

Consolidation would cost Greenville

By MICHAEL B. GOLDEN

I am writing on behalf of the five commissioners of the Greenville Fire District, which serves Edgemont, in response to Greenburgh Supervisor Paul Feiner's letters urging us to designate a representative to the Consolidation Commission to explore consolidation of the town's three fire districts, Greenville, Hartsdale and Fairview and to his letter to the Inquirer on Sept. 11. We appreciate Feiner's interest in our community and his goal to slow tax increases that burden us all.

We support the work of the Consolidation Commission and agree that we should periodically review the wisdom of consolidation. We and our chief supported the Pace Study on consolidating 10 fire departments, including those in Greenburgh. We will support the commission's effort in every way, including providing timely financial and other information.

However, after meeting twice with Alan Hochberg, and a third time after reviewing Feiner's letter, we respectfully decline to designate a representative to the commission because it seems to us extremely remote that consolidation will benefit Edgemont, and we therefore cannot justify the commitment required of an active member of the commission.

1. If the three districts were consolidated, it appears inevitable that Edgemont's fire taxes would immediately increase over 21 percent (from \$98 to \$119 per \$1,000), as demonstrated by the chart above.

The only way that Greenville's tax rate would remain *unchanged* is if expenditures of the consolidated department were reduced by \$4.8 million, or 18 percent. Because personnel costs, including salaries, health insurance, Workers' Compensation and retirement contributions represent approximately 85 percent of our budget, the only way to substantially reduce operating costs is by reducing the level of direct fire protection, including the number of firefighters. This would result in an un-

	Assessed Valuation	Tax Levy	Tax Rate/ per \$1,000
Greenville	\$71,945,948	\$7,067,640	\$98.2354
Hartsdale	\$70,210,700	\$9,209,091	\$131.1636
Fairview	\$86,693,680	\$11,000,500	\$126.8893
Combined	\$228,850,328	\$27,277,231	\$119.1924

acceptable reduction in service and protection of our residents.

2. The Greenville Fire District is run effectively: Costs are contained, and we provide exceptional service to our community and to neighboring communities that request our assistance. We just approved a budget that increases tax revenue less than 3 percent for 2010, which compares favorably with the average increase of 3.8 percent over the last four years.

Despite such modest increases, we have renovated both the exterior and interior of the firehouse and will use an apparatus reserve fund to purchase a new engine this year to replace one at the end of its useful life. The district also maintains cash reserves to offset fluctuations in mandated retirement contributions and certiorari awards, both of which are outside of the district's control. Upon consolidation, there is no guarantee that such fiscal responsibility would continue.

3. Through mutual aid agreements, the district accomplishes the goal of consolidation without actually combining the departments. Greenville shares resources and engages in mutual aid with Hartsdale and Fairview, and has a particularly robust relationship with neighboring Hartsdale, each responding to designated calls of the other and making its personnel and equipment available as requested.

We continue to work closely with these departments to further enhance the relationship, and Greenville also has relationships with other neighboring

fire departments, including Yonkers, Eastchester, Scarsdale, White Plains and New Rochelle.

4. Feiner implies in his letter to the editor that Greenville's operating budget is bloated and laden with unnecessary expenses by comparing it as a percentage of "the cost of all other services provided to Greenville residents by the town." This comparison is meaningless, as was Chief Kapica's report comparing the cost of providing police protection with the cost of providing fire protection in Greenburgh.

The only way to assess the reasonableness of the cost of fire protection is to drill down and analyze in detail manpower requirements, response times, equipment needs and a host of other factors, which combined result in excellent fire protection. Our chief and our commissioners do this continually, and we invite the Consolidation Commission to do the same.

We have provided the above detail in an effort to explain the reasoning behind our hesitation to designate a member of the commission. But, our view of consolidation is not set in stone; we acknowledge that we do not have a monopoly on the wisdom of consolidation. We welcome any analysis, cost savings or arguments we may have overlooked — at which point we will gladly reassess our skepticism of the value of consolidation to the Edgemont community.

Michael B. Golden chairs the Board of Fire Commissioners of the Greenville Fire District.