

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

# Rolling Stock

The vehicles and equipment that drive the City

---

City Council Work Session

October 26, 2026



# 318 vehicles and machines, \$24.5 million

| Department                                                            | Units      | * Purchase value    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| <b>GENERAL FUND</b>                                                   |            |                     |
| Public Works (Highway, Solid Waste)                                   | 114        | \$7,426,861         |
| Fire                                                                  | 29         | \$6,623,139         |
| Police                                                                | 49         | \$1,676,569         |
| School                                                                | 23         | \$630,506           |
| Public Works Other<br>(Recreation, City Hall, Library, Prescott Park) | 10         | \$277,008           |
| <b>General Fund subtotal</b>                                          | <b>225</b> | <b>\$16,634,083</b> |
| <b>ENTERPRISE &amp; SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS</b>                         |            |                     |
| Water (Enterprise)                                                    | 35         | \$2,815,520         |
| Sewer (Enterprise)                                                    | 28         | \$2,641,656         |
| Parking (Special Revenue)                                             | 25         | \$1,930,625         |
| Stormwater (Special Revenue)                                          | 5          | \$509,043           |
| <b>Enterprise and Special Revenue subtotal</b>                        | <b>93</b>  | <b>\$7,896,844</b>  |
| <b>CITYWIDE TOTAL</b>                                                 | <b>318</b> | <b>\$24,530,927</b> |

## Light vehicles

- Sedans, pickups, and vans for inspections, engineering, meters, and supervision
- Roughly \$30,000 to \$85,000 each

## Heavy trucks

- Dump trucks with plows and salters, refuse packers, roll-offs, and fire apparatus
- Roughly \$110,000 to \$1.7 million each

## Specialized equipment

- Sidewalk tractors, snow loaders, sweepers, Vector trucks, and aerial lifts
- Roughly \$175,000 to \$600,000 each

Roughly two-thirds of the value sits in the General Fund, where the appropriation competes with every other City service. The remaining third is paid by Water and Sewer rates, Parking revenue, and Stormwater. Purchase value is what the City paid, so replacing this fleet at today's prices would cost substantially more.

*\* Source: Primex exposure schedule, verified against City purchase records. Parking and Stormwater units are identified by department tags within the Primex schedule and could vary slightly from actuals because of the completeness of vehicle tag data by department provided by the City to Primex.*

# How we decide what to replace

EVERY DECISION IS WEIGHED AGAINST FOUR GOALS

- Reliability
- Ability to respond
- Safety
- Efficiency

## Step one: the guide

- Criticality of need or use
- Years of service by class, or hours of operation for equipment
- A target year, not a purchase order

## Step two: the adjustment

- Repair history and cost per hour or mile
- Corrosion, frame and body condition, parts availability
- What services stop if this asset is unavailable

## Step three: the decision

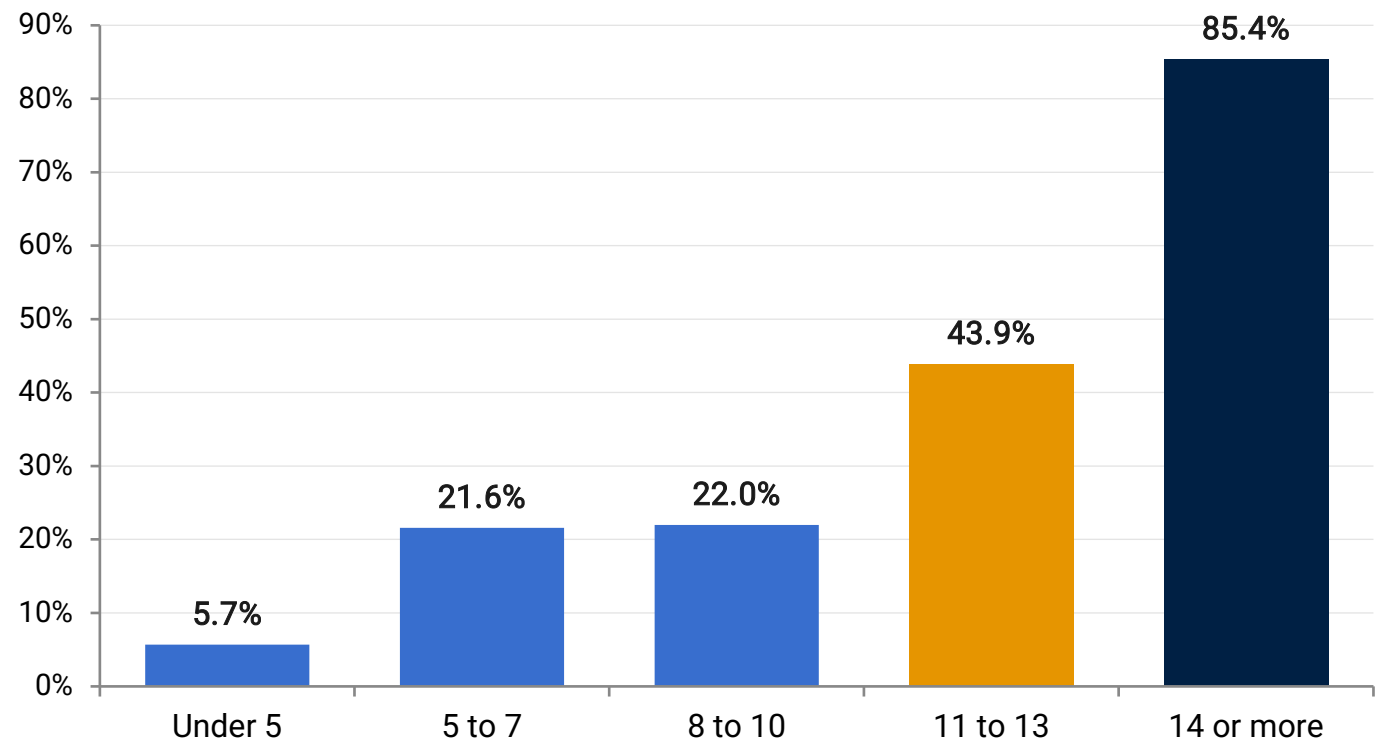
- Replace, defer, retire without replacement, or repurpose
- Reviewed every budget cycle, not set once

## The same logic, different thresholds, and judgment running both ways

| Asset                       | Scheduled | What staff did          | Why                                          |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| H095, 2015 tractor          | Due now   | Pushed to FY 2030       | Still in good condition                      |
| P130, 2020 F550             | FY 2030   | Pulled forward          | That model year is running high repair costs |
| H040, 2008 ten-wheel dump   | Past due  | Retired, not replaced   | Market Street snowplow operation alternative |
| H084, 2013 sidewalk tractor | Past due  | Held to FY 2029 or 2030 | Extending life to manage rising costs        |

Thresholds by department: Fire plans apparatus at 15 years and aims to replace before 10,000 hours or 100,000 miles, with independent third-party pump, ladder, and safety testing. Police plan patrol vehicles at 5 years, retiring at 85,000 to 95,000 miles and well over 10,000 engine hours. Public Works plans by class, from 8 years for a refuse packer to 20 years for a trailer.

# Repair cost rises with age, but not on every asset



## Median annual repair cost per asset

| Asset class          | Under 10 yrs | 10 yrs or more |
|----------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Dump and plow trucks | \$1,317      | \$4,924        |
| Sidewalk tractors    | \$1,859      | \$4,463        |
| Pickups and utility  | \$768        | \$783          |
| Cars and vans        | \$856        | \$456          |

66

Public Works assets at or past useful life entering FY 2028

77%

of repair dollars are completed in-house by City staff

Holding a plow truck past 10 years nearly quadruples its repair cost. Holding a sedan does not. That is why the schedule treats classes differently rather than applying one standardized rule.

Chart displays lifetime cost of parts, labor, and tires (excluding fuel) as a percent of what the City paid, by current age in years. 117 Public Works assets with an original cost above \$15,000.

# Getting more out of what we buy

SAFER, MODERN DESIGN

**Rear loader to side arm**

- One solid waste operator works from the cab instead of a crew on a riding step
- Fewer lifting injuries and faster routes

MULTI-USE OVER SINGLE-USE

**Loaders, not dump trucks**

- The City once ran dump trucks for the larger roads that sat idle outside winter season
- Staff fitted plows and wing blades to the large loaders instead

TECHNOLOGY DOING THE WORK

**Autonomous equipment**

- The School Department has its first autonomous field line-striping robot
- Schools have both proposed autonomous mowers

## And equipment keeps working after its front-line life



A police cruiser runs about five years on patrol, then serves as a spare, a detail car, or the School Resource Officer vehicle. One coming offline this year becomes the Social Worker and Community Outreach vehicle, outfitted with Opioid Abatement grant funds. Sixteen Public Works assets are hand-me-downs carried at under \$1,000.

# It is not only old equipment that is failing

## New vehicles fail early

- A patrol vehicle on the road less than a month needs an entire new engine
- A two-year-old patrol vehicle already needed a complete engine replacement
- A 2020 refuse packer has cost \$163,728 in repairs against its original \$267,150 purchase price

## Parts no longer last

- Since 2020, replacement parts do not hold up the way they used to
- A repair that once ended the problem now comes back for service
- Parts cost 23.8% more than in early 2020 and outside labor rates are 33.5% more

## The DPW maintenance is short-staffed

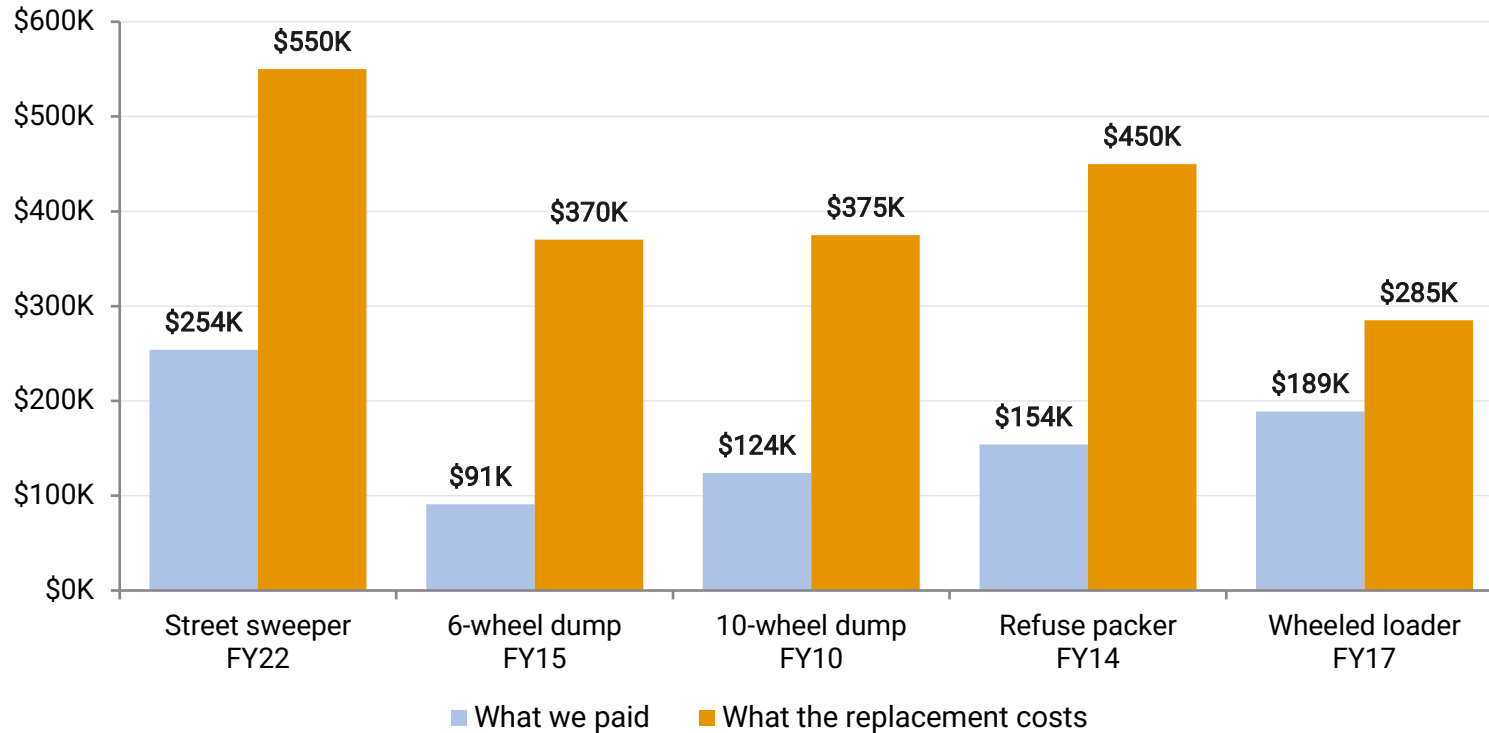
- A fully staffed garage is four mechanics, a garage assistant and welder, and a parts manager
- The City has been short at least one mechanic for five years and struggles to maintain adequate staff
- Apprenticeships and vocational partnerships have all been tried

### FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

The City's Vehicle Maintenance General Foreman reports that build quality has declined across the board since the pandemic, including replacement parts.

The vehicle warranty might cover a failed engine but not the lost availability of the asset.

# Purchase costs and lead times have both increased



Thousands of dollars. Original purchase price against the current replacement estimate.

**2.6x**

median replacement cost higher than original price, over a median of 12 years

**8%**

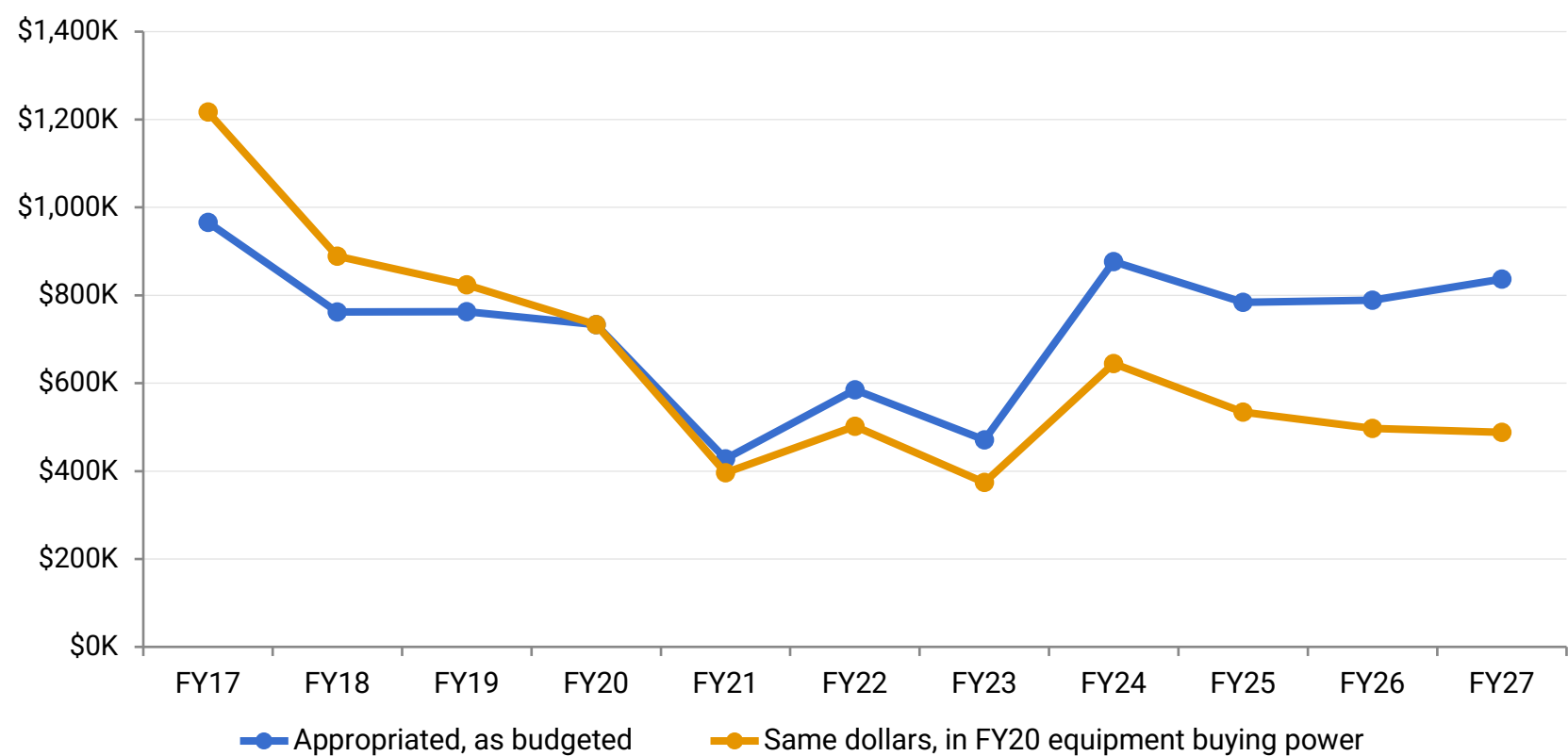
implied escalation per year, against general inflation near 4%

**18 to 24**

months lead time on most Public Works equipment, and up to 5 years on fire apparatus

For some vehicles, the ordering window closes before the budget is approved. In addition, tariffs increase the cost. A 10% tariff added \$17,500 to a recent sidewalk tractor purchase.

# Funding recovered on paper, not in buying power



**\$836,500**

appropriated in the General Fund for FY27

**\$1.5M**

a year is what the General Fund replacement plan calls for

**33%**

below FY20 in what those dollars actually buy today

FY21 reduced the General Fund program by 42%, a deliberate pandemic response that protected jobs. The dollars came back; the buying power did not.

Thousands of dollars. General Fund only: Public Works, Police, Fire, and School. FY23 excludes \$382,600 in Police and Fire vehicles funded by ARPA. Buying power deflated at 8% a year, the rate the City's own purchase records show.

# Three ways to fund a replacement

## One-time pay as you go

### CASH APPROPRIATION

*Appropriate and buy in the same year*

- Simplest and cheapest, no interest cost
- Works for routine vehicles
- Caps what can be bought in any one year

## Multi-year set aside

### CASH APPROPRIATION

*Accumulate appropriations until the full price is reached*

- How most large Public Works purchases are funded
- Appears in the schedule as multi-year funding

## Bonding

### BORROWING WITH INTEREST

*Authorize the full amount up front*

- Allows an order now, freezing price and holding a place in the queue
- Counters escalation during long lead times
- Carries interest cost
- Impacts debt capacity

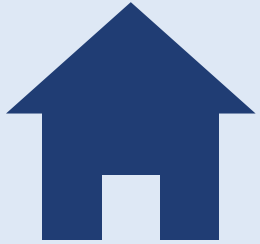
## Why fire apparatus is bonded

The same E-ONE Typhoon pumper, bought three times: **\$455,314 in 2015, \$549,825 in 2020, and \$740,588 in 2026**. Apparatus takes up to four years to build, so saving up means paying the price four years out. A bond authorization lets the City sign a contract and place the order now, which locks the price. The last two apparatus ordered followed this model and were shielded from the increases that followed. Of Fire's \$11.4 million ten-year plan, \$10.8 million is likely to be bonded.

Rolling Stock is pay as you go by design. Bonding is reserved for the largest, longest-lead purchases, where an authorization is what makes an on-time order possible.

# What Rolling Stock costs a typical household

## WHAT IT COSTS TODAY



**8¢**

of the FY27 estimated tax rate of \$12.05 per \$1,000

**\$62 a year**

on the median single-family home, valued at \$777,200 – approximately \$5 per month

## WHAT GROWTH WOULD COST



**1¢**

added to the tax rate for each additional \$100,000 of Rolling Stock funding

**+\$7 a year**

on that same median home, roughly 58 cents per month

## THE TAX RATE CARRIES ONE-THIRD OF THE PROGRAM

\$836,500 of the \$2.42 million program (all funds) is carried by the tax rate. The remaining \$1.59 million is funded by Water \$400,000, Sewer \$495,000, Parking \$390,000, and Stormwater \$300,000.

# Take aways

## 1 Rolling stock is how services get delivered

318 vehicles and machines purchased for \$24.5 million (all funds) stand ready for every snow event, trash pickup, water main break, fire call, police response, and school field

## 2 The City's fleet is actively managed

Age opens the conversation; hours in service, repair history, condition, and service disruption without the asset inform the decision, one asset at a time

## 3 Age matters most where the work is hardest

A plow truck held past 10 years costs nearly four times as much to repair; a sedan does not, and the replacement schedule reflects that difference

## 4 Quality has declined since the pandemic

New vehicles and replacement parts are failing earlier

## 5 Costs have far outrun general inflation

Approximately 8% inflation per year for Public Works equipment; a street sweeper bought for \$254,050 in FY22 is estimated at \$550,000 to replace

**The choice is not whether to pay for this equipment. It is whether to pay for it on a schedule we set, or one that the equipment decides for us.**

# What informs each year's budget request

1

## Inventory

Every asset's age, mileage, and operating hours, reviewed each budget cycle

2

## Condition and cost

Repair history, cost per hour or mile, corrosion, frame, and parts availability

3

## Service risk

What City services are disrupted if the asset is unavailable, and whether a backup exists

4

## Alternatives

Repurpose, share across divisions, contract for service, retire without replacement, or specify for multi-use

5

## Price and timing

Current quotes, lead time, and whether it is pay as you go, set aside over years, or bonded