

Wauwatosa's Financial Snapshot

2026

2026 Budget Overview

What's actually inside the City's 2026 budget, and how does it shape the services you rely on every day?

To help simplify the city portion of your property tax bill, we have broken it down into a monthly payment — similar to subscriptions

or other service charges.

For a Wauwatosa single-family home with an average assessed value of \$418,800, the approximate monthly cost of city services is \$192.65.

Learn more: wauwatosa.net.

Opportunity for Funding Fire Services

For the past 15 years, the City's fire department budget has followed a familiar pattern: find a way to do more with less.

Each year, state levy limits have capped how much the City can increase spending. Over time, that has meant leaving positions unfilled, delaying equipment replacement, and absorbing rising costs without new revenue. None of those decisions were easy or made lightly — to put it simply, options were limited.

That context matters in today's conversation about a potential fire department merger.

What makes the merger different is that it comes with knowns. We know the projected costs. We know the expenditure growth is capped at 2.84% for the first five years and 4% after that. We know the estimated property tax impact is about \$5 for the average homeowner, five years out.

We also know where some of the savings come from. For example, a single ladder truck costs about \$2 million. In a merged department, we could operate with fewer ladder trucks, replacing one with a lower-cost engine and removing another from the reserve fleet, reducing costs by roughly \$3 million.

And we know the merger opens the door to potentially \$20 million in state innovation funding.

City Service	Price Per Month
General Government	\$15.01
Police	\$51.76
Fire	\$40.27
Other Public Safety	\$2.71
Public Works	\$17.88
Health	\$4.85
Conservation and Development	\$8.01
Library	\$12.08
Debt	\$31.02
Parks	\$4.46
Capital	\$4.59
Total:	\$192.64

Without a merger, the path forward is also known.

The City would continue facing annual budget pressure, limited flexibility, and difficult tradeoffs, much like it has for the past 15 years.

A vote on a fire merger is expected in February 2026. Follow along at wauwatosa.net.





Sustainability Savings

How Responsible Choices Impact the City's Finances and Environment

For the City of Wauwatosa, sustainability centers on making responsible choices that benefit both the environment and the City's finances.

By investing in efficient operations and long-term infrastructure improvements, the City is reducing costs while ensuring Wauwatosa remains a strong and eco-friendly community for years to come.

One of the most impactful areas of savings has been energy use.

Electricity is a major expense for City operations, powering streetlights, public safety buildings, City Hall, and other municipal facilities. Investments in energy efficiency and on-site solar power have helped the City avoid rising energy costs.

From 2017 through 2024, these improvements saved Wauwatosa more than \$2 million.

Without these upgrades, electricity costs for the City's largest municipal buildings would have been more than double what was actually paid. These savings free up resources to support other essential services.

As the City looks to the future, sustainability priorities continue to focus on things residents can easily take part in. Reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills is one example, which is an area where everyday actions can make a meaningful difference.

The City is working toward a more sustainable approach to materials management by encouraging proper recycling, composting, and

safe disposal of items that do not belong in curbside bins.

Residents can support this effort by recycling correctly, composting food scraps and yard waste, donating usable items, and using tools like the [City's Waste Wizard](#) to understand how to dispose of common household materials. Community events such as the Tosa Green Summit also provide opportunities to safely manage items that require special handling.

Together, these efforts show how sustainability delivers real value for Wauwatosa. Thoughtful City investments paired with resident participation help control costs, reduce waste, and protect local resources so the community remains a great place to live, now and in the future.

Service Highlights from the Library



The level of service provided by the Wauwatosa Public Library is exceptional, on both state and national levels.

Did you know?

- We check out more items per full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff than **all but three** libraries in Wisconsin.
- In 2024, **871,541 items** were checked out, nearly a record for our library.

- Among single-branch libraries serving populations of 40,000-60,000, Wauwatosa ranked **#2 in the nation** for children's material circulation.

- Participation in children's programs **nearly doubled** in a year. From January to August 2025, we hosted 349 programs with 20,199 participants, largely due to offering weekly story times.

These service highlights reflect a library that is deeply valued by the community. In 2026, we remain committed to providing services our patrons will enjoy. This includes an expansion of our "Library of Things" collection — think board games, craft supplies, power tools, and more.

Learn more: wauwatosalibrary.org



How Grants Support Community Health

From items in our public health vending machine to our hardworking staff, grant funding allows the Wauwatosa Health Department to provide consistent resources for the community.

In addition to annual funds we receive from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), the Health Department applies for one-time grant funding to take new, creative approaches to community health and well-being.

“One-time grants often allow us to address the priority areas defined in our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), which is created with community input,” said Laura Stephens, Health Officer and Director of the Wauwatosa Health Department.

“By investing in substance use, mental health, social connection, and housing, we know we’re

focusing on issues that matter to the community and have the greatest impact on public health.”

Recent examples of grant funds in action include mental health reminders and access to free health essentials.

In September 2025, during Suicide Prevention Month, our Health Department team designed coffee sleeves for local coffee shops, ensuring the community received life-saving mental health messages in a practical way.

Additionally, grant funds enable our public health vending machine — which is free and available 24/7 — to be stocked with essentials such as hygiene kits, first aid kits, and fentanyl and xylazine test strips. Our public health vending machine is conveniently located outside of Wauwatosa’s City Hall for easy access, no matter what time of day.

“Public health work often happens behind the scenes,” said Stephens. “Grant funding allows us to provide public-facing programs or services that engage our community.”

In 2026, we plan to welcome Men’s Shed programming in Wauwatosa, thanks to a grant received from Bader Philanthropies.

A Men’s Shed aims to improve the well-being of men through programming that builds practical skills and stronger social networks. More information will be available on our website soon. Contact the Health Department with questions about the Men’s Shed.

The Wauwatosa Health Department continues to seek additional funding to strengthen the community’s health and well-being. For future updates or to learn how the Health Department can assist you, visit wauwatosa.net/health.

Technology Investments in Public Safety

Public safety represents a significant amount of the City’s overall budget. Ensuring those services operate effectively requires ongoing investment in tools and technology that support accountability, efficiency, and timely response.

The Wauwatosa Police Department has used Axon body-worn cameras, dual squad cameras, and interview room cameras for digital evidence collection since 2021. We’ve budgeted \$170,000 in the 2026 budget as part of a 10-year contract with Axon, one of the few providers of body-worn camera systems.

Body cameras are a critical tool for capturing digital evidence and supporting transparency in policing.

Also included in the budget is \$8,400 for a second drone. Due to a drone’s limited battery life, a second drone is required to maintain aerial capability during extended operations and to provide redundancy due to equipment downtime. Already, our drone has helped to find a robbery suspect and has been deployed at large special events (such as TosaFest), among other uses.





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By the Numbers: City Services



Calls for Police Service

34,944



Trees Planted

457



Calls for Fire/EMS
Service

9,795



Tons of Materials
Recycled

3,713



Water Meters
Inspected & Repaired

260



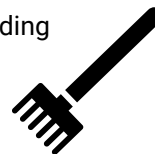
Tons of Garbage
Collected

11,430



Health and Safety Items
Dispensed from the Vending
Machine

1,357



Tons of Leaves
Collected

3,624



Library Checkouts

871,541



Fire Department
Medical Calls

5,828



Building Permits
Issued

4,577



Tons of
Asphalt Patch

1,198



Building and
Safety Inspections

8,389



Wauwatosa.net
Web views (million)

1.4M

