

# VILLAGE OF SOMERS

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**ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
STAFFING NEEDS & FUNDING OPTIONS**  
SUMMER 2025

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**PREPARED BY VILLAGE STAFF**



## SOMERS COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The Village of Somers, located in southeastern Kenosha County along the Lake Michigan shoreline, is a semi-rural community that has experienced steady growth while retaining its small-town character and agricultural heritage. The Village is situated approximately 35 miles south of Milwaukee, 60 miles north of Chicago, and just west of Lake Michigan, bordered by the City of Kenosha to the south and the Town of Somers to the west and north. The Village encompasses an area of roughly 25 square miles and is home to over 8,000 residents.

First settled in the 1830s, Somers developed as a pioneer farming community, with early settlements such as Berryville—known for its thriving strawberry farms—playing an important role in its agricultural history. The Village of Somers was officially incorporated in 2015, uniting several historic neighborhoods and rural areas into a single municipality.

Today, the Village's location between Interstate 94 and Lake Michigan provides residents with easy access to regional metropolitan areas, while maintaining its peaceful, semi-rural character with nearby parks and nature preserves, such as Petrifying Springs Park and Hawthorn Hollow, that offer abundant recreational opportunities and scenic natural beauty. Somers is also home to the University of Wisconsin–Parkside, a major regional educational institution part of the University of Wisconsin System.

The Village and Town of Somers deliver a wide range of essential services to its residents and businesses, including building inspection and code enforcement, fire protection and emergency response, maintenance of parks and public facilities, public works, refuse and recycling collection, snow removal and stormwater management. In partnership with the Kenosha County Sheriff's Office, the Village funds policing services delivered by Sheriff's deputies. The Village and Town also support community development initiatives, water and sewer utilities, and various civic programs that help maintain its high quality of life and small-town charm.

## INCREASING DEMAND FOR PROACTIVE PUBLIC SAFETY & LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES IN SOMERS

After the Village incorporated in 2015, Somers contracted with the Kenosha County Sheriff's Office to provide public safety and law enforcement services in Somers, rather than establishing a municipal police department. This contract cost the Village \$858,375 in 2025.

The Kenosha County Sheriff's Office is the third-largest law enforcement agency in Wisconsin and provides public safety services in Kenosha County's jails, courts and communities through various departments and divisions. In addition to its contract with the Village of Somers, the Sheriff's Office provides contracted service to the Villages of Bristol, Salem Lakes and Paddock Lake, and covers all six districts of Kenosha County.

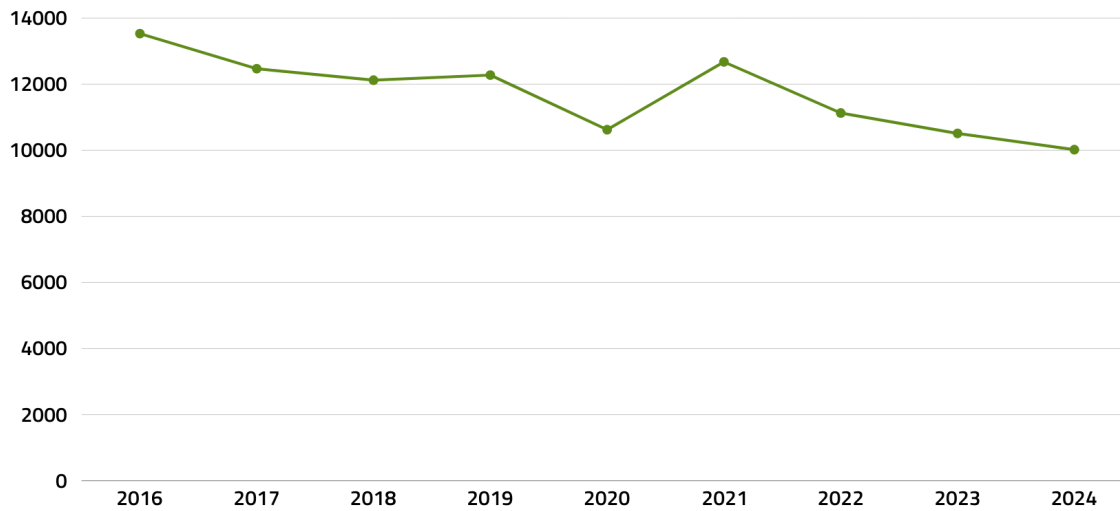
Based on the contract between the Village of Somers and the Sheriff's Office, there are four deputies dedicated daily to the Village of Somers – ensuring 24/7 coverage. During first shift, one deputy is on duty; during second shift, two deputies are on duty; and during third shift, one deputy is on duty to patrol the Village and provide proactive and emergency services.

### CONSISTENTLY HIGH DEMAND FOR PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES

While calls for service have decreased slightly recently, public safety and law enforcement needs in Somers have been consistently high over the last decade, comprising, on average, 23.5% of all Kenosha County Sheriff's Office calls for service since 2018.

The decrease in calls for service is attributed, in part, to a nationwide reduction in 911 calls, and the Sheriff's Office only joining the Fire & Rescue Department to staff significant or violent emergency medical incidents, instead of automatically responding to all medical calls.

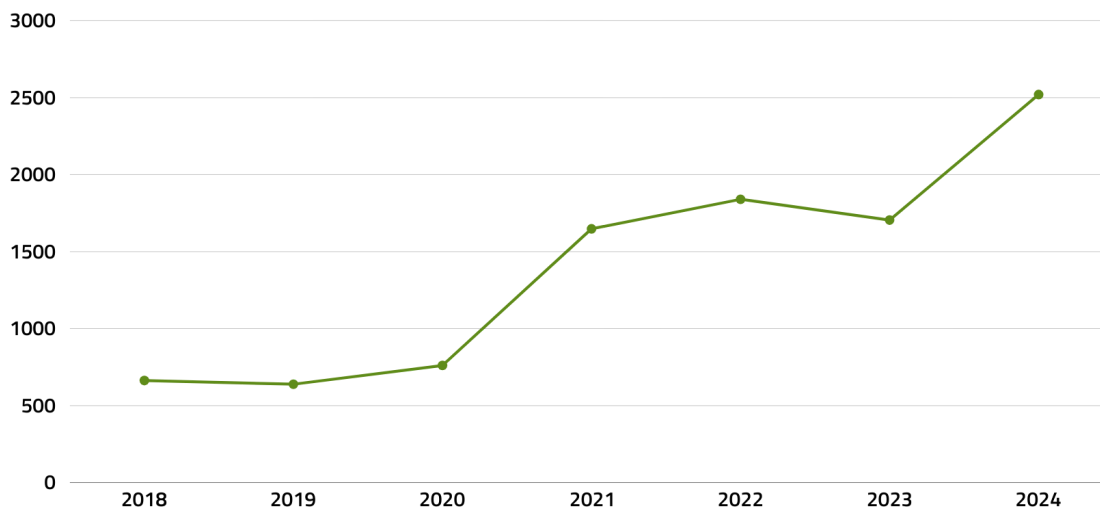
## Annual Calls for Kenosha County Sherriif's Office Service in Somers



In 2024, deputies responded to a total of 10,018 calls for service.<sup>1</sup> By far, traffic stops are the most common "call type" for Kenosha County Sheriff's deputies in Somers, with 2,647 traffic stops conducted.

Between 2018 and 2024, citations have increased by 280%. Deputies issued a total of 2,520 citations in 2024 for various ordinance and traffic violations – including 562 citations related to revoked or suspended licenses and 420 citations for speeding.

## Annual Citations in Somers from the Kenosha County Sheriff's Office



<sup>1</sup> "Calls for service" includes the number of reactive incidents deputies responded to as well as the number of officer-initiated proactive efforts conducted.

Through July 2025, the Sheriff's Office had issued 428 citations for speeding, surpassing 2024 totals. This is, in part, due to additional speed enforcement work happening several days per week to address speeding issues on Sheridan Road / Hwy 32 instead of narrowing the highway from four lanes to two. This speed enforcement unit is being funded by Kenosha County.

As road construction has been undertaken in the Village – including the expansion of Highway S (Burlington Road) into a four-lane highway – concerns about traffic violations and traffic accidents have grown. The Village frequently hears residents cite speeding as a persistent issue in Somers; drivers across the region will often use the Village's highways at high speeds as a shortcut.

## **ADDITIONAL STAFF WOULD HELP ADDRESS TRAFFIC ISSUES**

The need to address speeding, among other issues, is challenged when just one or two deputies are assigned to Somers at any given time of the day, considering other calls for service that contracted deputies must address.

To improve public safety services and the ability of deputies to provide proactive policing services that may help address speeding concerns, one additional deputy could be added.

**Contracting for one additional Sheriff's deputy dedicated to Somers would require an additional \$230,000 annually.**

## **CALLS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE INCREASING; STAFFING LEVELS LOW**

For over 90 years, the Somers Fire & Rescue Department has been dedicated to protecting the life and property of Somers residents and nearby communities. The Department operates out of two fire stations, providing full-service fire protection and emergency medical services to the Village and Town of Somers 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

### **HISTORIC, COMBINATION STAFFING APPROACH**

The Somers Fire & Rescue Department has a staff of approximately 60 personnel, including just 15 full-time employees. All other staff work on a part-time, paid-on-call (POC) or paid-on-premise (POP) basis.

#### **Full-time employees include:**

- (1) Fire Chief
- (1) Deputy Chief
- (5) Captains
- (3) Lieutenants
- (5) Firefighter/Paramedics

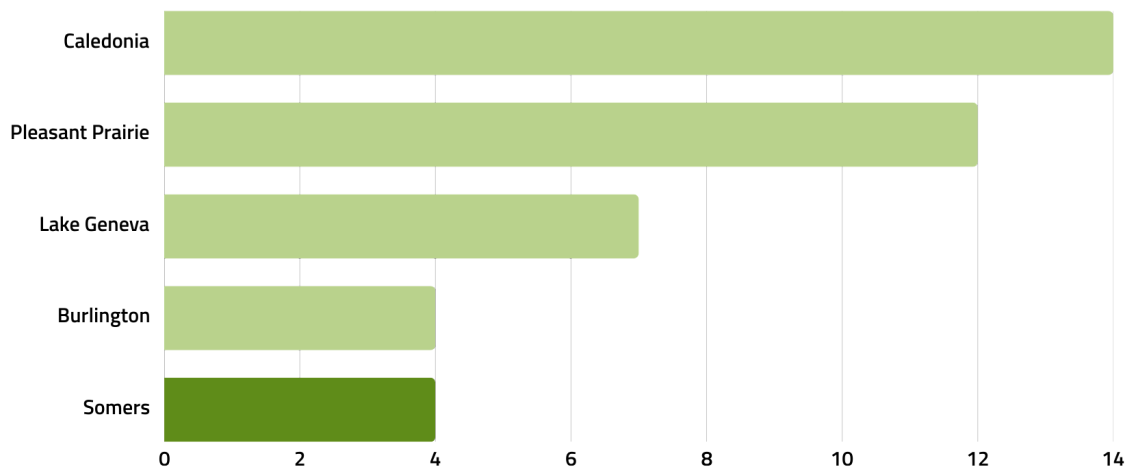
All full-time staff are certified Paramedics, though, as a Department, Somers Fire & Rescue is only certified at an Intermediate level (previously known as I-99). Because of this, the Department can only provide the highest level of paramedic service when a person certified as a Paramedic is part of the response. When services are provided by an EMT or AEMT, some medicines and advanced medical procedures can't be performed – including cricothyrotomy and pericardiocentesis, and administering medications like ketamine and sodium bicarbonate, which are critical in some medical emergencies.

The Fire Chief and Deputy Chief typically work 8-hour days Monday through Friday, leading the department while also responding to emergency calls. One of the two chiefs is on call at all times, including nights and weekends. The Department's other 13 full-time personnel, including Captains, Lieutenants and Firefighter / Paramedics, work a rotating schedule, 24 hours on-duty and 48 hours off-duty.

Current staffing levels allow Somers Fire & Rescue to assign two full-time staff to each station during each shift – fewer on days when a staff member may be sick or on vacation. This full-time staffing

level is relatively low when compared to the daily full-time staffing levels in nearby, comparable<sup>2</sup> communities.

## Daily Full-Time Staff in Comparable Communities' Fire Departments



To support adequate emergency service delivery, the Somers Fire & Rescue Department has long relied on its part-time, paid-on-premise (POP) and paid-on-call (POC) workforce.

Staff who have achieved at least one level of fire and emergency medical service certification (EMT-Basic, AEMT, Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, etc) are classified<sup>3</sup> as "part-time" employees when they are assigned to a shift. One part-time employee per day is assigned to work at Station 1 (where a majority of apparatuses are located) to help full-time staff operate vehicles and respond to calls for service. This combination-style approach to staffing lets the Department have five personnel on shift each day.

POP staff are in training, uncertified and unable to provide emergency medical services or fight fires, but they can help operate vehicles to free up full-time staff to focus on service delivery.

<sup>2</sup> Nearby communities were identified as comparable based on local fire departments' service area and call volume.

<sup>3</sup> Somers Fire & Rescue Department employee classifications relate to the wage staff members earn in different situations.

1. When someone is serving in a POP capacity, they earn minimum wage.
2. When someone is scheduled to serve in a part-time capacity, they earn between \$12-21 / hour depending on their level of certification.
3. When either POP or part-time staff respond to a call and are re-classified as POC for that period of time, they earn between \$12-21 / hour depending on their level of certification.

Those same part-time and POP employees are classified as “POC staff” when they are not scheduled to be in-station during shifts but respond to calls to help the Department’s response when more staff are required, often traveling from their homes or full-time workplaces to arrive on scene.

Reliance on part-time staffing for emergency services has grown increasingly difficult. Since 2016, 206 individuals<sup>4</sup> have left the Department. This trend reflects what fire departments across Wisconsin and across the country are seeing – the number of active part-time or volunteer staff is declining. Fewer people want to, or are able to, spend a significant amount of their time maintaining the training necessary to respond to calls for service, especially when they have other full-time work and family commitments.

Historically, part-time, aspiring Firefighter / Paramedics without any existing training or certification have been attracted to Somers because of the priority the Village places on training staff to provide the highest quality of service. In 2024, the Village conducted over 18,430 hours of training – a \$31,788 investment on just training classes, books and training materials<sup>5</sup>.

Once trained, part-time Somers staff often look for stable, family-supporting careers at full-time status. Because the Village budgets for only 15 full-time positions, and those positions are usually full, many individuals choose to leave Somers to find full-time opportunities elsewhere. Since 2016, at least 58 personnel have moved on to take full-time positions with other departments.

This cycle of training and turnover has a heavy cost, both financially and in the quality of public safety services available for Somers residents.

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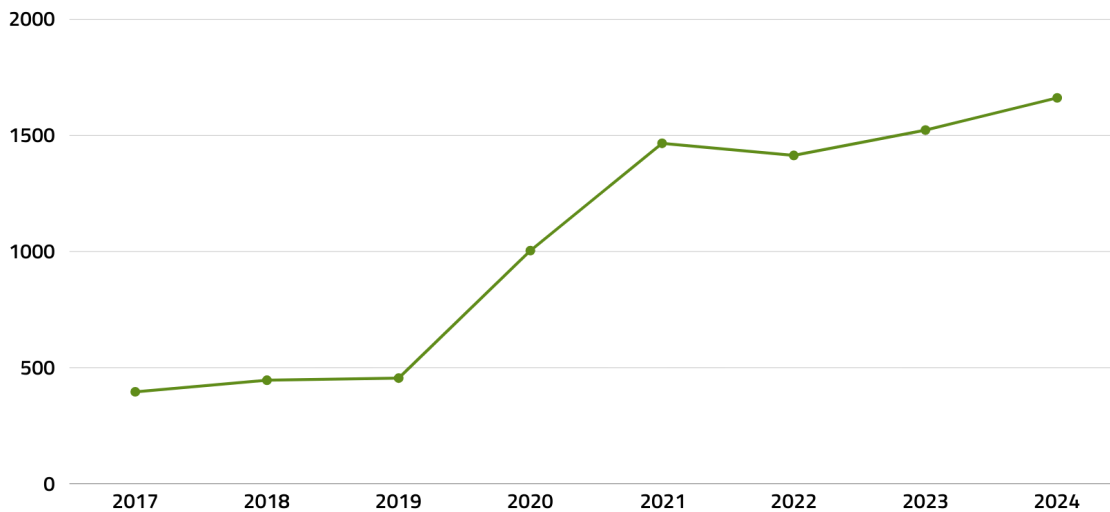
<sup>4</sup> Out of a total 266 individuals, including POC, POP, part-time and full-time staff over the course of the decade.

<sup>5</sup> In total, the cost to train a new recruit from no certifications to basic training in fire and EMS costs the Village approximately \$2,813 per recruit, plus nearly \$13,000 in staff time to run two recruit classes annually.

## CALLS FOR SERVICE INCREASING

Somers has seen a steady increase in calls for service in recent years, with a nearly 320% increase in calls from 2017 to 2024. In 2024, Somers Fire & Rescue Department responded to 1,662 calls – a record high – straining staff.

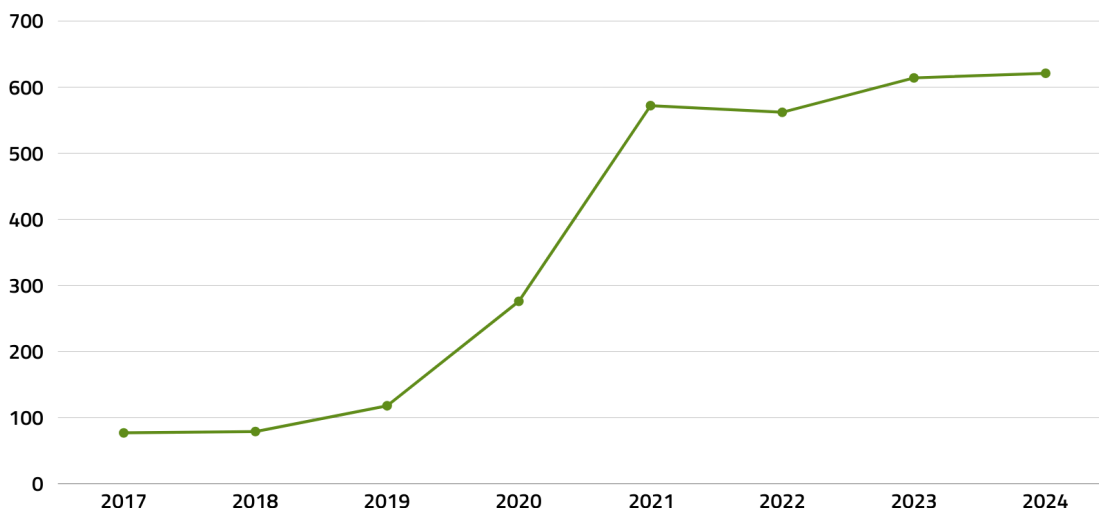
### Annual Somers Fire & Rescue Calls for Service



## LIMITED STAFFING LIMITS RESPONSE TO EMERGENCIES

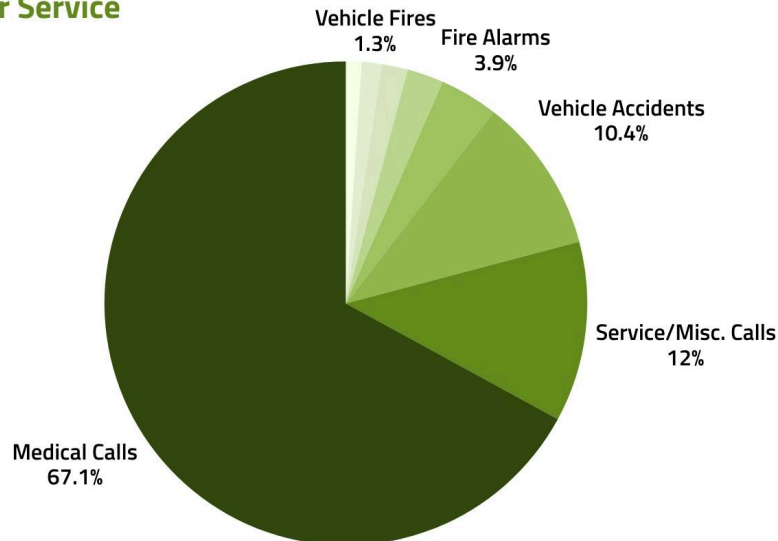
Increasing demand for service means multiple emergencies are requiring a response at the same time more often. In 2024, the Department received simultaneous calls for service 621 times.

### Increasing Simultaneous Calls for Somers Fire & Rescue



Most calls for service are for emergency medical incidents. In 2024, 67% of calls for service were for medical care, primarily to serve older adults<sup>6</sup>, with an additional 10% of calls being for vehicle accidents.

## 2024 Calls for Service



Calls for emergency medical service often require a high level of care immediately. When fully trained staff and an ambulance are available, the Department's paramedics can provide the service needed. Without the proper training and certification, part-time, POC and POP staff can support emergency medical calls, but they can't always provide the highest level of care.

Unfortunately, it's not always possible for the Department to respond immediately to emergencies. Because the State Administrative Code requires at least two personnel to operate an ambulance (one to drive and one to care for a patient), **the Department can only guarantee it can immediately operate two ambulances at any given time – one from each station.**

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<sup>6</sup> The Somers Fire & Rescue Department has seen an increase in the number of calls for service to assist older residents. In 2024, approximately 50% of patients in 2024 were over the age of 60, compared to 35% in 2019.

The Somers Fire & Rescue Department does have a third ambulance, six fire apparatuses and four utility/support apparatuses that off-duty staff can help operate when significant emergencies or simultaneous calls come in<sup>7</sup>.

If staff are unavailable, or a large response is required, the Department must call in a neighboring department to help – increasing the time before a first responder can reach a patient. The Department received mutual aid from neighboring departments 71 times in 2024.

**Demand for Somers Fire & Rescue Department services is likely to continue increasing as additional housing units are completed in the future at Maplecrest, Savannah at Pike Creek, and other developments likely to come to light in the years ahead. This will further increase the number of residents in Somers – and demand for services – beyond those who have already moved into Savannah at Pike Creek, Lake of Somers Apartments and Pike Ridge Senior Apartments.**

## ADDITIONAL ON-DUTY STAFF NECESSARY TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY, MEET SOMERS' NEEDS

According to a January 2025 third-party study<sup>8</sup> of the Somers Fire & Rescue Department, to meet the community's needs, a minimum of four fully-trained staff would need to be on duty at Station 1 and three fully trained staff would need to be on duty at Station 2 at all times.

	STATION 1	STATION 2
<b>CURRENT STAFFING LEVEL (5)</b>	<b>3 on-duty personnel</b>	<b>2 on-duty personnel</b>
<b>PROPOSED STAFFING LEVEL (7)</b>	<b>4 on-duty personnel</b>	<b>3 on-duty personnel</b>

<sup>7</sup> Many off-duty staff must respond when a structure fire occurs. The National Fire Protection Association recommends that at least 16 personnel respond to a structure fire. At the very minimum, three fully-trained firefighters are required to be on site in order for any to enter a structure fire, with a team of two going into the building and one firefighter remaining outside to help ensure the safety of responders.

<sup>8</sup> An additional 2024 study also confirmed the need to construct a new building to replace Station 2's existing structure. The Village continues to explore the potential future construction of a new fire station. This report is focused on service and staffing needs, which exist regardless of whether a new station is constructed, and how to fund improvements.

The proposed increase in on-duty staffing would improve services by **guaranteeing the Department could immediately send out all three ambulances at once** – or two ambulances and a fire engine with extrication tools. It would also allow Somers to meet new requirements for automatic reciprocal aid (mutual aid) agreements<sup>9</sup>, which require minimum three-person crews for fire service and guarantee extra support from neighboring departments when needed.

## FULL-TIME, FULLY TRAINED STAFF NEEDED

Additional full-time staff are the solution. With additional full-time staff on duty during each of the Department's three shifts, Somers Fire & Rescue will improve service delivery and ensure reliable, skilled, and quick emergency responses for Somers residents.

By adding eight full-time Firefighter / Paramedics, the Somers Fire & Rescue Department will have 21 full-time, fully trained staff available – **guaranteeing paramedic-level service and the deployment of all three ambulances at once**.

**Hiring eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics would require an additional \$1,293,400 annually.**

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<sup>9</sup> Some communities neighboring Somers will not enter into automatic reciprocal aid agreements with Somers Fire & Rescue Department until minimum three-person crews are guaranteed. This limits the amount of support currently available to Somers residents.

## FUNDING PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES IN THE VILLAGE OF SOMERS

When considering any increase in expenses, municipalities must determine how they will fund that increase.

### EXISTING FUNDING SOURCES ARE RESTRICTED BY LAW

As with all municipalities in the State of Wisconsin, Somers relies on two primary funding sources: property taxes and shared revenue.

Property tax levies are limited by state law. Municipalities are permitted to increase property taxes only up to the amount necessary to repay loans<sup>10</sup> or by an amount tied to increases to a municipality's equalized value from "net new construction." Municipalities can opt to exceed operational levy limits if approved by voters via referendum.

Shared revenue, funding provided to municipalities by the state annually to be used on any approved budgetary expense, is limited in a different way – shared revenue payments are not tied to inflation and do not increase at the same rate as increased costs to provide services or purchase equipment and materials.

Few additional revenue sources exist, including revenue generated by fees and grant funding. Some communities have added a municipal vehicle registration fee ("wheel tax") to help close the gap between increasing costs and limited revenue.

If a community cannot increase revenue to meet increased costs, it must make budget cuts elsewhere to fit those new expenses into the budget – State law requires municipal budgets to be balanced.

### 2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The Village and Town of Somers jointly levied \$5,185,328 in 2025. The Village raises 98% of the levy, while the Town funds 2%.

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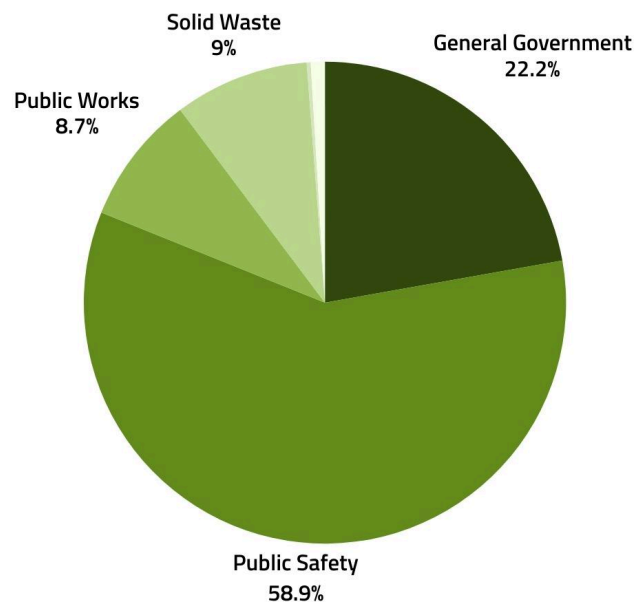
<sup>10</sup> To a point. The State does not allow municipalities to incur debt at an amount that exceeds 5% of the equalized value of the taxable property located in the municipality.

For the 2025 budget, the Village Board opted to leverage the full allowable property tax levy increase of \$283,964 tied to net new construction. The 2025 budget also saw a total \$104,511 increase in funding from the State of Wisconsin – including an additional \$2,066 in shared revenue, \$24,091 in personal property aid, \$22,000 in fire insurance dues and \$26,838 in transportation aid – as well as slight increases in revenue from fees and other sources.

Those additional dollars were leveraged to fund increasing costs to maintain service levels across all departments – including increasing municipal court expenses, law enforcement contract costs, fire department expenditures, public works expenditures, road maintenance costs, and more. Inflation is making the same services cost more.

In 2025, 59% of the budget is allocated to public safety costs, 22% to general governmental expenses, about 9% to public works, 9% to solid waste management and about 1% to planning and development-related costs.

## **Somers 2025 General Fund Budget Expenditures**



This means that approximately \$4,230,700 is currently budgeted for public safety services. To improve public safety by hiring eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics and contracting for one additional Sheriff's deputy dedicated to Somers, an additional \$1,500,000 – equivalent to about 28% of the annual budget – would need to be allocated to public safety.

## VILLAGE WORKING TO BRING IN EXTERNAL FUNDING

The Village and Somers Fire & Rescue Department have consistently worked to bring in outside funding to support public safety needs, but it has not been enough to fund additional full-time positions on staff.

In 2024, the Department was awarded a Wisconsin DNR Fire Safety Grant, which paid for 50% of the costs involved with adding an AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) to its UTV that responds to grass fires and other off-road emergencies. The Wisconsin DNR grant provided just over \$1,300 towards the AED and Accessories. The Department also recently received a We Energies grant of \$1,800 for two new water/Ice Rescue suits. Past grants have been awarded to us by Walmart, Sam's Club, and Union Pacific Railroad, among others.

The Department has also applied for federal SAFER grants for the last several years, including in 2025. The SAFER grant provides funding that allows awarded fire departments to increase or maintain the number of trained firefighters on staff. If the Village were to be awarded the grant in 2025, funds would cover 100% of first-year<sup>11</sup> Firefighter/Paramedic salaries and benefits for three years – at a value of approximately \$1.2 million each year.

Fire & Rescue Department personnel have also applied for, but have not received, numerous other federal, state and local grants for equipment and staffing.

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<sup>11</sup> The grant does not cover equipment, annual union-protected salary increases or cost of living adjustments.

## COMMUNITY TO GUIDE PRIORITY INVESTMENTS & FUNDING APPROACH

To help elected officials determine when and whether to improve public safety services by increasing staffing levels, and how to fund those improvements, the Village of Somers is working with third-party, independent survey firm Community Perceptions to survey Somers residents.

The survey, which will be mailed to every household in the Village, will provide an opportunity to share anonymous input and help shape the path forward.

### POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The survey will ask Somers residents to provide feedback on the following potential options.

#### OPTION 1: IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY AND IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF REVENUE

Somers residents may determine that they prefer to prioritize public safety service improvements and would want the Village to increase revenue to maintain existing services while improving public safety. If the Village seeks to maintain the standard of existing services its residents are used to and resolve public safety challenges, it will need to **raise additional revenue**.

As state law limits the ways municipalities can raise revenue, there are **few viable options** available:

- Approval by voters through a **referendum to exceed the state-imposed property tax levy limits**; or
- Implementation of **municipal wheel taxes** on eligible vehicles.

#### Property Tax Levy Increase via Referendum

The State of Wisconsin limits the amount of property taxes a municipality can collect each year. In order to exceed that levy limit, the municipality needs voter approval through a community-wide referendum.

That voter approval could be completed through a referendum in the Village during the April, August or November 2026 elections, which, if approved, would increase property taxes beginning with bills issued in December 2026 and allow for public safety improvements to begin in 2027.

## **Option 1A: \$1,293,400 Fire and Emergency Medical Services Referendum**

If a \$1,293,400 referendum is passed to improve only fire and emergency medical services by funding eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics, property taxes would increase by approximately \$109.22 per \$100,000 in assessed property value (\$388.62 for a median home assessed at \$355,000).

## **Option 1B: \$1,500,000 Public Safety Referendum**

If a \$1,500,000 referendum is passed to improve both fire and emergency medical services in addition to law enforcement services by funding eight additional full-time Firefighter / Paramedics and one additional Sheriff's deputy, property taxes would increase by approximately \$126.67 per \$100,000 in assessed property value (\$450.69 for a median home assessed at \$355,000).

*Note: The State of Wisconsin permits municipalities to ask just **one** property tax levy referendum question per election. Separate referendum questions about funding for Fire Department and Sheriff's deputy staffing would not be permitted.*

## **Municipal Wheel Tax:**

Wisconsin law allows municipalities and counties to collect an annual municipal vehicle registration fee ("wheel tax"). The fee applies to certain vehicles (automobiles, autocycles, and trucks at 8,000 lbs or less, except dual-purpose farm vehicles) kept in the municipality.

Revenue generated from a wheel tax must be used to fund "transportation-related expenses," which may include street repairs and other operational costs. In Somers, the vast majority of "transportation-related expenses" are funded through borrowing, using the debt service levy. Implementing a Somers wheel tax to help fund these expenses would allow the Village to decrease its borrowing, but would not free up funding to re-invest in public safety services.

A wheel tax could not resolve the need for additional funding to invest in additional Fire Department and law enforcement staff in Somers.

## **OPTION 2: BUDGET CUTS AND SERVICE REDUCTIONS IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS**

Somers residents may determine that they would prefer to improve public safety services without increasing property taxes. The Village has explored whether there are potential budget cuts that could be made to other services to free up funding for additional public safety staff; however, given that **public safety services represent approximately 59% of the general fund budget**, funding for other essential operations is limited and many non-public safety services are state-mandated. That leaves limited options for budget reductions, potentially including:

- Liability insurance (up to approximately \$230,000)
- Road maintenance and other public works expenses (up to approximately \$125,000)
- Street lights (up to approximately \$24,000)
- Recreation (up to approximately \$11,000)
- Animal control (up to approximately \$10,000)

Cuts alone can not fund additional public safety staffing and would reduce the availability and quality of the other essential services Somers residents currently receive. As a result, the Village would look for solutions beyond cuts to the existing annual budget.

*Note: In an effort to save on funding and staff time, the Village already stopped providing garbage service to commercial and apartment buildings in 2024. That same year, the Village was able to add one Firefighter / Paramedic and one Public Works position. It should also be noted that garbage collection service is already provided by a private contractor.*

## **OPTION 3: MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO**

Somers residents may determine they prefer to take no action to improve public safety services.

While this option would not increase property taxes beyond the allowable levy limit or require a wheel tax and would not require cuts to other services, over time, if the Village does not identify funding to hire additional public safety staff, the existing challenges will create more strain as the demand on emergency services continues to grow.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Village of Somers, in partnership with the Somers Fire & Rescue Department and the Kenosha County Sheriff's Office, has identified a need to increase public safety staffing to address increasing demand for emergency medical services and a growing need for proactive policing to support a safe and healthy Village.

In the coming weeks and months, the Village will seek feedback from its residents to determine the best path forward.