

EAST NORWICH

LONG ROAD FOR A NEW TRUCK

Pending bond approval by town, fire department spending \$1.6M for vehicle ordered 3 years ago

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The East Norwich Fire Department will spend \$1.6 million to purchase a new fire truck that will arrive this summer, replacing one of its aging ladder apparatuses.

The vehicle, a 2024 Ferrara rear-mount ladder truck, will have a compartment for extrication tools, capacity for a 500-gallon water tank and a pump capable of spraying 2,000 gallons of water per minute. It will serve as a dual-use apparatus for the department.

“If you need it as an engine, it’s an engine; if you need it as a ladder, you can use it as a ladder,” East Norwich Fire Department Chief Todd Cronin said in an interview.

The department sold an 18-year-old vehicle that was wearing down to a Pennsylvania fire company to help cover the cost of the new truck, Cronin said. The department also has two ambulances, two engine trucks, a heavy rescue vehicle and a tower ladder truck in its fleet.

East Norwich will seek the Town of Oyster Bay’s approval to borrow \$1.2 million to cover the balance of the expense, according to town documents. The town board has to approve the borrowing, part of a 10-year tax-free bond, and will hold a hearing on May 20.

The truck purchase won’t result in an increase to the budget of the department, which serves East Norwich in addition to Muttontown, Upper Brookville and parts of Brookville.

Supply chain delays

The East Norwich Fire Department ordered the truck about three years ago. Fire departments on Long Island, and across the nation, have struggled with supply chain issues since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to fire chiefs, officials and manufacturers.

“Departments are waiting three to four years for brand-new vehicles,” Cronin said.

The Florida-based Fire Appa-



East Norwich Chief Todd Cronin, from left, president Christopher Velsor and secretary Russell Fuller.

ratus Manufacturers’ Association, a national nonprofit, said in a report that the pandemic “worsened any weaknesses that already existed in the supply chain.”

Bruce Whitehouse, president of the nonprofit, told Newsday orders for new trucks between 2021 and 2023 rose 43% compared with the average a decade before the pandemic. While demand rose, it became harder to purchase parts — creating a “significant backlog,” he said.

Those pressures have lessened over the past 18 months, Whitehouse said, but the number of new orders remains

higher than usual.

Julie Nuernberg, a spokeswoman for Wisconsin-based REV Group — which owns Ferrara, the company that made the East Norwich Fire Department truck — said a historic spike in demand put pressure on the industry.

It also takes longer to fulfill custom orders, Nuernberg said. She said the company has boosted vehicle production 30% over the past two years.

Issues for departments

Thomas Rahilly Jr., chief of department at Oyster Bay Fire Company No. 1, said the long delays have caused issues in re-

cent years.

“It’s taken us three years to get our new ambulance,” Rahilly said in an interview. Departments have to get themselves in a queue for custom vehicles, even if they haven’t secured the financing for it yet, he said.

“If you don’t get your order in and put yourself in a line, it might be six years because you waited for funding,” the Oyster Bay chief said.

Tim Gilman, a spokesman for Wisconsin-based Oshkosh, which owns fire truck manufacturer Pierce, said in a statement the company is working to navigate “global supply challenges, unprecedented demand and sig-

Finding a fire truck

■ The East Norwich Fire Department will borrow \$1.2 million to help finance a new fire truck it ordered about three years ago.

■ Fire chiefs and officials cite significant backlogs behind custom orders. Manufacturers said the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the backlog.

nificant inflation since the pandemic started in 2020.” Those forces have contributed to “extended delivery times and increased prices.”

“The wait time is just insane,” Commack Fire District Chairman Pat Fazio said in a recent interview. “The supply chain is an issue, no doubt.”

In 2022, the Commack Fire Department contended with rapidly rising equipment prices. The cost of one ladder truck rose from \$1.35 million in November 2021 to \$1.8 million the following summer, Fazio told Newsday in 2022.

Federal scrutiny

Federal lawmakers are scrutinizing the role of consolidation in the industry, focusing on private equity groups that are acquiring multiple manufacturers. REV Group holds more than a third of the market share in the fire truck manufacturing industry, federal officials have said, citing data from IBIS-World, which produces industry research reports.

Last month, Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Jim Banks (R-Ind.) opened a “bipartisan investigation” to assess the impact of private equity-backed firms buying up independent manufacturers of fire trucks, according to a letter written by the lawmakers.

In their letter to the International Association of Fire Fighters, Warren and Banks wrote: “The lack of competition in the industry has allowed private equity to hike fire truck prices, restrict fire truck production, and created a dangerous backlog of firefighting equipment.”

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