

Rochester Hills Fire Department

FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING NEEDS ASSESSMENT



March
2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This assessment evaluates the Rochester Hills Fire Department's staffing levels against the evolving demands of our community. As our population has grown to over 78,000 residents, the frequency of emergency incidents has increased. This report identifies a widening gap between our current staffing level and the national safety benchmarks required to protect both our citizens and our firefighters.

The fire department's current staffing levels are no longer sufficient to guarantee a response when a resident calls 911. Last year alone, the department exhausted all available units on 224 occasions, leaving the city with no internal resources to respond. During these gaps, we must rely on neighboring communities, which adds life-threatening minutes to our response times.

Additionally, data shows a significant failure to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710, the standard for the organization and deployment of fire suppression and emergency medical operations. Over the last three years, the department arrived with the minimum required personnel within the mandated time frame only 4.5% of the time. This means that our crews are arriving with fewer people than the national standard deems necessary to safely and effectively perform their jobs. By failing to meet this benchmark 95.5% of the time, we are significantly increasing the risk of injury to our firefighters and decreasing the chances of saving lives and property during a fire.

To address these gaps in service, this staffing assessment recommends the addition of 12 full-time firefighter/paramedics. This increase will provide an additional ambulance and enhance our fire coverage. These additional personnel will dramatically reduce the number of times our department runs out of units. Additionally, these 12 positions will allow us to put more firefighters on the scene of a fire enhancing our ability to meet the NFPA 1710 standard and increase resident and firefighter safety.

To provide the funding necessary for these 12 additional firefighter/paramedics, the department proposes a 0.5-mill increase to the current fire department millage. This increase is a dedicated investment in the community's fire department. By securing this funding, we can provide additional units and personnel to meet the needs of the community.

Beyond the need for personnel, this 0.5-mill increase will also provide a critical boost to our capital fund. A portion of these new recurring funds will be dedicated to the long-term replacement of fire apparatus, ambulances and other life-saving equipment. Due to the increasing cost of fire apparatus and ambulances, our current capital budget is heavily strained just to maintain our existing fleet.

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Rochester Hills, located in Oakland County, Michigan, is a premier master-planned community encompassing 32.8 square miles with a population of approximately 78,000 residents. Since its incorporation in 1984, the city has balanced a high quality of life with a diverse landscape of quiet residential neighborhoods, historic sites and major commercial hubs. It remains the "Preeminent Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family."

The Rochester Hills Fire Department is an all-hazards emergency service agency operating from five strategically located fire stations. The department provides 24-hour fire suppression, paramedic-led Advanced Life Support (ALS) medical services and specialized response capabilities including technical rescue, hazardous materials mitigation and water rescue. As the community continues to expand and the complexity of medical and fire-related calls increases, the department remains committed to innovation and efficiency.

The mission of the Rochester Hills Fire Department is to protect and preserve life, property and the environment through a highly trained and dedicated team. To fulfill this mission, the department must maintain adequate evidence-based staffing that aligns with community demand and recognized industry standards.

This assessment examines the relationship between current staffing levels, call volume and the department's ability to meet established national safety standards. By analyzing historical data, community growth and the aging population alongside concurrent incidents and NFPA 1710 standards, this document establishes evidence-based recommendations to ensure the Rochester Hills Fire Department continues to fulfill its mission.

This assessment focuses exclusively on fire suppression personnel. Staffing levels for Community Risk Reduction and Administrative staff are not evaluated as part of this document. Staffing for these divisions are addressed as part of the department's strategic plan.

CURRENT STAFFING OVERVIEW:

The Rochester Hills Fire Department currently operates with 57 suppression personnel across five stations. Our personnel work a standard 24-hour rotation divided into three 19-person shifts. Each shift consists of one Battalion Chief, five Lieutenants, and 13 Firefighters. Our personnel are distributed as follows:

Station	Location	Staffing Composition	Standard Total
Station 1	Avon & Livernois	1 Battalion Chief, 1 Lieutenant, 3 Firefighters	5
Station 2	Auburn & John R	1 Lieutenant, 3 Firefighters	4
Station 3	Crooks & Auburn	1 Lieutenant, 3 Firefighters	4
Station 4	Walton & Adams	1 Lieutenant, 3 Firefighters	4
Station 5	Rochester & Tienken	1 Lieutenant, 1 Firefighter	2

While 19 personnel are scheduled, the department maintains a daily minimum of 15 personnel on duty, utilizing overtime as necessary. At minimum staffing, seven units are staffed at all times. When at full 19-person capacity, the two additional firefighters at Stations 2 and 4 staff a secondary fire apparatus. Otherwise, these personnel rotate to cover vacancies due to vacation or some other type of approved leave. In 2025, the department was at full staff only 2.7% of the time.

Stations 1 and 3 always maintain four personnel to operate both a two-person medical (Alpha) unit and a two-person fire apparatus. Stations 2, 4 and 5 utilize cross-staffing, responding with either an Alpha unit or a fire apparatus depending on the nature of the emergency.

CALL VOLUME:

The information provided in this report is statistical information obtained from the Oakland County CFIRS-Fire Integrated Records System. The system tracks all incidents, both priority and non-priority, for the City of Rochester Hills.

The demand on our department continues to grow, both in emergency incidents as well as other responsibilities associated with modern fire and emergency services. To maintain public safety, the department must now account for specialized technical hazards such as lithium-ion batteries, solar panels and energy storage systems. The threat of intentional violence requires additional training for medical operations during active threat incidents. This evolving need also requires additional planning and emergency preparedness for public events. Furthermore, escalating federal and state mandates for training, reporting and cancer-reduction safety protocols have added significant administrative and operational burdens.

In 2025, the Rochester Hills Fire Department responded to 9,212 calls for service. Chart 1 indicates the increase in call volume from 2015 to 2025. Chart 2 shows the same information along with the percentage change from the previous year.

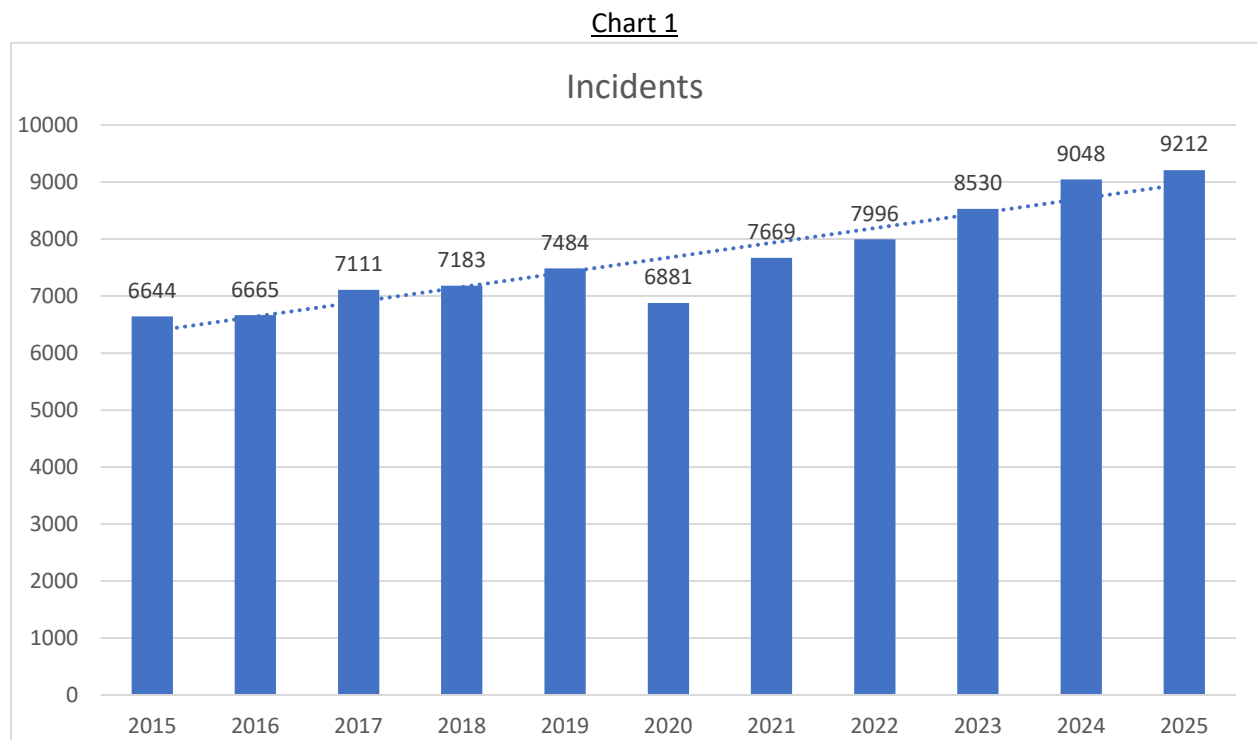


Chart 2

Annual Call Volume		
Year	Incidents	Percent Change From Previous Year
2015	6644	1.47%
2016	6665	0.32%
2017	7111	6.69%
2018	7183	1.01%
2019	7484	4.19%
2020	6881	-8.06%
2021	7669	11.45%
2022	7996	4.26%
2023	8530	6.70%
2024	9048	6.07%
2025	9212	1.81%

As these charts indicate, the department has seen an increase in call volume every year with the exception of 2020, a decrease caused by the COVID pandemic. While the increase in 2021 was a disproportional recovery from that decline, the long-term trend remains clear; the department has seen a 14.58% increase in call volume over the last three years. Although the call volume increase for 2025 was 1.81%, the average annual increase over the last three years is 4.86%. Since 2015, total call volume has increased 38.65% or 2,568 calls. This amounts to seven additional calls per day, bringing our 2025 average to 25.2 calls per day.

The number of incidents at our 24 senior living facilities continues to increase. Chart 3 compares our department’s total responses to these facilities over the last three years and to 2015. In 2015, senior living facilities accounted for just under 26% of our total incidents. In 2025, while housing less than 2% of the city’s population, the senior living facilities accounted for 34% of the department’s total incidents. Chart 4 shows the average calls per bed per year at these facilities. That number has increased from 1 call per bed per year in 2015 to 1.5 calls per bed per year for 2025.

Chart 3

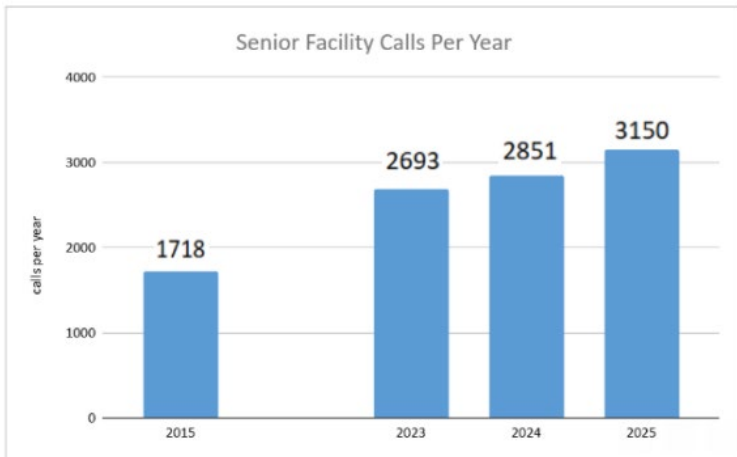


Chart 4

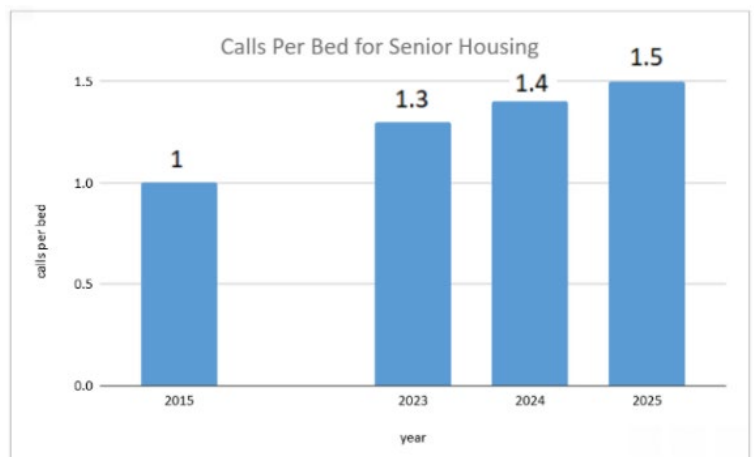
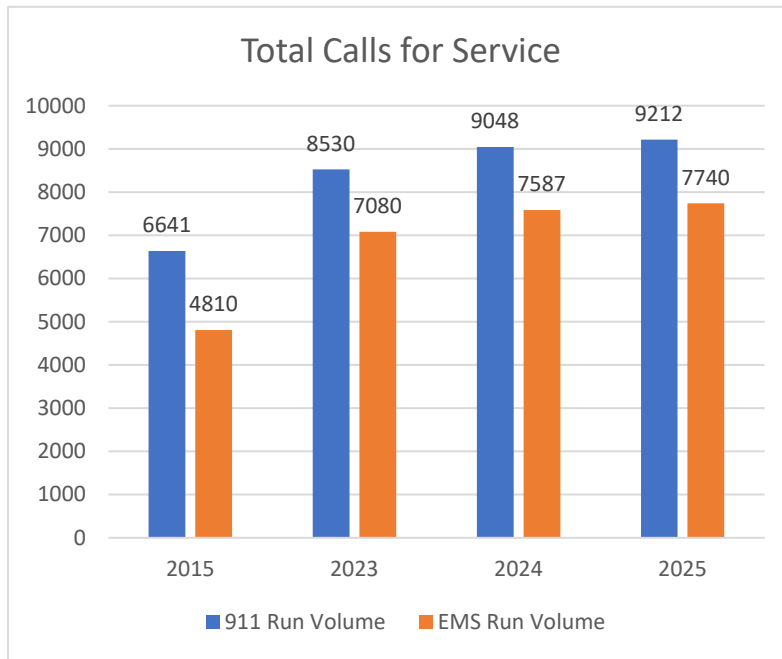


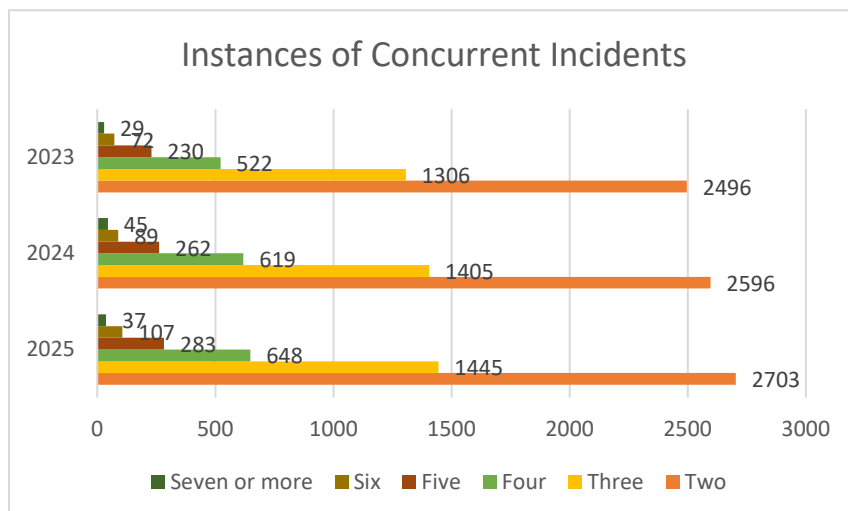
Chart 5



As illustrated in Chart 5, the demand for EMS services is growing. This chart compares recent EMS calls and overall call volume to 2015 data. This chart demonstrates the continuous rise in EMS incidents over the last few years.

Chart 6 illustrates the trend of concurrent calls over the last three years. As these overlapping incidents rise, the department's resources are frequently exhausted. Certain calls, such as motor vehicle accidents and cardiac arrests, require multiple units to respond simultaneously. During these periods, the fire department may deplete all available internal resources and must rely on mutual aid from neighboring cities. Because these units respond from outside our jurisdiction, response times can increase significantly. In emergency services, these additional minutes can directly impact patient outcomes and fire spread. Ultimately, Rochester Hills should maintain a staffing level that ensures our daily call volume does not rely on the resources of our neighboring communities.

Chart 6



Beginning in 2024, the department began tracking the number of times our department resources were depleted and the times we only had one unit available. This information is provided in Chart 7. During these times, we had no units available to respond to emergency calls for assistance. With only one unit available, the department lacks the resources to safely and effectively extinguish a fire. While we would still have mutual aid responding, it puts our firefighters at risk.

Chart 7

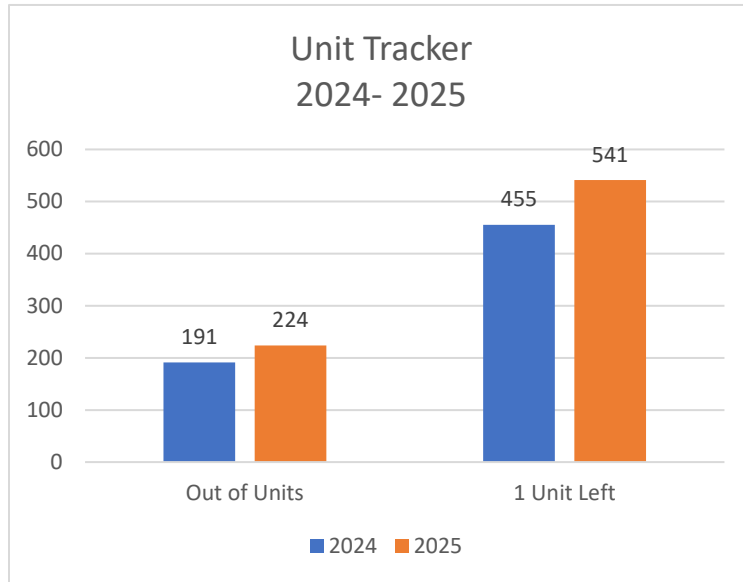


Chart 8 illustrates mutual aid activity, showing that our department received assistance 68 times in 2025. Notably, 47 of those instances were for medical emergencies. While mutual aid is an essential component of modern emergency services, it is most effective when reserved for large-scale events or extreme surges in demand.

Chart 8

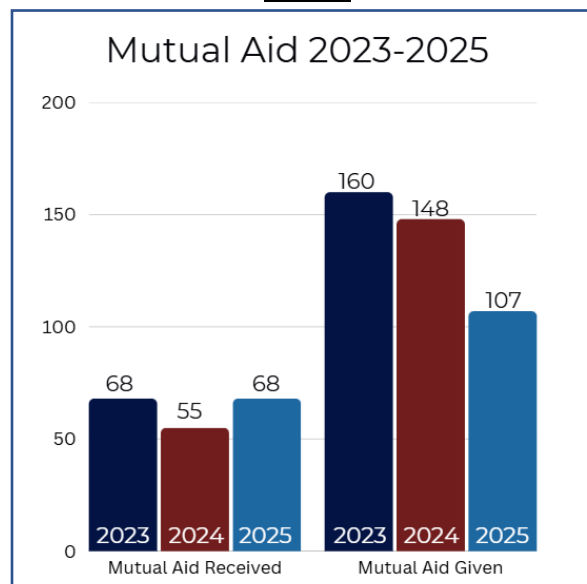
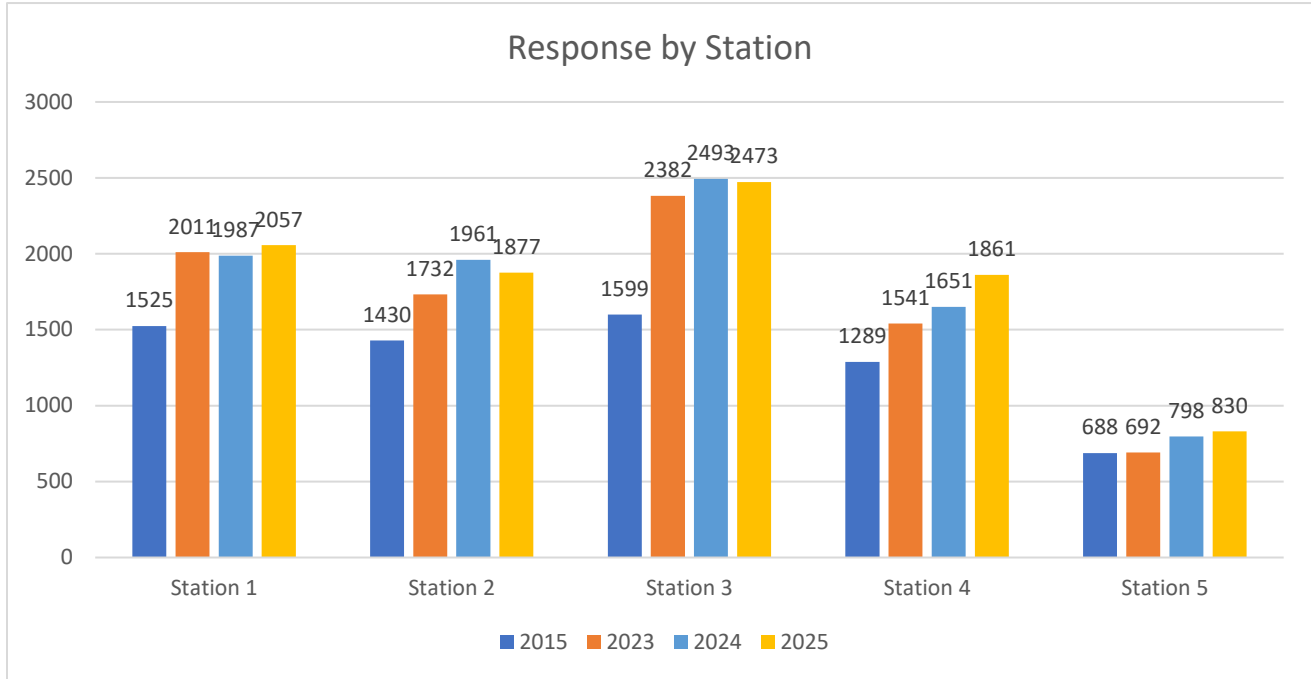


Chart 9 illustrates the total call volume by station, highlighting the steady increase in service demand since 2015 alongside a comparative analysis of the last three years. Station 3 remains the department’s highest-volume station, followed by Station 1. Currently, Stations 2 and 4 demonstrate a near-identical level of operational activity, while Station 5 continues to record the lowest call volume. It is important to note that 13 of the City’s 24 senior living facilities are in the Station 3 response area.

Chart 9



The statistical data from 2015 through 2025 illustrates a clear and sustained upward trend in service demand across the City of Rochester Hills. While call volume varies by station, the overall system is increasingly impacted by the logistical challenges of concurrent incidents and shifting community demographics. Specifically, the disproportionate volume of calls originating from the city’s senior living facilities has become a primary driver of this increased demand. These trends represent a cumulative strain on existing resources as the department manages the evolving needs of the community.

RESPONSE TIMES:

Response times are broken down into three distinct phases that track a call from the initial call to the arrival of help.

The first phase is Alarm Processing. This is the time it takes for the 911 dispatcher to receive the call and notify the appropriate fire station. The second phase is Turnout Time, which is the period from the moment the station is alerted until the crew is dressed in their gear and the wheels of the apparatus begin to move. The final phase is Travel Time, which is the actual driving duration from the station to the emergency scene. When these three segments are added together, they create the total response time representing the complete interval between the request for help and the arrival of professional assistance.

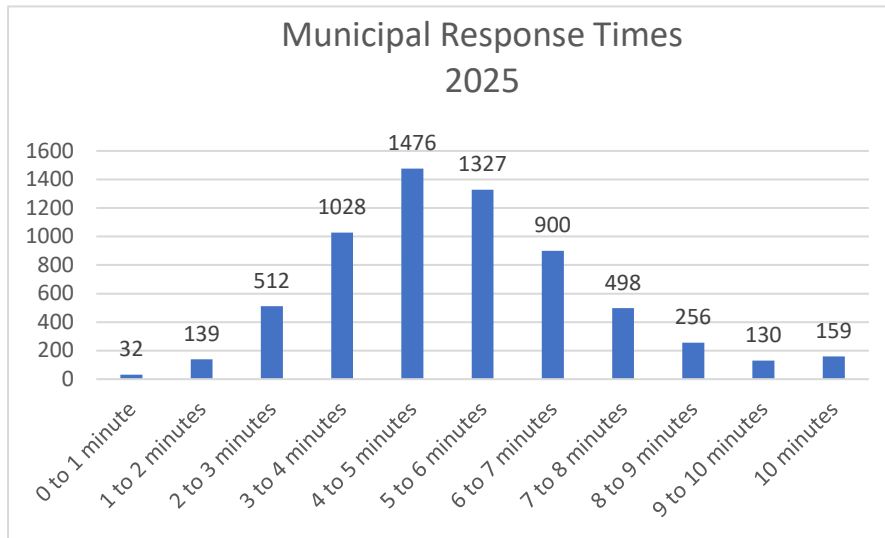
In most reporting models, ours included, a fire department's response time is defined specifically as the combination of turnout time and travel time. This represents the total duration from the moment the station is alerted to the moment the apparatus arrives on the scene. It is important to note that the only phase the department can control is the Turnout Time. The Alarm Processing phase is controlled by the Oakland County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center, which is contracted by the City of Rochester Hills to perform dispatch services. Travel Time is contingent on the location of the call from the station, time of day, traffic and weather conditions.

In 2025, our department's average response time for all emergency incidents was 5 minutes and 15 seconds. This performance is measured against the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 standard, which establishes the benchmark for career fire departments. NFPA requires the first fire engine to arrive on the scene within a total of 5 minutes and 20 seconds 90% of the time. This figure includes both a 1-minute and 20-second station turnout period and a 4-minute travel window. By maintaining a 5 minute and 15 second average response time, our department's average response time is currently within the parameters of the national standard for on scene arrival.

Because our department operates exclusively as an Advanced Life Support (ALS) provider, we are also held to the medical response benchmarks set by the American Heart Association and the NFPA. National standards for high-priority medical calls require the arrival of a paramedic-level unit within an 8-minute window to ensure the highest probability of patient survival. Our 5 minute and 15 second average is well within this national medical requirement.

Although our department maintains an average response time within acceptable national standards, averages can be deceiving. As Chart 10 indicates, the department still had numerous response times that exceed the national average. Many of these occur when the primary unit for that incident is already on a call and a unit from a farther station or mutual aid must respond.

Chart 10



While our average arrival time for the first unit is favorable, arrival speed is only half of the safety equation. The next section evaluates our ability to assemble a full effective team on the scene of a fire.

NFPA 1710 PERFORMANCE REVIEW:

NFPA 1710 is the national standard for the organization and deployment of career fire departments, designed to protect both the public and responding firefighters. To ensure a safe and effective operation, the standard requires a full alarm assignment, the total number of firefighters needed to handle a structure fire, to arrive on the scene within 8 minutes of dispatch. This ensures there are enough personnel to simultaneously perform search and rescue, ventilation and extinguish the fire. This benchmark is expected to be met 90% of the time.

The full alarm assignments under NFPA 1710 vary by the type of structure involved. A standard single-family home requires 16 personnel, or 17, if an aerial device is utilized. For most businesses within our city, the requirement increases to 27 personnel, or 28, with an aerial device. Because the department's minimum staffing is 15, there are days when the department lacks the internal manpower to meet the standard even if every unit is available.

To address these gaps, the department utilizes automatic aid from neighboring departments. However, because these units respond from outside the city limits, they typically fail to arrive within the required 8-minute window.

In a review of our significant fires over the past three years, we had 22 qualifying events and our department only met this standard one time. This represents a 4.5% success rate, which falls significantly short of the 90% goal established by the standard. Because the department fails to achieve this safety threshold in over 95% of our fires, our initial crews are often forced to begin high risk operations without the number of personnel recommended for a safe operation.

Additionally, this standard is used by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) to evaluate our staffing levels when determining the city's Public Protection Classification. While several factors influence our final score, our current inability to meet the 1710 standard negatively impacts the staffing portions of this evaluation.

POPULATION/COMMUNITY GROWTH:

As of July 2025, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) lists the population of Rochester Hills as 78,820. This is a 3.3% increase from the 2020 census and an 11% increase from the 2010 census. Chart 11 from the SEMCOG website shows the population increases.

Chart 11

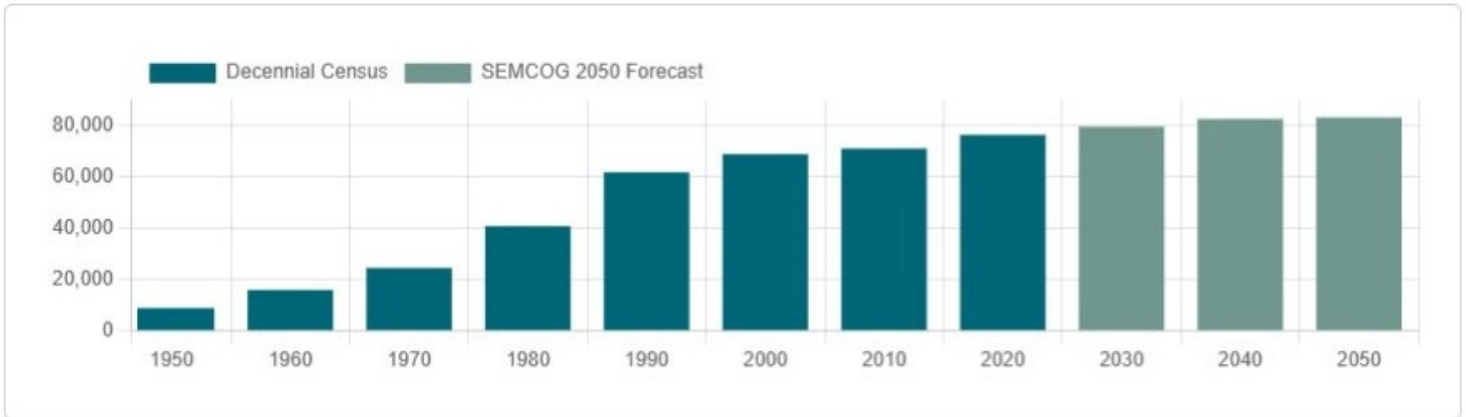


Chart 11 also shows the future population predications. SEMCOG is predicting the population of Rochester Hills to increase to 83,000 (5.3%) by 2050. The rate of growth is projected to slow by roughly half over the next quarter-century compared to the previous 15 years.

Chart 12

Age Group	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	Change 2020-2050	Percent Change 2020-2050
Under 5	3,939	3,952	4,423	4,633	4,754	4,700	4,643	704	17.9%
5-17	12,698	12,602	12,419	12,337	12,808	12,956	12,892	194	1.5%
18-24	6,262	6,904	6,972	7,040	6,782	6,657	6,900	638	10.2%
25-64	38,893	37,710	38,691	39,396	39,855	40,465	40,521	1,628	4.2%
65-84	12,525	13,813	14,686	14,980	14,849	14,101	13,930	1,405	11.2%
85+	1,983	1,872	2,305	3,048	3,479	3,968	4,203	2,220	112.0%
Total	76,300	76,853	79,496	81,434	82,527	82,847	83,089	6,789	8.9%

Chart 12 shows the SEMCOG estimates for age of population. As the chart indicates, the population aged 65-84 is expected to increase by 1,405 individuals, a mere 11.2 % increase. However, the increase in residents 85 and over is expected to increase by 2,220 individuals, which is a significant increase of 112%.

As development and population begin to stabilize, the demand for service continues to outpace simple population metrics. This is driven by a demographic shift; the city is not just growing, it is aging. SEMCOG data indicates that while the general population growth is level, the number of residents aged 85 and over is projected to increase by 112%. This demographic requires emergency medical intervention at a much higher frequency than the general public. Therefore, the department must staff for the intensity of service required by our current and future residents rather than just the total number of residents.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the data presented in this analysis, it is evident that the department's current staffing levels cannot keep up with the call volume. While our current average response time of 5 minutes and 15 seconds appears favorable, this figure does not fully capture the increasing frequency with which our resources are depleted. Our resources are being depleted at an unsustainable rate. Last year alone, the department was entirely out of units on 224 separate occasions. When our primary units are already committed to incidents, we cannot maintain the required response times or provide the necessary personnel for subsequent emergencies in the community.

To alleviate this problem and ensure the safety of both our residents and fire department personnel, it is recommended that the City of Rochester Hills hire 12 additional firefighter/paramedics. This will add four firefighters to each of the three shifts increasing our daily staffing to 23. This increase allows the department to staff an additional Alpha unit and an additional fire apparatus. This will increase our number of staffed units from seven to nine, providing the depth of resources needed to handle overlapping calls without exhausting our fleet. It will reduce the number of times we rely on mutual aid and reduce the number of times our response time exceeds the national standards. Furthermore, this will enhance our response to fires as we strive to meet the requirements of NFPA 1710 and provide a more reliable level of protection for our residents.

Supporting this expansion requires an adjustment to the fire department's revenue structure. Consequently, the city's Chief Financial Officer is developing a formal funding plan that includes a proposed millage increase to support these additional positions. This coordinated approach ensures that the expansion of our front-line personnel is backed by a sustainable and transparent financial framework, allowing the department to maintain these enhanced staffing levels well into the future.

Predicting future call volumes and staffing needs can be a complex challenge; however, the addition of 12 firefighter/paramedics represents a natural progression in the department's service delivery. While this expansion addresses our immediate operational deficits and restores current service reliability, the department must remain forward thinking. Data from SEMCOG indicates that while general population growth in Rochester Hills is leveling off, there is a significant projected increase in residents over the age of 65. Because an aging demographic typically correlates with a higher demand for emergency medical services, this staffing increase ensures our department is well-positioned to evolve alongside the community's changing needs. Therefore, it is important that this assessment be evaluated annually to analyze call volume and evolving trends, ensuring the Rochester Hills Fire Department continues to provide the highest level of service to the community.