

Our fire protection districts must be studied comprehensively

This edited letter to Alan Hochberg, chairman of the committee studying the possible consolidation of fire districts in unincorporated Greenburgh, is published at the writer's request.

Dear Mr. Hochberg,

I am pleased that most of the committee believes a study of the fire protection districts is warranted. I believe that you should request that the supervisor appoint another committee to study that issue. Since labor issues will not be part of that study, it might be completed before the Consolidation Committee is finished. A comprehensive study of the fire protection districts is essential for the following reasons:

There is a real issue of taxation without representation. No citizen is part of any committee that deals with the villages on this matter. The supervisor negotiates with the villages and citizens are left out. Allowing citizens to attend a public hearing to approve the contract does not make up for their forced lack of participation in this process.

I am not aware of any town study of the fire protection districts that indicates

alarm times, number and type of apparatus dispatched to the scene for each alarm, how long it takes for the apparatus to arrive, how many firefighters are on each, the number of firefighters present for each alarm and their level of training. All of these issues are critical in determining the level of service provided to the citizens of the fire protection districts. A study is warranted just to provide this information.

The language in the fire protection district contracts is poor. The town does not require minimum NFPA standards to be met! Why is this? Also, while some villages place all of their financial information on the Web in a readable manner, others are not so transparent. The public has a right to know how and where its tax dollars are being spent, especially since, by law, the villages are required to reimburse the village fire department only up to 35 percent of the contract amount. The citizens of the fire protection districts have a right to know where the other 65 percent-plus is going.

On a separate matter, after much thought I believe that Ed Rush should be asked to resign from the committee. The

definition of conflict of interest is:

A situation in which a public official's decisions are influenced by the official's personal interests.

Rush is the fire chief of Hartsdale. He is also an elected politician in the Village of Elmsford and an officer in the Elmsford Fire Department.

Since no one can ever determine with certainty that Rush's decisions on the committee are not influenced by his status in Elmsford, I feel the only proper thing for the committee to do is ask for his resignation.

The Consolidation Committee will make decisions that potentially impact the fire service in Greenburgh for the next century. Lives, property and tax dollars are at stake. You owe it to everyone not to make decisions for personal or political reasons. Should Rush remain on the committee, I believe its decisions will be challenged on that basis alone.

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