

## **Dissenting Comments on the Report of the Fire Department Consolidation and Government Efficiency Committee**

On Wednesday November 10, 2010, the Fire Department Consolidation and Government Efficiency Committee voted to approve and issue a final report titled "Fire Services in Unincorporated Greenburgh: Consolidation Feasibility Study and Fiscal Practices". This report was approved by a final vote of the nine member committee; six in favor and three opposed. The three committee members in opposition voted against the report because we feel that the report contains quite a bit of incorrect, misleading and potentially inflammatory information. Many of the recommendations are impractical or would require action well beyond the scope of the committee or the Town, such as sweeping changes to state law or major changes to collective bargaining agreements. Some of the specific areas we disagree with are as follows:

1. The Observations and Findings on page 9 project an 8.4% tax increase through 2015 based on "current trends". However, these "current trends" include a base year with an unusually high tax increase due to state mandated pension fund payment increases necessitated by the aftermath of 9/11 and the related stock market crisis. It also ignores the fact that the 2010 and 2011 budgets show increases of less than 2%. We feel that you cannot project large increases based on current trends, and ignore the last two years that reflect moderate increases.
2. In the Observations and Findings on page 9, the report attempts to "project" what the district budgets should be for 2011. There are also five pages in the report (pages 30 through 34, which is 8% of the entire report) that are dedicated to disputing the 2011 proposed budgets of the three districts. This entire section is completely irrelevant to the report. The budgets are what they are as adopted by the districts. They cannot be "wrong" since they are simply the best estimates of the districts based on the data available at that time. They were prepared by experienced staff that spends many hours assembling and analyzing data and projecting expenses and revenue based on previous years of experience and current information available. These budgets are then presented to the full Boards of Fire Commissioners, who utilizing their knowledge and expertise, may modify the budgets. The budget is then presented to the public at a hearing as required by state law before final adoption. It is up to the districts to live within those adopted budgets. If any committee member had questions on the specific budgets or the budget process, they should have attended the public hearings. However, even though several committee members, including the chairman, live in Hartsdale, not one of them attended the public hearing or questioned the budget in any other way. Two committee members and several residents attended the Fairview Budget Hearing, none of which had any questions or concerns regarding the actual proposed budget. There were no challenges to the Fairview budget.
3. In the Observations and Findings on page 9, in the Overtime Practices section on pages 36 through 38, and in the Compensation per Employee section on pages 41 and 42 there is significant discussion regarding the compensation per employee and the payment of overtime.

It appears that the report is implying that the employees in the districts are over compensated. However, there are several factors driving up the average compensation per employee, and the related overtime costs. Most importantly, the district employees have several different agreements that require working additional hours, most at straight time, in lieu of hiring additional staff. This results in considerable savings in benefits, training, and equipment. You cannot simply compare average salaries, you must look at the hours worked and the equivalent number of personnel that are working on the street. Due to the unique scheduling requirements of emergency services (24 hour manning seven days a week), you need to hire approximately 4.7 firefighters to add one on the street at all times. In addition, the peer groups operate differently than the district departments. White Plains will shut down companies when staffing levels fall due to injury or illness, resulting in decreased coverage and longer response times. Scarsdale employs five firefighters and officers as coverage employees. They fill in for vacations, compensatory days etc. While eliminating some overtime, it results in more employees on the payroll and additional benefit costs. All of these factors combined make a simple comparison of average compensation per employee misleading and a more costly solution. Any significant reduction in overtime in the three districts would result in a decrease in the number of firefighters available to respond to emergencies on a daily basis.

4. The recommendations on page 12 through 14 recommend administrative consolidation, but then go on to further recommend the Town initiate a study to determine if this administrative consolidation is feasible. We strongly oppose making a recommendation that we as a committee are not sure can be implemented, or generate actual savings.
5. The Table 1 on page 21 outlines Annual Cost Reduction Goals. There are several issues with this chart. Most importantly, the chart gives the impression that these savings could be recognized by following a few of the recommendations of the committee. However, in order to recognize most of these savings, you would need major changes to existing collective bargaining agreements, which must be negotiated and agreed upon by the firefighters union. In addition, the chart outlines savings from eliminating 2 fire chiefs. There is no provision to offset these savings by hiring additional personnel. This results in a "loss of manpower". This contradicts the paragraph above the chart that states that "these cost reductions are not intended to result in a loss of manpower". Not only are the three Chiefs actively involved in fire suppression efforts, but all of the administrative functions performed by the two eliminated Chiefs would have to be picked up by someone else, resulting in additional staff being hired. All of these costs must reduce the Annual Cost Reduction Goals.
6. The last paragraph of the Chairman's opening letter on pages 5 and 6 states that the report will "...make sure the people living in the Hartsdale, Greenville and Fairview communities have the best and most efficiently run fire departments without creating further burdens on the taxpaying public". This is the goal and the job of the Commissioners in each district, and the inclusion of this statement infers that the districts Commissioners are not doing so. This is as far from the truth as possible. The Commissioners in all three districts are a very dedicated hard

working group that continually does a great job of balancing the need to provide excellent fire protection with the desire to keep taxes as low as possible. There is extensive training that is required of the Commissioners to continue to hold these positions. And all of this work is done on a volunteer basis since there is no salary for these elected Commissioners.

7. In the recommendations on page 12, and in the Collective Bargaining Agreements section on pages 35 and 36, the report states that "it is out of the norm for local and municipal employers, such as the subject districts, to pay for the full cost of medical insurance". The report therefore recommends that firefighters from the districts be asked to contribute towards their medical insurance. However, the Town of Greenburgh employees do not contribute toward their medical insurance, with the exception of new Police Officers. We feel that a committee representing the Town should not recommend that an outside agency be doing something that the Town itself is not doing. This fact also casts a doubt on the "research conducted by the FDEGEC", when the Town itself does not support the conclusions of that research.

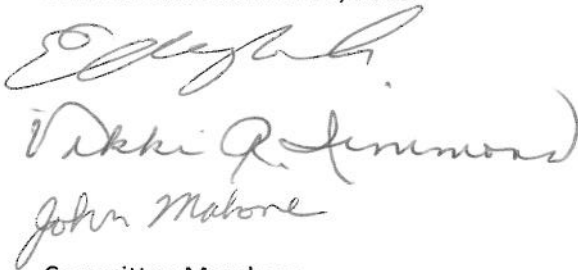
Reflected above are some of the areas of which we disagree with the FDEGEC Committee's findings and recommendations. To review a more detailed list as pertains to the individual districts, see the responses to this report on the district websites, Facebook and/or Twitter sites.

Fairview Fire Department – [www.fairviewfire.org](http://www.fairviewfire.org)  
[www.facebook.com/fairviewfire](http://www.facebook.com/fairviewfire)  
[www.twitter.com/fairviewfire](http://www.twitter.com/fairviewfire)

Greenville Fire Department – <http://fdgreenville.com>

Hartsdale Fire Department - [www.hartsdalefire.org](http://www.hartsdalefire.org)

Submitted November 15, 2010



Committee Members

Edward Rush

Vikki Simmons

John Malone