

Greenville Fire District should be represented on commission

To the Editor:

The Edgemont Community Council recently sent residents a letter stating reasons why consolidation would not be beneficial for the Greenville Fire District. In response to this and other issues dealing with efficiency, costs, and benefits of mutual aid for the fire districts, the Greenburgh Town Board has resolved to establish a fire commission study on consolidation of the Greenville, Hartsdale and Fairview fire departments.

The commission will have 10 members. Ideally there would be three from each fire district, not including the chairman who is from Hartsdale. Some preliminary work has begun and eight people have been chosen. The fire commissioners of each fire district have been asked to name one representative to the commission. Fairview has named a deputy fire chief and Hartsdale has named the new fire chief.

As of today the Greenville Fire District, which provides fire protection for the Edgemont community, has not selected anyone. It would be a missed

opportunity if Greenville were not to participate.

This is not business as usual. We must explore all options to modify or reduce tax increases while delivering services that make quality of life special in Greenburgh. When you deal with police and fire departments you are talking about saving lives. This cannot be negotiable. However, if we can maintain or improve services and cut expenses, isn't this worth examining?

Without a study of the three fire districts, it is hard to explain why the Greenville Fire District in 2009 represents 45 percent of the cost of all other services provided to Greenville residents by the town (\$7,267,740 as opposed to \$16,278,095), and in the other two districts, the percentages are even higher.

Local governments are bracing for a more than 50 percent jump in pension costs in 2011. Covering pensions for police and fire departments may require raising property taxes as much as 10 percent.

However, we cannot just look at the fire departments alone. I will begin shortly to conduct a comprehensive two-year study on reforming town government and its impact on services. The town is already looking at new ideas to modify tax increases for the coming year.

The final decision on consolidation lies with the voters of each fire district. All the fire commission can do is to educate the community as to the pros and cons of consolidation. If a majority of voters in any of the fire districts involved vote against consolidation then, as far as I am concerned, that community has spoken and made its decision. It is the will of the people that counts, not the opinions of community leaders or politicians. A fully informed public is the greatest guarantor of democracy. I therefore urge the fire commissioners of Greenville to appoint a representative to be on the commission.

PAUL FEINER
Greenburgh Town Supervisor