C.** No change.

⁴ The 2025 Adopted Budget included a proposal (subject to bargaining) that would have civilianized SFD's disability officer position that assists with finding and assigning light-duty work and currently rotates among uniformed personnel every two years. SFD's goal for civilianizing the position was to increase institutional knowledge for processing and managing injury and illness claims beyond the typical two years of the uniform position. This item was not resolved through labor negotiations, and the body of work remains within the Local 27 bargaining unit.

III. BUDGET LEGISLATION

1. CBO 2025 Year-End Acceptance ORD

The proposed legislation would increase appropriations to SFD (\$100,000) in the 2025 Adopted Budget to reflect funding from the Department of Homeland Security (through the Seattle Police Department) to reimburse the department for 2025 expenses for training on large-scale hazardous material deployments and equipment pre-positioning, technical response drills, and mass casualty planning.

2. CBO 2025 Year-End Supplemental ORD

The proposed legislation would adjust appropriations to SFD (\$6 million) in the 2025 Adopted Budget as follows:

- Increase appropriations (\$4.7 million) for retroactive and current year costs associated with a labor agreement between the City and Local 2898 ([ORD 127288](#));
- Increase appropriations (\$1.1 million) for increases in termination pay cash-outs that were higher than projected due to higher retirements than forecasted and higher cash-outs per retiree;
- Increase appropriations (\$350,000) for increases in utilities that were higher than projected due to unbudgeted inflation costs; and
- Increase appropriations (\$20,000) for reimbursed vehicle damage caused by other parties.

3. CBO 2026 Annual Grant Acceptance ORD

The proposed legislation would accept funding awarded to SFD (\$644,000) from the Federal Department of Homeland Security for an Urban Area Security Initiative Grant to assist high-threat, high-density urban areas in efforts to build, sustain, and deliver the capabilities necessary to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism.