



CITY OF WARD

P.O. BOX 237 • WARD, ARKANSAS 72176 • 501-843-7686

CHARLES GASTINEAU
MAYOR

KRYSTAL RUMMEL
CITY CLERK

State of the City Report March 17, 2026

This report is presented pursuant to A.C.A. 14-58-302

To the City Council, City Clerk, City Attorney, City Employees, Planning Commission Members, Water Advisory Committee Members, and of course, our citizens, I offer my 2026 State of the City Report.

The State of the City is once again, EXCELLENT, OUTSTANDING and SUPERB! I know I said the same thing last year, but its TRUE! Ward continues to grow at a steady rate with new housing opportunities for young and old to purchase their own home and set down roots. Ward is a great place to live, away from the hustle and bustle of bigger towns, but close enough to get to the hustle and bustle, if you desire.

The financial health of the city is very good and continues to improve. City and County sales tax are both up, due in-part with new businesses in town and "to be frank"¹ (once again) new businesses in Lonoke county to include our sister-cities Cabot and Austin. Regionally, we all succeed when new businesses are brought in.

As always, I want to thank the men and women who work tirelessly for the city every day providing service to our citizens and visitors alike. It will continue to be our collective goal to provide the best experience that we can provide when you reach out to us with an issue or need service. From the youngest employee² to the one who's been here the longest³, we all strive – or should – to do what is right "even when no one is watching."⁴

I also want to thank the Ward City Council for their hard work. We may not agree on everything – and we shouldn't – but we do agree in doing the best for the city and its citizens.

¹ The phrase "to be frank" originates from the word "frank" which comes from the Medieval Latin term "francus" meaning "free," referring to the idea of freely expressing one's opinion without holding back, essentially meaning to be honest and direct

² Schyler Doherty, Water Operator – Age 19

³ Lt Sims, Ward PD – 28 Years

⁴ C.S. Lewis; "Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."

Thanks also to the Planning Commission and the Water Advisory Board. They too work hard to do what is right for the community.

Finally, as always, I want to thank you – the citizens of Ward. You elected us to do the work for you and your family as best we can with your tax-payer monies.

Please visit our website below for more information about your city, its government and what we ALL can do for one another. The link below will also give you access to our other websites and social media platforms.

www.wardarkansas.gov

I continue to be inspired by the words of President John F. Kennedy:

**“Change is the law of life.
And those who look only to the past or present
are certain to miss the future”**

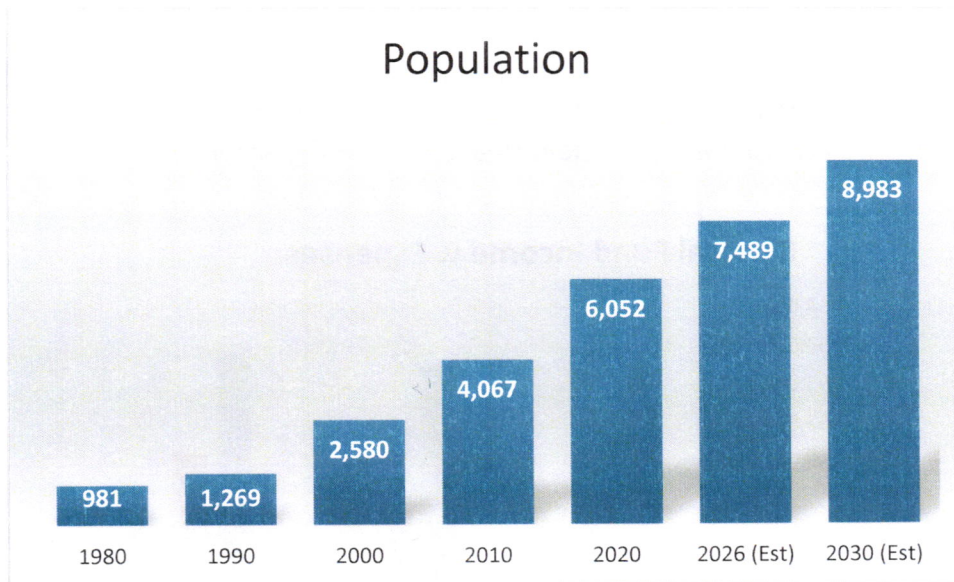
I’m also encouraged by former Arkansas Governor, Winthrop Rockefeller’s words from his 1971 Farewell Address:

**“Every citizen has the duty to be informed, to be thoughtfully concerned, and to participate in the search for solutions.
Only by working together can we make the contribution necessary to build the world we all yearn for.”**

Attached you will find the 2025 Financial Statements for our General, Street, and Water/Wastewater Funds. These are presented in accordance with A.C.A. 14-59-116 and 14-237-113. Overall, the City of Ward continues to be financially sound.

The City of Ward and the region as a whole strives to grow making northern Lonoke County one of the fastest growing regions in the state. The City of Ward is not only the 2nd largest city in the county but we are the 10th largest city in Central Arkansas. The World Population Review estimates our population change to be 23.01% since 2020⁴. At a 3.23%⁵ annual growth rate, the population of Ward will be approaching 9,000 by the next census. The chart below is pretty telling of our growth pattern.

⁵ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/arkansas/ward>



Some additional facts for 2026 from the Census Reporter⁶ about our city.

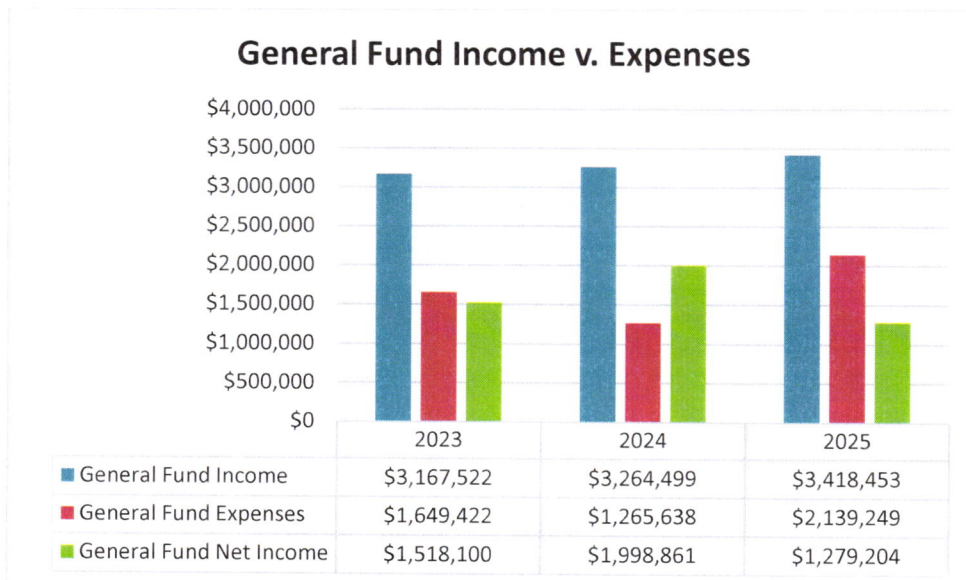
- Education Attainment:
 - High School Graduate or Higher: 88.7%
 - Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 22.1%
- Marital Status: 58% Married
- Median Age: 30.2
- Median Household Income: \$72,734
- Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing: \$189,100
- Per Capita Income: \$29,305
- Population with Veteran's Status: 7.4%
- Race and Ethnicity:
 - White: 81%
 - Black: 3%
 - Hispanic: 10%
- Size: 4.4 sq miles

Financial Overview

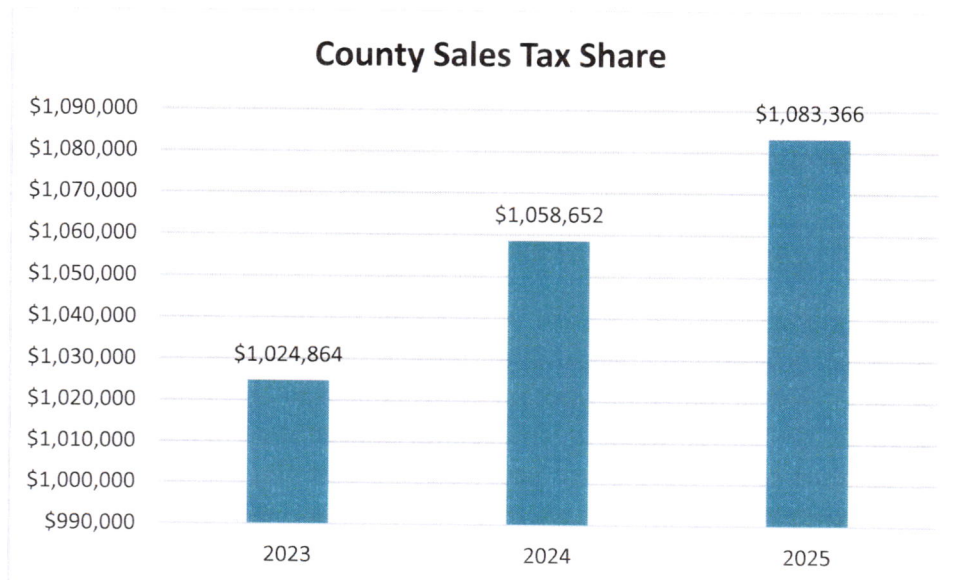
Overall, the finances for the city are in excellent standing. General income (sales tax, personal property taxes, etc) continue to rise at a steady pace. Expenses are higher this past year due in part to the improvements we've made to City Hall. If you have not visited or watched a City Council meeting, you cannot appreciate the much-needed changes to the council/court room we did last year to transform the 1970s era look to a modern design that will last for years. We also replaced the hallway flooring in city hall and have plans to upgrade the entrances and restrooms to better accommodate individuals with disabilities.

⁶ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US0573130-ward-ar/>

As always, my sincere thanks to my HR/Finance Director Courtney Ruble for keeping the books straight along with our contracted Certified Public Accountant, Don Davis. My thanks also to the Department Heads for keeping expenses down.



Our share of the county sales tax rose 2.3% over the previous year. As stated last year, the rise in county sales tax is due, in part, to the commercial and retail growth in Cabot. Shop Ward first, but if not, shop Austin or Cabot as we all share in the county's sales tax no matter where the transaction is within the county.



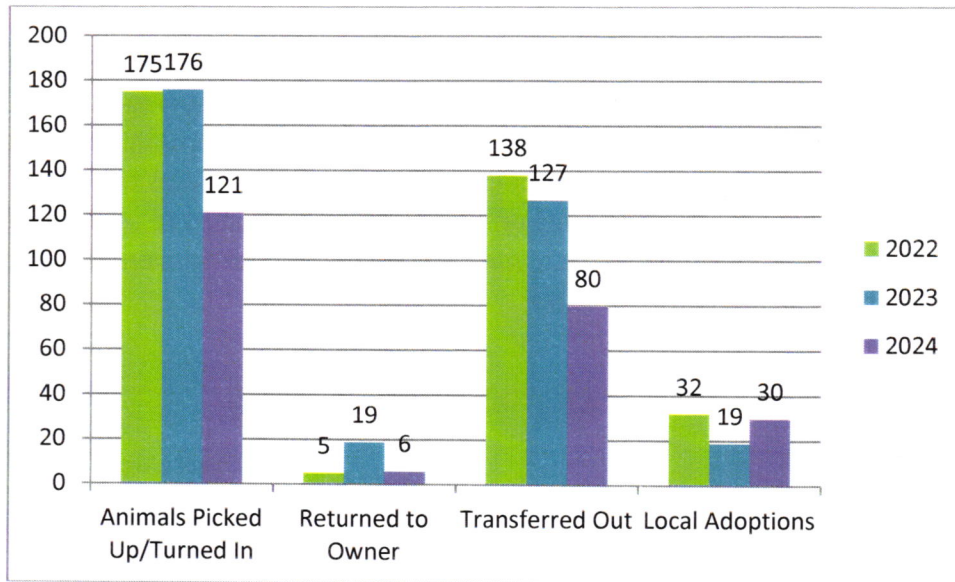
City sales tax increased 9.3% over last year down slightly from the 9.8% increase from 2023 to 2024. However, the January 2026 city sales tax revenue topped \$100,000⁷ for first time ever and was a 20.3% increase over January 2025. Remember, if you can't buy local, buy on-line OR have your goods delivered to your house. Sales tax is based on point-of-delivery meaning anything you buy on-line and have delivered to your house (Amazon, etc) is taxed at the local rate. It is a win-win as you get the convenience of front door delivery and the city gets the sales tax.



Department Summaries

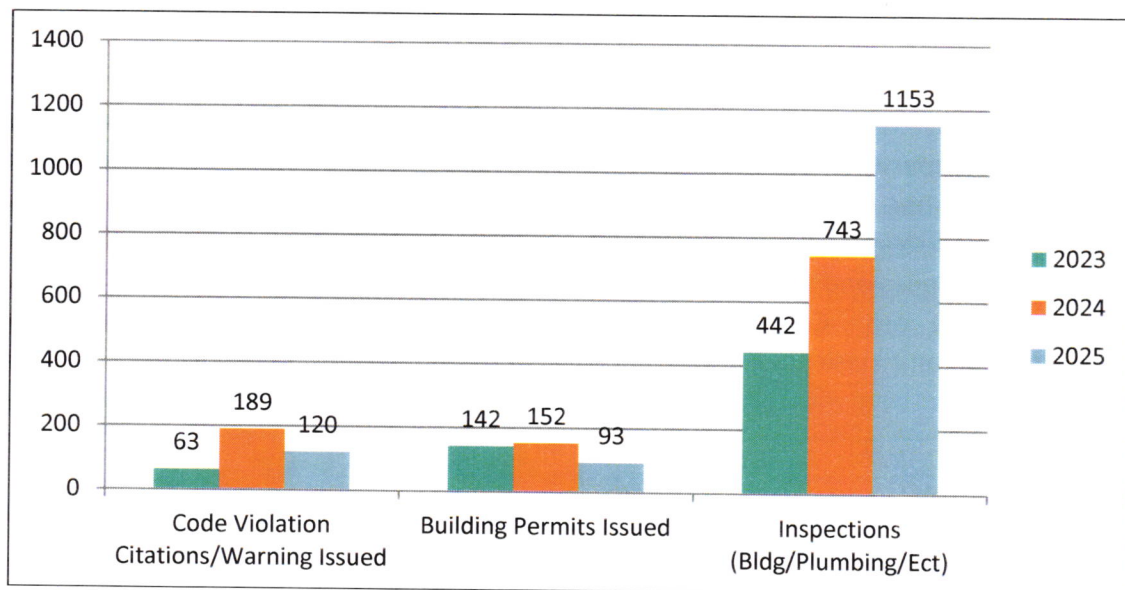
- **Animal Control:** With the recent departure of Taylor Barnes, Clarissa Byrom has taken over of as Supervisor and we expect nothing but the best from her...and whomever we hire to assist her. As with most every city and county in Arkansas and across this nation, the issues of stray and lost animals is a concern. As such, the shelter has a continuing need for supplies and food to care for the animals such as towels, cat/dog toys, cat/dog canned food, etc. Contact the Animal Control Office at (501) 843-6351 for more information or go visit their website, <https://wardanimal.wardarkansas.org/>

⁷ \$118,677



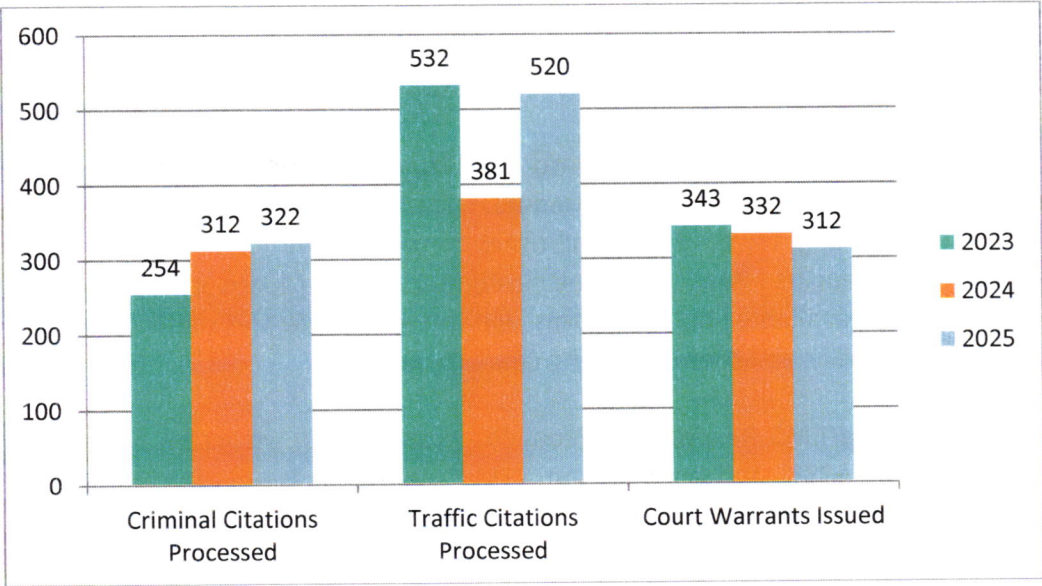
- Code Enforcement/Permitting/Building Inspection: In 2025 we opened a separate office as a one-stop shop for obtaining permits, code enforcement and building inspections. With the use of new software that provides a portal for citizens and contractors to request and track permits, business licenses, and code violation, we provide a more streamlined method for all. You can access the portal by going to:

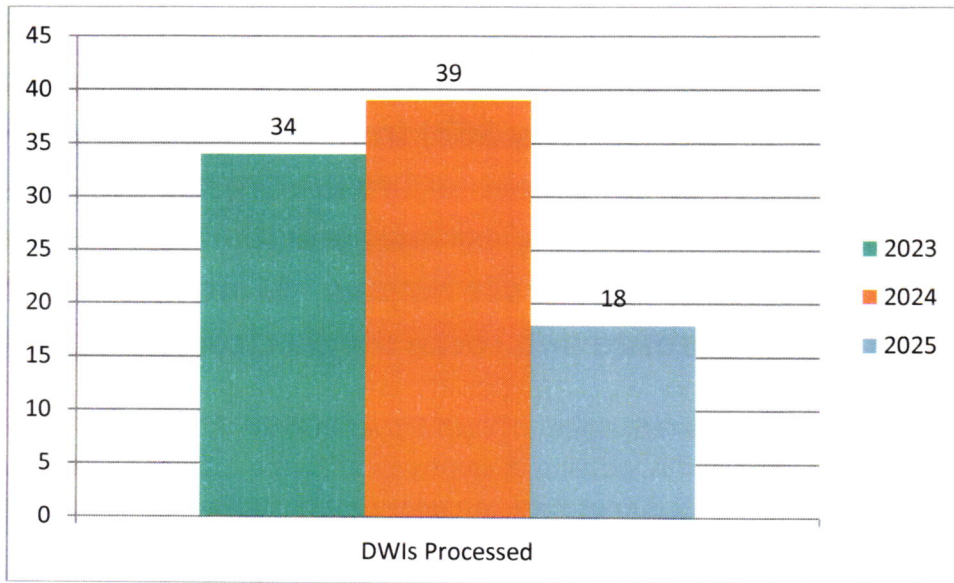
https://wardar_license.portal.iworq.net/portalhome/wardar_license



*****The next City -Wide clean-up day will be held on May 2, 2026 (Sat). Dumpsters will be set up at the Water Operations Facility at 404 E. 2nd Street (Hwy 367) from 8 am to 3 pm. To avoid traffic issues on 2nd Street and to ensure the process flows smoothly, we respectfully ask that you line up on North Street and follow directions of those helping. More information will be posted on our website and social media closer to the event. *****

- **District Court:** With the retirement of Beth Glover in 2025, Angel Williams was promoted to Chief Court Clerk and is working diligently to ensure the court’s work moves forward without any issues ...and is improved. Angel is continuing to work on her Certified Court Manager Certification and will graduate later this year. Monthly Court Dockets are posted at <https://www.wardarkansas.org/monthly-court-docket> and linked off our Facebook Page.

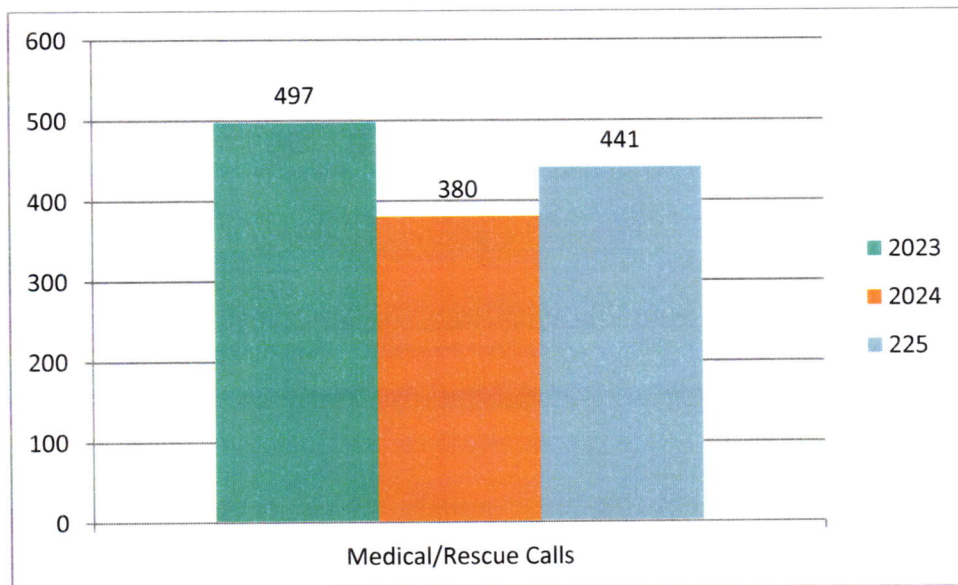
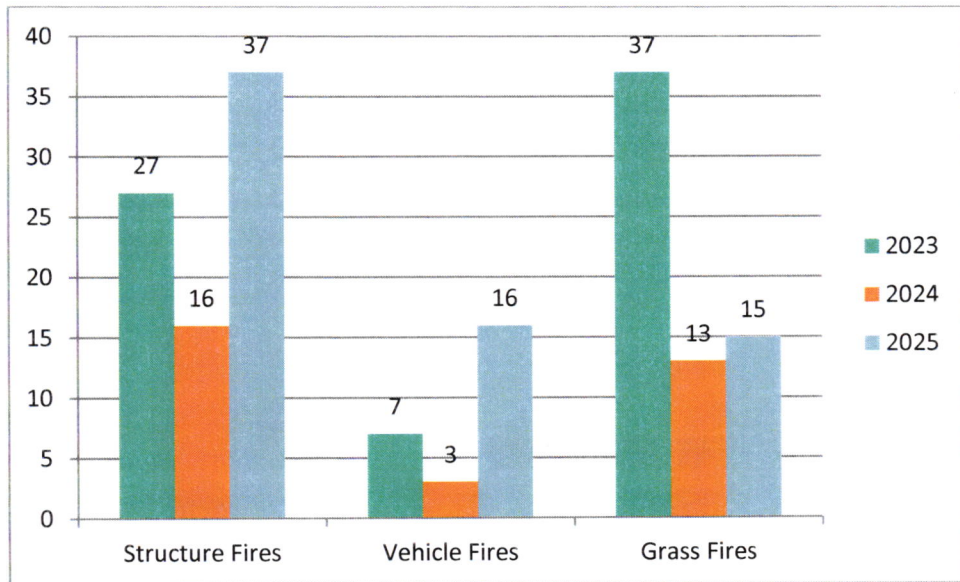




- **Fire Department & EMS:** 2025 was a busy year for the Ward Fire Department with all fire calls up along with EMS type calls. Chief Reaves and the men and women who volunteer – which includes responding to calls at all hours of the day or night – should be commended by all for what they do for ALL of us.

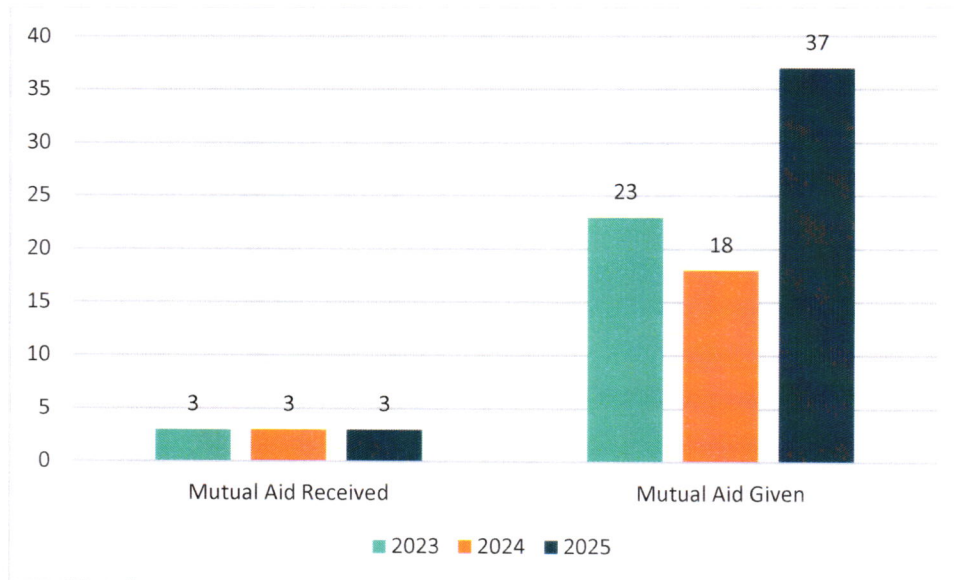
In late March of this year, Ward Fire Department will employ our first-ever full-time firefighters working a 48/96 schedule. This schedule will ensure we have at least one full-time firefighter on duty at all times to provide immediate response to fire and medical emergencies. More full-time firefighters will be hired in the coming years as funds become available; however, this will not eliminate the need to volunteer firefighters as we will need them for many years to come.

Fire and Rescue/EMS Responses: From the graph below, structure fires are up 131%, vehicle fires up 433%, and grass fires up 23%. Volunteers are ALWAYS needed....



Mutual Aid: WFD has Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid Agreements with all surrounding Fire Departments and their districts. 2025 saw a 106% increase in the number of times WFD provided mutual aid to another departments. This increase is do in large part – I believe – to the ever-decreasing number of volunteers. According to the NFPA, our nation’s volunteer fire service loses an average of 12,000 firefighters per year, while calls since 2008 have increased 70%.⁸

⁸ <https://www.nfpa.org/news-blogs-and-articles/nfpa-journal/2026/02/11/volunteer-fire-service-crisis>



Community Involvement: Ward Fire Department takes pride in community involvement. The Fire Department is, of course, involved in all city events, and they also visit each preschool and Ward Central Elementary School at least annually during Fire Prevention Week and at other times too. The department conducted 21 pre-fire inspections in 2025.

To learn more about YOUR Fire Department, go to:

<https://fire.wardarkansas.org/>

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSMiN5r-GPlcrDrOleyDX_A

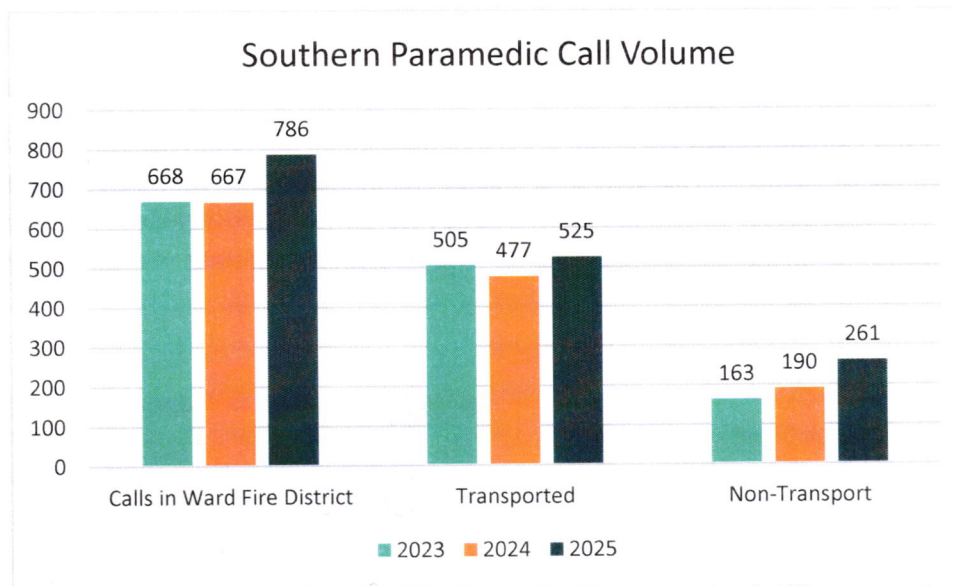
<https://www.facebook.com/CityofWardFireDepartment>

- Emergency Medical Service (EMS):** Southern Paramedic Service (SPS), our contract Ambulance service provider, provides high-quality pre-hospital care for our community. Overall, they cover approximately 25,600 acres, which includes the City of Ward and its Fire District, the City of Austin, CS&Z, and Mt. Springs Fire Districts. SPS also participates in many city events to include the “Meet the Machines”, 4th of July Celebration and the Christmas Parade.



This year, SPS responded to 786 calls within the Ward Fire Department District which is a 17.8% increase over 2025. Within the SPS coverage area EMS calls represented 70.48% of the total call volume. With 30% of all calls resulting in no one being transported – like last year – the strain on SPS resources (and other EMS providers) is evident. Nationwide there is a shortage of EMS personal and some services experience high turnover rates.⁹

Southern Paramedic Service is a valued partner with the City of Ward. Go to <https://www.southernparamedic.com> to learn more about SPS and what they have to offer.



- Parks and Recreation:** Parks and Recreation Director Michelle Fitzgerald’s management of the city’s Parks and Recreation programs is nothing short of outstanding. She and her staff are always looking for better ways to serve the community and in particular the children with more and more sports activities geared toward kids. Michelle is also involved in other city events, such as Ward Eggstravaganza, Harvest Fest, as well as our annual Christmas Parade.

Go to <https://www.wardparksandrec.com/> to view their website.

⁹ <https://ambulance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/10-30-2025-EMS-Shortage-NDAA-One-Pager.pdf>