

SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT (SFD)

2027–2028 PROPOSED BUDGET

OVERVIEW & POLICY CONSIDERATIONS PAPER

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Table 1. Department Budget Summary

Budget Summary Level	2026 Adopted	2027 Proposed	% Change	2028 Proposed	% Change
Operating Budget					
Fire Prevention	\$15.7M	\$16.0M	2.2%	\$16.1M	0.5%
Leadership and Administration	\$57.2M	\$57.3M	0.1%	\$59.7M	4.3%
Operations	\$277.8M	\$273.0M	(1.8%)	\$278.2M	1.9%
Total	\$350.7M	\$346.2M	(1.3%)	\$354.0M	2.2%
FTE	1221	1232	1%	1232	0%

I. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

The 2027-2028 Proposed Budget for the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) includes a 2027 decrease of \$4.5 million (1.3 percent) relative to the 2026 Endorsed Budget. As described in detail below, this decrease is driven by a proposed ongoing reduction of \$7.1 million to SFD's overtime budget. SFD's budget would increase by 2.2 percent from 2027 to 2028, relative to the 2027 Proposed Budget. Additionally, two increases totaling \$1 million are included to align SFD's budgeted utility and maintenance costs to their actual levels. Other technical adjustments reflect centralized City cost changes.

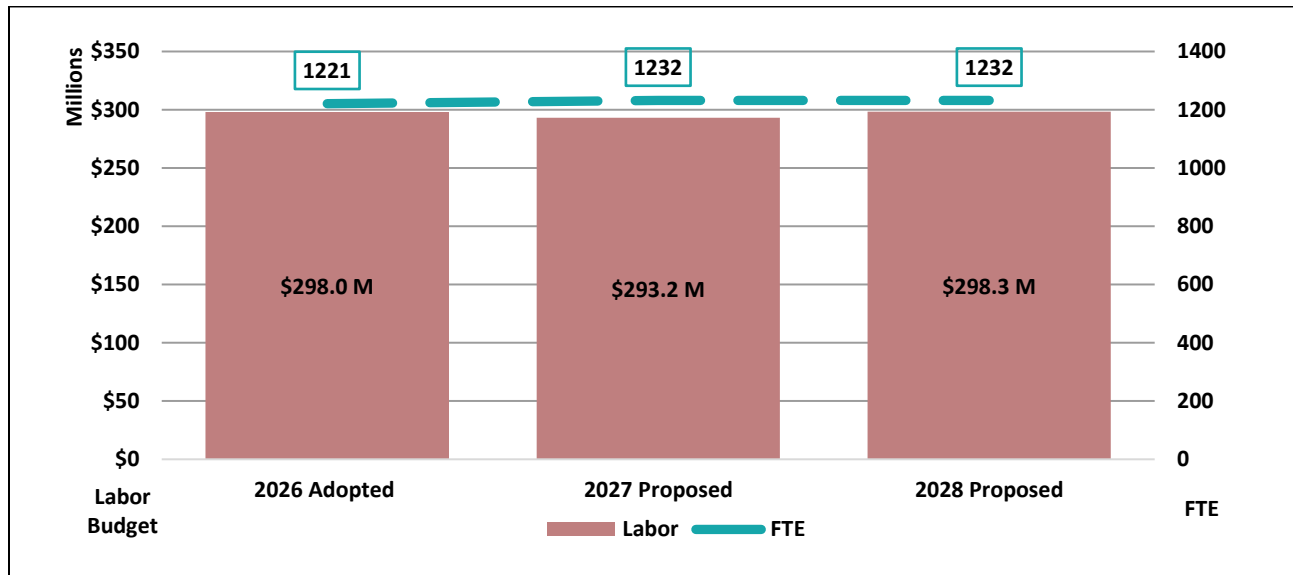
A. Operating Budget

Key policy proposals in the 2027-2028 Proposed Budget include:

- The reduction of SFD's overtime budget by \$7.1 million on an ongoing basis. Given that firefighter overtime accounts for the vast majority of SFD's total overtime budget, the impact of this reduction would largely be borne by them. The proposed reduction amounts to a 17% reduction in SFD's overtime budget from the 2026 level. SFD has relied on overtime staffing to meet its target daily firefighter staffing level, and the proposed reduction would mean that this level would decrease by design from 222 to 209. Although SFD has operated with ad hoc "unit outages" due to low staffing levels for the past several years, the proposed reduction would systematize them, requiring that they be maintained at a higher level than has historically been the case. See Section II below.
- The addition of 10 FTE firefighter positions to support SFD's Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) program, which began in 2016. This addition is technical in nature and does not add new staff or funding. Instead, it adds dedicated MIH positions corresponding to funding that has been added to SFD's budget as the MIH program has grown. SFD MIH teams include up to two firefighters (all SFD firefighters have Emergency Medical Technician certification) and a case manager based in the City's Human Services Department (HSD). To date, SFD has supported this program's incremental growth by increasing its overtime budget as needed, because incumbent firefighters staff MIH shifts on an overtime basis. Creating new MIH-specific positions will enable SFD more easily to track the program's costs, and it will allow SFD to establish MIH participation as a longer-term role for firefighters with interest in this area. This position add also recognizes that the MIH program, initially a pilot, is now permanent at SFD.
- Ongoing funding of \$820,000 for five firefighters to staff a peak-time aid car providing Basic Life Support services. The Council added one-time funding for the aid car in the 2026 Adopted Budget.

B. FTE & Labor Changes

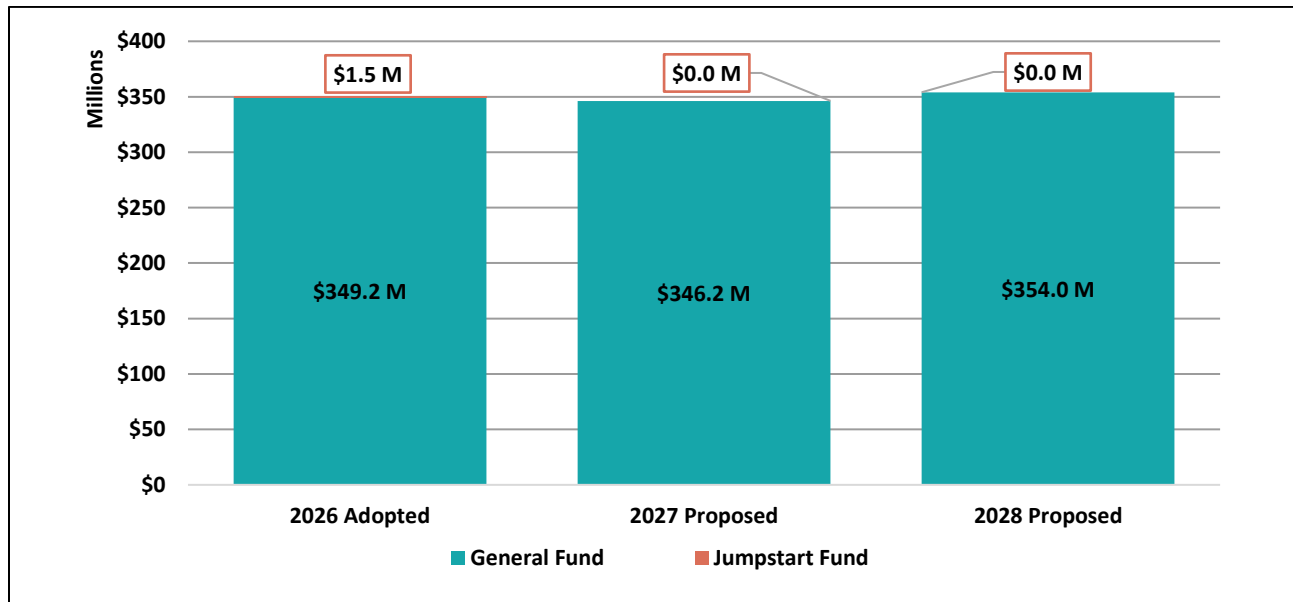
Figure 1. FTE & Labor Budget Summary



Labor costs are the primary driver of SFD's annual budget, with these amounting to 85 percent of the 2026 Adopted Budget and 84 percent in both years of the 2027-2028 Proposed Budget. The 2027 FTE change shown here includes the addition of 10 Mobile Integrated Health positions. The 2027-2028 Proposed Budget reflects a five-year increase in SFD's authorized positions from 1177 to 1232 (4.6 percent), most of which are first-response positions.

C. Fund Appropriations Summary

Figure 2. Fund Appropriations Summary



SFD is supported by General Fund revenues. In 2027, SFD's proposed \$346.2 million revenue appropriation from the General Fund includes \$79.3 million in voter-approved property tax revenue from the County-wide Emergency Services Levy and \$16.7 million in revenue from various grants and fees.

II. ISSUES FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION DURING BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

1. Proposed \$7.1 million Ongoing Reduction to Overtime Budget

The Seattle Fire Department has 922 authorized first-responder firefighter positions.¹ The regular work schedule for these positions constitutes 24 hours worked, then 48 hours off, followed by 24 hours worked and 96 hours off. As of October 9, 2026, 886 of these positions are filled. (This figure is fluid and should always be considered a snapshot.) SFD establishes a target daily staffing level, often referred to as “minimum daily staffing,” which is based on the required full-staffing configuration for every response apparatus planned to be in use. The term “minimum daily staffing” may be misleading in that (1) this target level in fact reflects a baseline and (2) since 2021, it has often not been met. In 2026, SFD’s target daily staffing level is 222. The overtime-reduction proposal in the 2027-2028 Proposed Budget would decrease this number to 209.

Given the various categories of leave to which all City employees are entitled and the unpredictability of the use of this leave, SFD – like fire departments generally – relies on firefighter overtime. Every day, SFD Operations evaluates the number of firefighters who are available to work their regular shifts versus the department’s target staffing level. For most positions not able to be filled by a firefighter working a regular shift, the department fills the shift on an overtime basis. Overtime is not mandatory at SFD, however, and the number of firefighters who volunteer for an overtime shift is typically lower than the number of shifts available.

This means that on a given day, SFD staffing, including shifts worked on overtime, is lower than the department’s target staffing level. In these situations the department makes data-informed decisions to implement “unit outages,” which are affirmative choices not to resource one or more response apparatus (fire engine, ladder truck, etc.) across the SFD system. As an example, if SFD staffed 218 positions one day in 2026 – some of them on an overtime basis – that might reflect the unit outage of one ladder truck that is staffed, when in use, by four firefighters. Historical unit-outage data is included in Table 2.

Table 2. SFD Unit Outages, 2022 – current year

Year	January - August	Calendar Year
2026	564	-
2025	656	1094
2024	499	868
2023	204	351
2022	710	907

Attachment 1 to this memo is a map of SFD’s 31 fire stations across Seattle and the apparatus housed at each one. SFD assigns apparatus based on a station’s capacity, geographical location, ability to support response redundancy, and the type of calls to which the station has historically responded. The main factor in SFD’s decision to remove a particular unit from service is a neighboring fire station’s ability to deploy the same category of unit if it is needed. SFD manages unit outages by striving to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) response standards. The proposed overtime reduction would represent the systematization of unit outages, and SFD would implement it based on its demonstrated ability to manage these outages on an ad hoc basis.

SFD estimates that its 1094 unit outages in 2025 allowed the department to avoid \$4.8 million in overtime costs. The proposed \$7.1 million reduction would be reflected in approximately a 50 percent

¹ Some SFD firefighters are not first responders, for instance those on staff in the Fire Prevention Division (Fire Marshal’s Office) and those currently serving in administrative roles.

increase from that level, for a total of 1600 to 1700 unit outages. SFD believes that it can absorb the additional unit outages. Additionally, some current overtime at SFD is allocated by management for areas such as simulation-based training and committee work, and the department's proposal includes an intent to review the use of management-allocated overtime and reduce this practice when the overtime is not tied to firefighter-proficiency requirements.

If the Council were interested in the policy goal of significantly reducing the number of unit outages across SFD stations, it is possible but not certain that the funding of an additional recruit class or classes could support this goal. The annual addition to the firefighter workforce of new recruits is offset by incumbent firefighters' separation from service, typically due to retirement. Firefighters are not required to give advance notice to SFD of their intent to separate from service, so the department is unable to balance incoming and outgoing firefighters for an optimal staffing level. In addition, the proportion of a recruit class that will successfully complete training and join SFD is unpredictable, as is all firefighters' use of extended leave.

Options:

- A. Reduce the proposed reduction
- B. Add one-time funding for one or more additional firefighter recruit classes (estimated cost is approximately \$121,000 per recruit or \$3.6 million for a class of 30)
- C. A and B
- D. Alone or in combination with any of the above, adopt a Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) requesting that SFD report on unit outages and their impact on response time
- E. No change

III. BUDGET LEGISLATION

1. 2026 Year-End Supplemental Ordinance

The 2026 Year End Supplemental Ordinance includes 11 items that would increase appropriations in SFD by a total of \$9 million. Five of these, totaling \$3.4 million, are backed by grant or other funding. Of the remaining \$5.6 million, \$2 million supports the repair and mechanical overhaul of SFD's fireboat *Leschi* and \$2 million supports the payment of termination pay cashouts and workers' compensation claims that were higher than budgeted for in the 2026 Adopted Budget. \$510,000 is included to pay for damage caused to SFD vehicles by other drivers. Central Staff has reviewed all of the proposed appropriations and has not identified any issues.

2. 2027 Annual Grant Acceptance Ordinance

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.

IV. ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Seattle Fire Department Apparatus Locations

