

Where we Spend our Money Compared to other Cities, Part 4

Category 6: Public Safety

The sixth and final Category used within the State’s budgeting categories is Public Safety. This category is the one where the largest differences can be seen between Keokuk and the other communities. The following table shows the variety of expenditures communities commit to this category:

Public Safety Expenditures Across Communities, FY2026

Community	Police Department	Jail	Emergency Management	Flood	Fire	Ambulance	Building Inspection	Misc. Protection	Animal Control	Other Safety	Total
KEOKUK	\$ 3,671,762	\$ -	\$ -	\$22,000	\$ 2,882,151	\$ -	\$400,032	\$ -	\$ 154,586	\$ -	\$ 7,130,531
DENISON	\$ 2,316,095	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 923,759	\$ -	\$199,282	\$ -	\$ 22,400	\$ -	\$ 3,461,536
FORT MADISON	\$ 3,037,940	\$ -	\$ 5,500	\$ -	\$ 2,201,510	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,244,950
KNOXVILLE	\$ 2,458,682	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 370,970	\$ 1,882,580	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 32,477	\$ -	\$ 4,744,709
PERRY	\$ 2,134,199	\$ -	\$ 500	\$ -	\$ 285,288	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6,500	\$ -	\$ 2,426,487
FAIRFIELD	\$ 2,229,520	\$ -	\$ 18,832	\$ -	\$ 580,965	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 8,500	\$610,240	\$ 3,448,057
WAVERLY	\$ 2,974,305	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 319,002	\$ 55,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,000	\$ -	\$ 3,349,307
WEBSTER CITY	\$ 2,511,665	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 926,786	\$ -	\$408,547	\$ -	\$ 8,000	\$ -	\$ 3,854,998
DECORAH	\$ 2,343,216	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,002,688	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3,345,904
GRINNELL	\$ 1,881,216	\$ -	\$ 2,700	\$ -	\$ 755,228	\$ 911,496	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6,500	\$134,806	\$ 3,691,946
STORM LAKE	\$ 3,564,437	\$ -	\$ 13,881	\$ -	\$ 720,915	\$ -	\$199,328	\$ -	\$ 6,000	\$ -	\$ 4,504,561
BOONE	\$ 3,387,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,741,227	\$ -	\$284,075	\$ 27,200	\$ 120,000	\$ 13,500	\$ 5,573,002
CRESTON	\$ 1,631,943	\$140,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 636,904	\$ -	\$123,038	\$ -	\$ 18,520	\$ -	\$ 2,550,405
OSKALOOSA	\$ 2,468,024	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,124,544	\$ 27,500	\$279,050	\$ 463,961	\$ 37,500	\$ 25,387	\$ 4,425,966
SPENCER	\$ 3,188,562	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,004,593	\$ -	\$456,135	\$ 758,579	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,407,869
MOUNT PLEASANT	\$ 1,666,576	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 296,932	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 51,991	\$ 20,000	\$ -	\$ 2,035,499
CARROLL	\$ 2,356,487	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 299,140	\$ -	\$254,329	\$ 150,000	\$ -	\$ 5,108	\$ 3,065,064
LE MARS	\$ 3,249,243	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,759,236	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,000	\$ -	\$ 5,009,479
PLEASANT HILL	\$ 3,722,179	\$ -	\$ 12,300	\$ -	\$ 2,459,186	\$ 167,700	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 12,000	\$ -	\$ 6,373,365
SIOUX CENTER	\$ 1,839,320	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 282,225	\$ 699,760	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 2,826,305
PELLA	\$ 3,586,081	\$ 4,700	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 136,753	\$ 2,139,424	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 8,000	\$ -	\$ 5,874,958
CLEAR LAKE	\$ 3,451,788	\$ -	\$ 63,419	\$ -	\$ 325,004	\$ 1,167,683	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,500	\$ -	\$ 5,009,394
	\$ 2,712,284				\$ 956,137				\$ 21,340	Average:	\$ 4,243,377

Public Safety Expenditures, overall, are the area where Keokuk stands out the most when making comparisons to other communities of our size. There are unique characteristics about our town that do have an impact, that do contribute to this variance, and they should be noted. Keokuk does have a higher than average crime rate, which does lead to consider a need for increased law enforcement in the community. With that in mind, lets look at what the financial numbers show.

The average community our size spends \$4.2 Million on Public Safety compared to Keokuk’s \$7.1 Million, which the highest of any of our comparable cities by \$800,000. This is a significant disparity, and reflects higher than average expenditures in every subcategory that we budget our expenditures into.

For example, our Animal Control Services division, at \$150,000 is well above the average community expenditure of \$20,000. Boone, the next highest spender in this category at \$120,000, actually included Mosquito control expenditures of \$25,000 that may more appropriately have been shown in the Health and Social Services category where mosquito control is an actual line item. Their remaining \$95,000 expenditure was a contractual allocation they provide to Boone Area Humane Society, who runs the community animal shelter. No other community our size allocates over \$40,000 annually for this priority. Every community is

different, but the majority of towns our size operate their animal shelter with no to minimal paid staffing. What is missing in this comparison, though, is that several of these communities require more effort from their patrol officers in responding to animal control issues, and their regular police budget absorbs a larger portion of operating costs for this function. Completely equal comparisons are rarely possible.

Building Inspections is another category where we spend well above the average amount; the average community spends \$118,000 in this category compared to our \$400,000, though we are not the highest spender in this area. Approximately \$180,000 of this expenditure amount is for dilapidated building demolitions, with another \$80,000 allocated to nuisance abatement costs and \$10,000 for City-wide cleanup. The amount that we allocate to for these kinds of expenses are well above average, but are driven by our population dynamics, where our community is continually shrinking and our housing stock aging.

Our Fire Department is the most expensive of any of the comparison group by about \$400,000 and almost 3 times the average. This, as well, is driven by a shrinking population base. The only two departments among the 22 that rely solely on full-time fire department personnel are ourselves and Fort Madison, both of whom are communities that used to be significantly larger than they are now. Almost all of the other 20 communities include paid fire fighters to a degree, but they supplement their force with varying numbers of volunteer members as well. The next highest Fire Department Budget community is for FY2026 is Pleasant Hill, with a \$2.4 Million budget. This is a growing department, in a rapidly growing community; their population was 10,100 in the 2020 Census, with current estimates of around 11,900, a 17% increase in 5 years. They prepared their FY26 budget with the intention of moving from 5 full-time Firefighters to 8, while also budgeting to fill close to 2 paid positions daily with Part-time personnel. Their goal was to take portions of their approximately 40 volunteer firefighters and allow them to fill the part-time shifts throughout the year, while volunteers supplemented the on duty personnel in responding to actual incidents. The third highest cost department is Fort Madison at \$2.2 Million. Their department, as already mentioned, is the most comparable to our fire department; Keokuk has 19 full time firefighters, while Fort Madison has a slightly smaller crew of 16.

The following chart is an approximation of the distribution between full-time and volunteer positions by department in these comparison communities:

Fire Department Personnel FY2026

Community	Fire Full Time	Fire Part Time	Fire Volunteers
KEOKUK	19		
DENISON	1		30
FORT MADISON	16		
KNOXVILLE	14		
PERRY			26
FAIRFIELD			19
WAVERLY			30
WEBSTER CITY	4	24	
DECORAH	Combination		
GRINNELL	12	23	25
STORM LAKE	2		27
BOONE	10	8	8
CRESTON	Combination department		
OSKALOOSA	8		20
SPENCER	5		30
MOUNT PLEASANT			25
CARROLL	1		34
LE MARS	10		40
PLEASANT HILL	8		45
SIOUX CENTER			40
PELLA			24
CLEAR LAKE			26

Several of these communities are in areas that do not have the level of industry to complicate what is required of a department that Keokuk has with Roquette as well as a few others. Yet some of these communities do have significant industries to deal with as well, with Boone, Storm Lake, Fort Madison, Grinnell, Pella, Carroll, LeMars, Webster City and Denison coming to mind as having major industrial bases in their communities. Regardless, the combination department model allows them to have a minimal amount of staffing on hand at any given time, but relies heavily on volunteers to supplement any calls for service that arise. Bettendorf, population 39,000, is the largest community with a combination (both full-time and volunteers) department in the state, but it is a rarity among communities over 20,000. There is a transition that occurs between volunteer departments and full-time departments somewhere between 7,500 residents and the 20,000 mark from seeing a volunteer model and seeing a full-time model

department, largely due to the complexity of issues and number of calls seen as community size increases.

The final subcategory in this comparison is the Police Department. Keokuk is not the most expensive department out of the comparison group of similar sized communities, but it is at the top of the range. The variability in costs between departments is nowhere near as wide as is seen in Fire Departments, reflecting the inability to rely on volunteers in the community to supplement police protection as can be done with Fire Departments. There is some variation in departments across this comparison group, though, that largely has to do with whether the department is confronted with the issue of operating an Emergency Operations Center/Dispatch function, or can rely on an outside entity to provide that service for them. A staffing distribution comparison is as follows:

Police Department Personnel FY2026

Community	Police Sworn Officers	Police Civilian	Police Com Center	Total
KEOKUK	24	4		28
DENISON	13	1	6	20
FORT MADISON	21	3		24
KNOXVILLE	14	3		17
PERRY	13			13
FAIRFIELD	12	1	6	19
WAVERLY	17	1		18
WEBSTER CITY	12	1	9	22
DECORAH	13	1		14
GRINNELL	14	3		17
STORM LAKE	21	4		25
BOONE	17	4		21
CRESTON	11	1		12
OSKALOOSA	17	1		18
SPENCER	21	1	7	29
MOUNT PLEASANT	17			17
CARROLL	17			17
LE MARS	14	2.5		16.5
PLEASANT HILL	17	2		19
SIOUX CENTER	12			12
PELLA	19	1	7	27
CLEAR LAKE	16	1	7	24

When looking at total staffing comparisons, there are a handful of communities that have overall staffing levels similar to Keokuk. When looking at sworn officers on the street, though, Keokuk

has the highest number of budgeted officers among our comparison communities with 24 sworn budgeted positions, with the next highest communities, Fort Madison, Storm Lake, and Spencer, being at 21 sworn officers.

Even with 24 sworn officers budgeted, our current staffing level in the Police Department is at 21 sworn officers, the highest number of positions filled in a significant amount of time. Our actual filled positions has been as low as about 17, and has spent a large amount of time with 20 filled, staffed positions.

That concludes this final area of comparison expenditures between similar-sized communities. The comparisons, again, are not designed to provide final answers on how money is spent, or answers on what is the right or wrong way to allocate resources, but it does provide a backdrop to at least ask if we are prioritizing issues similar to what others do, and having that help provide a basis for justifying determining if it seems to be reasonable.

This series of posts has been designed for the purpose of providing background information as significant decisions are made in regards to Fiscal Year 2027's budget proposal. Fiscal Year 2026 was originally budgeted (if items had been displayed accurately) with a \$2 million shortfall, and that is about where we are anticipated to end up. Fiscal Year 2027, as departmental requests have been submitted for consideration, will lead to another \$2 million shortfall. This is not sustainable, and will require modifications for our community to survive, let alone thrive.

Next: Alternatives that can be considered for modifying the FY2027 budget