

Village of Rochester Fire & EMS Referendum FAQ

August 11, 2026 Referendum Election

The Village of Rochester is asking residents to consider a referendum related to funding Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) at current service levels. Below are answers to common questions regarding the referendum process and its purpose.

What is the Fire & EMS Referendum?

The referendum asks voters whether the Village should be allowed to exceed the State-imposed property tax levy limit by \$140,000 on an ongoing basis in order to continue funding fire protection and emergency medical services at their current levels.

Why is the referendum being proposed?

Officials have determined that current fire and EMS service levels cannot be sustained without either additional revenue or reductions in other Village operations.

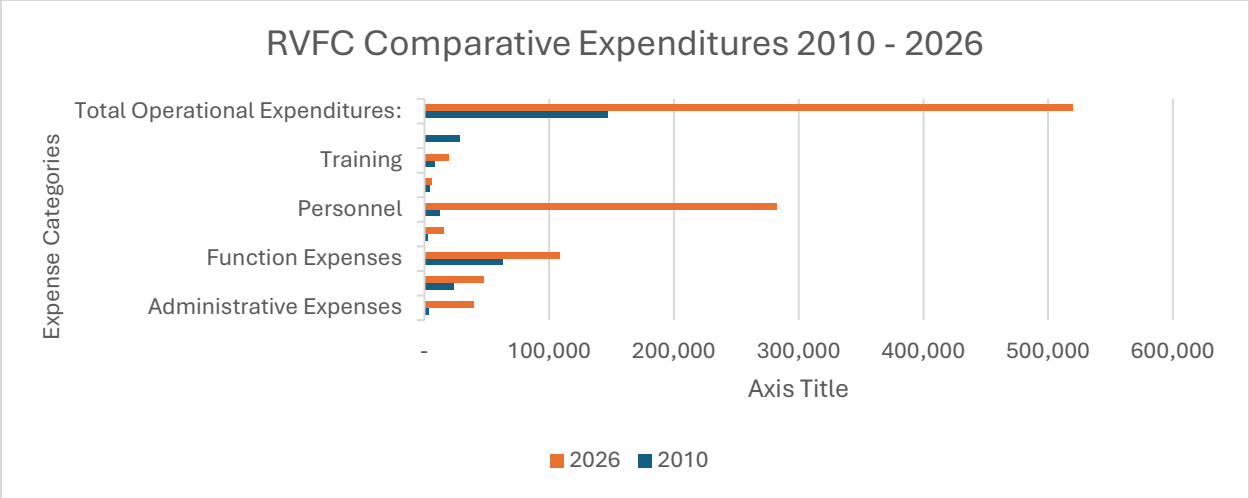
Major contributing factors:

- Property tax levy limitations
- Increased fire protection and EMS personnel costs
- Higher training and operational expenses
- New State-mandated EMS provider fees
- Decreasing rescue revenues

Increased personnel costs; EMS provider fees, explained.

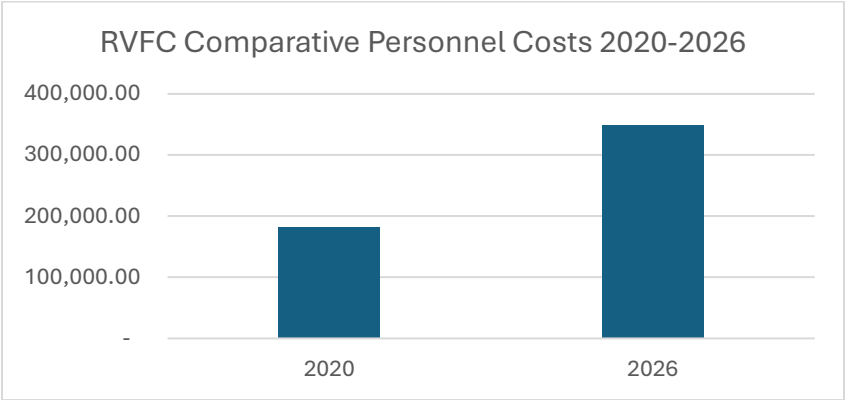
Like many volunteer fire departments across the country, the Rochester Volunteer Fire Company (hereinafter referred to as RVFC) has been challenged by a nationwide decline in volunteerism, increasing certification requirements, and rising 911 call volumes. In response, the fire company began transitioning to paid daytime staffing in 2010. As a result, the compensation budget has grown from a fully volunteer-based total of \$12,800 in 2010 to a combined volunteer and paid staffing budget of \$282,580 in 2026.

Additionally, state EMS provider fees imposed on private emergency medical service providers beginning in 2025 have added approximately \$25,000 in annual administrative expenses.

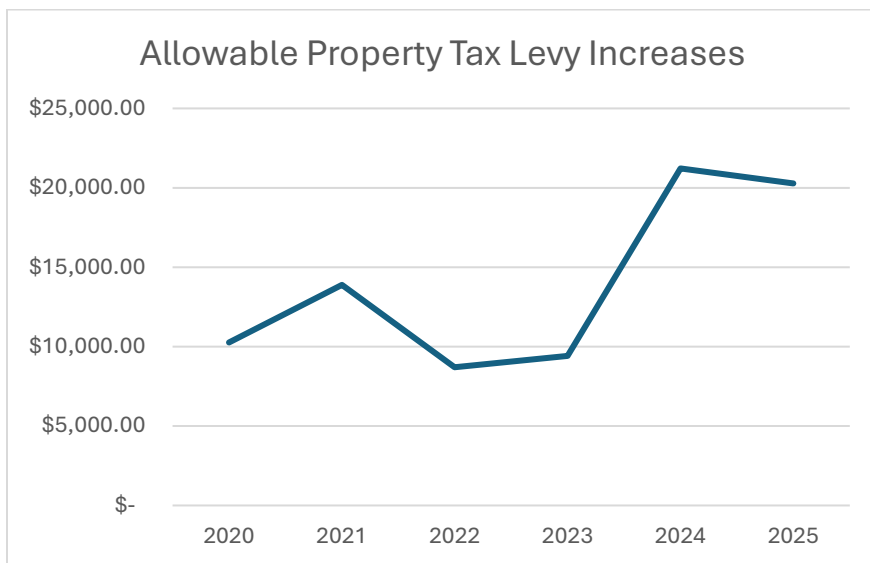
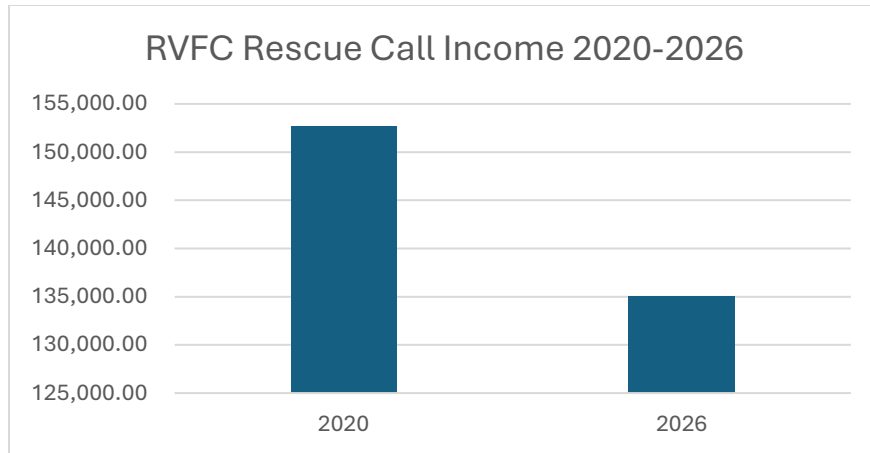


Increasing Expenses vs. Decreasing and Limited Revenues

Increases in rescue run revenue and Village tax appropriations kept pace with increased costs until 2020 when RVFC transitioned to two full-time employees to meet minimum response standards and keep up with the increasing administrative burden associated with running the company. Since that time, RVFC’s compensation budget alone has risen by more than \$170,000 to meet operational needs and maintain competitive wages in 2026.



Since that transition occurred, projected annual rescue revenues have declined by \$18,000, while the Village’s capacity to increase property taxes have averaged only \$13,963 per year—an amount that must be distributed across multiple departments.

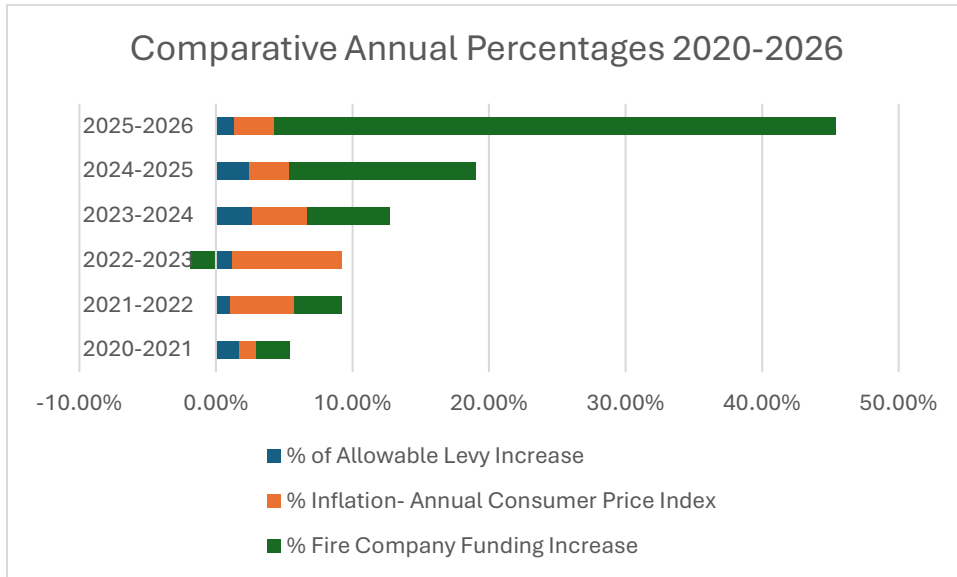


Officials have determined that current service levels cannot be sustained without either additional revenue or reductions in other Village operations.

Why can't the Village fund Fire & EMS within the current levy limits?

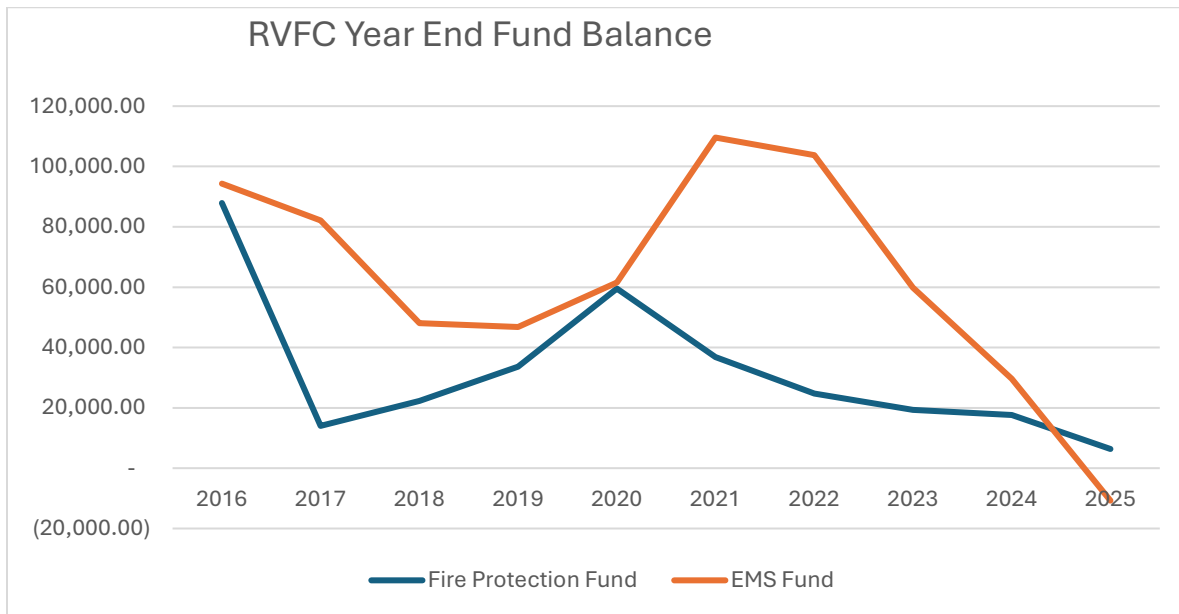
Since 2020, Rochester's allowable property tax levy has increased by an average of 1.72% annually—approximately \$14,000 per year—while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has risen by an average of 3.98% per year. During the same period, fire and EMS funding appropriations have increased at an average annual rate of 10.81%, or roughly \$27,000. In addition to supporting Fire and EMS operations, the Village must also fund a broad range of essential services, including legislative and administrative functions, building and property

maintenance, insurance, street maintenance and plowing, animal control, parks, and library services.



Is the Village going to referendum to make up for a budget deficit?

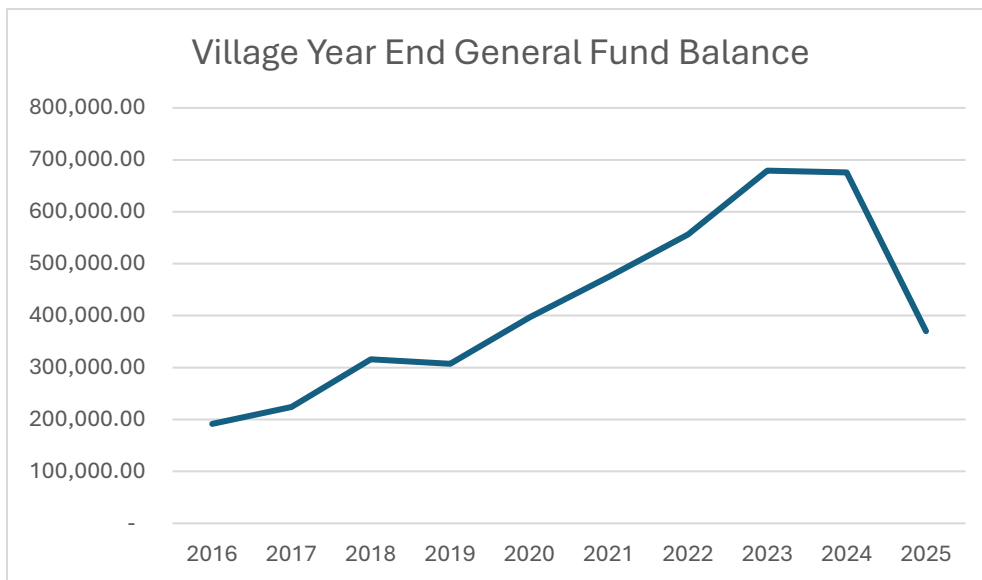
Yes. Over the past decade, RVFC’s Fire Protection Fund balance declined from \$87,890 (YE 2016) to \$6,359 (YE 2025), and its EMS Fund balance fell from \$94,264 to (-\$10,760) due to ongoing operating losses, requiring the fire company to dip into fundraising reserves to cover costs.



Has the Village already used reserve funds to support operations?

Yes. The Rochester Volunteer Fire Company required a \$101,000 increase in taxpayer funding beginning in 2025 to balance its 2026 budget, which the Village was only able to accommodate by drawing on fund balance, thereby reducing its financial flexibility and increasing its vulnerability to unforeseen expenses. For 2027, the Rochester Volunteer Fire Company has projected the need for an additional \$39,000 in taxpayer support to balance its budget due to continuing cost increases and declining revenues.

Officials have stated that continued reliance on reserves is not a sustainable option.



What will appear on ballots?

The referendum question that will appear on the August 11, 2026, ballot is as follows:

“Under state law, the increase in the levy of the Village of Rochester for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year, 2027, is limited to 1.283%, which results in a levy of \$1,359,010. Shall the Village of Rochester be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year, 2027, for the purpose of funding fire protection and emergency medical services at their current level, by a total of 10.302%, which results in a levy of \$1,499,010, and on an ongoing basis include the increase of \$140,000 for each fiscal year going forward?”

What will happen if a majority of voters vote “yes”?

A “YES” vote would authorize the Village to institute a one-time, permanent \$140,000 increase to the property tax levy, beginning with property tax bills issued in December 2026.

More specifically, Rochester would have the funding to allow the Rochester Volunteer Fire Company to continue its current staffing model of one Full-time Fire Chief, one Full-time Paramedic, and rotating part-time staff to provide dedicated fire protection and emergency medical service coverage Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; with continued reliance on volunteers to provide coverage for days and times outside of those hours. The increase would become part of the Village's ongoing levy base moving forward.

How much would it cost taxpayers?

This would translate to a property tax impact of approximately:

- **\$23.09 per \$100,000 in assessed property value.**

The impact on a Rochester home valued at \$400,000 is estimated at \$92.36 annually. Actual impacts may vary slightly depending on final property assessments and equalized values.

What would a “NO” vote mean?

A “NO” vote would keep the Village under the existing State levy limits. Without additional funding authority, the Village will need to consider:

- Reductions in Fire or EMS service levels
- Reductions or elimination of other municipal services
- Continued reliance on reserve funds, which is not sustainable
- Possible implementation of new fees

If approved, how would the additional funds be used?

Any funds generated by the referendum would be used solely for Fire and EMS operations, including:

- Staffing and personnel costs
- Training and certification requirements
- Equipment and operational expenses
- Maintaining emergency response services for residents

Capital equipment purchases, such as fire trucks or major apparatuses, are funded separately and are not part of the referendum request.

Is this a one-time increase?

No. The proposed referendum is for an ongoing increase to the Village levy beginning with the 2027 budget year. Committee discussions determined that a one-time increase would not provide long-term sustainability for Fire and EMS operations.

Is the funding referendum a permanent solution?

No. However, this funding request is projected to be sufficient for approximately five years. During that time, officials plan to implement cost-saving measures, including transitioning the Rochester Volunteer Fire Company (currently a private contracted provider) into a Village department. This change is expected to eliminate state-imposed EMS fees and reduce certain administrative costs.

How can residents learn more?

Residents are encouraged to:

- Attend Village Board and committee meetings
- Review official Village newsletters and website updates
- Watch for informational mailers
- Follow official Village and Rochester Volunteer Fire Company website and social media

When will the referendum take place?

- The referendum is scheduled for the Tuesday, August 11, 2026, election.

Where do I vote?

Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Rochester Village Hall, 300 W. Spring St., Rochester, Wisconsin. To view your options for voting, including early and absentee voting, please visit myvote.wi.gov.