

A Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Freehold was held on Thursday, January 27, 2011 at 7:00 PM in the Municipal Building.

Mayor Wilson stated that Notice of the time, date and location of the meeting had been provided pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 231 of the Laws of 1975 (Open Public Meetings Act).

Mayor Wilson opened the meeting with the Salute to the Flag, followed by a moment of silence.

#### ROLL CALL

PRESENT	MAYOR MICHAEL WILSON
PRESENT	COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DI BENEDETTO
PRESENT	COUNCILMAN KEVIN KANE
PRESENT	COUNCILMAN JOHN NEWMAN
PRESENT	COUNCILMAN GEORGE SCHNURR
PRESENT	COUNCILWOMAN SHARON SHUTZER
PRESENT	COUNCILMAN JAYE SIMS

Mayor Wilson read Item No. 4 on the Agenda as follows:

#### **“Public Hearing: Proposed Fire District, Freehold Borough.”**

Mayor Wilson stated the fire department has obtained the necessary signatures needed on a petition to move this to the next step.

Joseph Youssouff, Attorney for the Freehold Fire Department, made a presentation to the council. He stated that he represents 14 fire districts and has been practicing municipal law for over 36 years.

Mr. Youssouff explained why the fire department felt it was necessary to create a fire district. He stated he was responsible for creating fire districts in Jamesburg and Englishtown Boroughs. The Borough of Jamesburg created a fire district in 1982 because they were running into the same kind of financial problem the Borough of Freehold is facing today in 2011. Municipal budgets now are subject to a 2% cap. In 1982 they were not subject to a 2% cap but the cap law had been in effect since 1978 and in those days it was a 4%-7% cap. The Borough of Jamesburg found the squeeze on the municipal budget made it increasingly difficult to satisfy the demands of the fire department for equipment, training and protective gear. Contrary to the wishes of mayor and council they had to make very severe budgetary reductions and that was the spur to create a fire district in Jamesburg. Similarly the Borough of Englishtown in 1985 ran into the same kind of problem. There was a budget squeeze and the mayor and council could not provide funding for the creation of a new firehouse, and the purchase of new fire apparatus. The financial constraints on the Borough of Englishtown were even more severe than the Borough of Jamesburg. So once again the petitions were circulated by the fire department and the mayor and council conducted a hearing similar to this one and at the conclusion of the hearing adopted an ordinance establishing a fire district.

Here are the analogies. The Borough of Jamesburg consists of 0.9 square miles. It has a population of approximately 6,429 people. The fire district budget in 2011 is proposed to be \$446,857.00. Keep in mind the district population is significantly smaller than Freehold

Borough. But most importantly the debt level that the district faced was incurred for the purchase of new fire trucks and the rehabilitation of the fire house. The tax rate for the district of Jamesburg this year is 0.166 per \$100.00 of assessed evaluation. The Borough of Englishtown is 0.6 square miles. It has a population of 1, 893 people. The tax rate for that district is 0.53 per \$100.00 of assessed evaluation. Of the total budget in Englishtown of \$462,063.00, \$118,913.00 are devoted to debt service. Once again for fire trucks and fire apparatus.

We recently purchased a fire truck in another fire district. This fire truck is referred to as an aerial platform; it is a 110 foot aerial platform which is necessary to handle buildings that are set back far from the road. The purchase price of that apparatus was \$1,100,000.00. It was very expensive and very difficult to fit the debt service into the municipal budget. Even though under the property tax levy cap law, capital acquisitions are outside the municipal budget.

Freehold Borough's tax rate last year was 2.246 cents per \$100.00 of assessment. Englishtown's tax rate last year including the district is 1.775 cents per \$100.00. In Jamesburg it was \$5.03 per \$100.00 assessment. Middlesex County is traditionally higher. Jamesburg is assessed at 46%, so they are not at 100% of true value and that is a part of the problem in Jamesburg.

When you look at Freehold Borough you have a population of approximately 11,500 people and the Borough consists of 2 square foot miles. When you compare the net valuation of property within these municipalities, according to the latest assessment in Englishtown, the total net value of property is \$259,713,563.00, Jamesburg is \$238,902.456.00. They have less value in their property base for taxation than Freehold Borough does.

The Borough of Jamesburg currently has 32 active volunteer firefighters. The Borough of Englishtown has approximately 35 active volunteer firefighters. What sets Freehold Borough apart from the other two towns is that Freehold Borough has approximately 100 volunteer firefighters. Fire protection provided by purely volunteer fire departments in New Jersey municipalities is the best buy in this government, bar none. Were you to lose your volunteer firefighters and have to take the road to a paid department you would end up with probably 12-15 paid firefighters, filled in with per diems, overnight 24-7 fire protection and you would triple your budget for fire protection from a fire district level. So you don't have labor costs, but you do have needs for equipment and equipment moving forward. The Borough fire department needs a program of replacement of their fire apparatus. Fire apparatus is expensive and complicated, difficult to design and takes a long time to build. New Jersey fire districts with volunteer companies are very good at maintaining their equipment at a very cost effective basis. Many of our fire trucks are 25 years old and once they reach that level the replacement to make them NFPA compliant is mandatory and it becomes essential because your equipment no longer provides adequate protection for the guys who operate it.

The Borough of Freehold is stuck in a difficult situation, but it is not a unique situation. The demands for modernizing the fire equipment, adequately training your volunteer firefighters and adequately equipping them with personal turn-out gear are constant and accelerating. The financial burden on your municipal budget especially in view of the 2% property levy tax is severe. A benefit of creating a fire district, aside from the fact that you take this out of the municipal budget, is that the people who design the trucks and determine what equipment to be used and purchased. I know from personal experience how much time is demanded of mayor and council to run a municipal government. But by creating a fire district you create a subdivision of municipal government specifically charged with one function and that function is to fund and provide for adequate fire protection and prevention services within the municipality. That's what a Board of Fire Commissioners is.

Board of Fire Commissioners is a sub-division of municipal government created by municipal ordinance. It consists of five elected fire commissioners. You don't have to be a fire fighter; you don't have to be a member of the fire department. The difference between the

mayor and council and a fire district is your budget does not have to be submitted to the voters every year, fire districts do. We are fast approaching the annual fire district election date which is scheduled by statute for the third Saturday of February every year. The Board of Fire Commissioners is required in every case to do the following:

- It must introduce and approve the proposed budget by December of the year preceding February referendum.
- It must then submit its budget to the State of NJ Department of Community Affairs local finance board for review and compliance with administrative regulations and statutory criteria.
- Once it receives the approval of the local finance board it then must submit its budget to a final hearing, then re-approved by the commissioners after approval from Trenton and then after that occurs you have to submit it to the voters for approval.

If the budget is defeated by the voters the statutes provide that the budget is then given wholesale to the mayor and council for review and then the mayor and council are obligated to fix the budget.

Fire district budgets have been defeated by the voters. Millstone Township has lost four budgets in a row. They lost these four budgets because the budgets went through the roof and the reason was because Millstone has 12 volunteer firefighters and has been forced to engage 10 full-time paid firefighters supplementing that force with per diem firefighters. The first budget was defeated in Jamesburg in 1982. Englishtown Borough lost a budget two years ago by one vote.

Mr. Youssouff passed out two handouts showing fire district budgets in other towns.

Mr. Youssouff stated that fire commissioners do not receive health insurance from the district and they are not enrolled in the NJ State Pension program. In all the districts that he represents none of the commissioners have tried to accept health insurance benefits. Fire commissioners are paid compensation and the amount is fixed by the fire commissioners but when an ordinance is adopted for fixing their compensation it must be submitted and approved by mayor and council. The compensation basis for most of the fire districts that he represents range from \$3,000 - \$4,000 a year and some districts are significantly less than that.

Mr. Youssouff explained that insurance is required. He stated that the \$52,000.00 insurance number in Englishtown Borough's budget provides for the following things:

- Mandatory Liability Insurance – protection in the event of a firehouse fire and life insurance for the volunteer firefighters.
- Workers Compensation Insurance – by statute volunteer firefighters are entitled to workers compensation insurance.

Mr. Youssouff then went line by line over the budget worksheets.

Mayor Wilson stated Freehold Fire Department is 125 years old and he is still trying to get a handle on what the difference would be if the Borough had a fire district. He asked Mr. Youssouff if the fire department becomes a fire district how would they be able to better maintain themselves, equipment wise vs. what has gone on for generations here. Over the years that he's been involved the governing body has always given the fire department everything that they've needed for fire safety.

Mr. Youssouff replied the difference is the fire department would like to establish a schedule for periodic replacement of equipment which has been hard to do because of the budgetary constraints the Borough has been operating under. This will enable the fire

department to plan when they can retire a piece of equipment and when it will be replaced. The fire department is very worried about the 2011 budget and the budgets going forward.

Mayor Wilson stated that every municipality in New Jersey is looking at a 2% hard cap. The current budget for the Freehold Fire Department for 2010 is \$400,000.00 a year. The proposed fire district budget that we've been given is roughly \$680,000.00 a year. If the fire district was approved the taxpayers of Freehold Borough would be looking at approximately a .03 cent tax increase for the first year which equates to \$80.00 a year added to their taxes.

Mr. Youssouff explained that in 2009 the budget was originally \$557,142.00. The budget decreased to \$400,000.00 when the dispatching duties were turned over to Monmouth County. Most of the districts he represents are struggling with the County because the County is giving you a contract for services on a per call basis and they're not telling you what it will cost next year. What I've seen is a substantial escalation and when we questioned the County for an explanation they say we need to build a new radio dispatch system, we need more personnel, we need a bigger building etc. So now we have a continuously escalating cost.

Mayor Wilson stated the projected 2011 fire department budget is \$403,702.00. We received a preliminary budget of \$682,000.00 and you're now saying there is a revised budget of \$549,902.00.

Mr. Youssouff explained this is a proposed budget and we will not know the surplus until the end of the year.

Mayor Wilson stated the bottom line is that a fire district will cost more money. This budget would have to be approved by the Local Finance Board. Mayor Wilson asked if the finance board will look at this and say is Freehold Borough trying to decrease their budget by \$400,000.00.

Mr. Youssouff explained that there are 186 fire districts in New Jersey. The State says it is more efficient to consolidate and have shared services agreements. Once the governing body has authorized the creation of a fire district the Local Finance Board really cannot refuse its approval unless it demonstrates the fire district is an undue financial burden on the municipal tax payers.

Mayor Wilson stated there are 2 fire districts in Freehold Township and maybe Freehold Borough should either merge or consolidate with Freehold Township.

Mr. Youssouff stated there are 3 fire districts in Marlboro, 5 in Howell, 2 in Freehold Township and 2 in Manalapan. He stated it is technically impossible to create an inter-juristically fire district. What can be done is inter-local service agreements within the chiefs called mutual aid agreements. If there was a bad structural fire in Freehold Borough, neighboring fire departments would come and offer their support. But when you look at the concept of a joint fire district the difficulty is due to the taxing value of the property located within the municipality. Freehold Township's two districts have tax basis as follows:

District #1 has \$3,489,000,000.00 in ratables.

District #2 has \$2,728,000,000.00 in ratables.

Freehold Borough ratables base is substantially lower. If you were to merge you would be asking Freehold Township's taxpayers in Districts #1 and #2 to subsidize fire protection costs in Freehold Borough.

Mayor Wilson opened the meeting to the governing body for questions.

Councilman DiBenedetto did not have any questions.

Councilman Kane asked when the last fire district was created.

Mr. Youssouff responded that Englishtown was the last fire district created in 1985.

Councilman Kane asked what the normal turnout is for the February elections.

Mr. Youssouff stated usually there isn't a lot of people who vote unless it is controversial. When there is a Presidential election the voter turn out is 32% for registered voters but for a fire district election it runs between 12%-15%. The statute calls for the election to be on the third Saturday of February between the hours of 2:00 PM-9:00 PM. One of the things in the governor's tool kit includes the possibility of consolidating elections.

Councilman Kane asked how things are going with the County dispatch operations.

Chief Bailey responded that it is a work in progress. He stated they meet every quarter with the County to go over issues. So far things are going fine.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated she spoke with the chiefs about the dispatch operations and was told that at this point there was no reason for council intervention and that they were handling the little "kinks" that were there.

Councilman Kane asked if the Fire Prevention Bureau was included in the proposed budget.

Mr. Youssouff stated it is not in the budget as proposed because it is up to the mayor and council if they want to transfer control of the Borough Fire Prevention. If it does get transferred it would become part of the district operating budget.

Councilman Kane stated he understands that equipment is the big issue and he asked Mr. Youssouff if he developed a long-term capital improvement plan for the replacement of the trucks, etc.

Mr. Youssouff stated the plan is to follow the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines, which is 20 years for a pumper truck and 25 years for an aerial device.

Councilman Kane stated you can re-certify after 20 years.

Mr. Youssouff stated that in 1992 NFPA required all cabs had to be enclosed. The Borough still has two trucks in the fleet with open cabs.

Councilman Kane asked as a tax paying resident in the town what benefit would it be for a homeowner to have a fire district. The service we provide now is great, so why should we change it.

Mr. Youssouff stated the primary benefit that he thinks the fire district would offer is a laser sharp focus on fire protection and firefighting by a municipal subdivision in municipal government. With a distinct budget that is submitted to the voters every year. He stated a municipal budget is not submitted to the voters. The voters actually have better control over fire district budgets and this creates a better democracy. The fire department has done a great job for over 125 years. The volunteers are coming to you now so they can manage their own affairs.

Councilman Schnurr asked how long the aerial truck was out of service last year.

Chief Bailey responded approximately 2 months, the majority was due to maintenance. There also was an accident involved with the truck.

Councilman Schnurr asked what a fire district would do differently.

Chief Bailey stated if there was a fire district in place the fire truck would have been replaced a year ago at the 25 year mark. With the other rolling stock that is under 20 years a good preventive maintenance plan would be put in place.

Councilman Schnurr asked in Chief Bailey's professional opinion has the aerial truck outlived its useful life.

Chief Bailey replied yes.

Councilman Schnurr stated as per the fire district's budget it looks like not enough money is being spent on equipment.

Chief Bailey replied that he has not had any obstacles from mayor and council with maintenance so far but he would like the trucks fixed faster.

Councilman Schnurr asked about specific pieces of equipment. He asked if there were radios for each red tag fireman.

Chief Bailey replied that every truck has a radio and there is 1 radio for every 11 firemen.

Councilman Schnurr asked if other fire districts have 1 radio per person.

Chief Bailey stated yes.

Councilman Schnurr questioned what the thermal imaging cameras were used for and how they would improve safety for the firefighter.

Mr. Youssouff stated the standard operating procedure for most fire districts is every truck has a thermal imaging camera. The camera is used when you go into a building that doesn't have visible smoke conditions the thermal imaging camera will see through the wall to pick out a hot spot. But most importantly they are used for life saving techniques because one of the most common problems a firefighter encounters is when they enter a smoke environment

they can't see their hand in front of their face, making it impossible to see victims of the fire who may be trapped. These cameras locate heat and there should be one camera for every truck and every firefighter needs to be trained on this equipment.

Councilman Kane asked if the big districts have one radio for every fireman.

Mr. Youssouff replied they are assigned a number and they are only used in case of an emergency. Sometimes firemen go in using a hand line and then the hose team goes in and they get separated from the group, they can then use their radio.

Councilman Schnurr asked if there could be a fee for service.

Mr. Youssouff replied the problem with fees for services is that they are not statutorily authorized.

Councilman Schnurr asked if there were any business models where the first aid department is rolled into the district.

Mr. Youssouff replied no because there is no statutory authorization for the fire district to have a joint fire rescue operation.

Councilman Schnurr asked if the fire district would roll back the governing body's decision in regards to moving the fire dispatch to the County.

Chief Bailey replied no.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated we need to take emotions out of this and when it comes to volunteerism in the fire department and first aid it is very hard to take emotions out of any decisions that are made. Decisions need to be made based upon facts and figures. She came tonight with an open mind and to listen.

Councilwoman Shutzer quoted Mr. Youssouff, "It's probable that it will cost more to have a fire district." She asked as an elected official in town she needs to be able to speak with the average taxpayer and answer this question, "How will this benefit the average taxpayer." She again quoted Mr. Youssouff, "Lazar sharp focus on fire protection." She stated we have that now and could he specifically explain the difference.

Mr. Youssouff explained that anything the governing body can do to guarantee the continuation of a vibrant and effective volunteer fire service is a benefit that should not be discounted. The reason the firefighters submitted this petition is because they wish to control their fire department operations and the future of the Freehold Borough fire service. They wish to have the ability to do what all surrounding municipalities have which is to have fire districts devoted exclusively to the maintenance of fire service and protection. The benefit will be that you will enhance their ability, aid their morale and give them the ability to control their own futures and budgets and knowing all the while that when you do it the voters have the ultimate say over that budget.

Councilwoman Shutzer asked if we added \$278,298 more to our budget or in the revised budget if we added \$133,000 to our budget, would we increase that Lazar sharp focus on fire

protection. Councilwoman Shutzer stated she needs to know how to sell the average increase in taxes.

Mr. Youssouff stated if the budget was \$600,000 that would be 5.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation which would be \$11.90 a month.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated for many years we had an equipment replacement system but the council agreed that they could no longer afford to do that and that's when replacing equipment stopped. She asked what specific instances happened that made the fire department want to become a fire district.

Mr. Youssouff does not know.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated one of the questions that she would like for the public to know was that the volunteer fire company is paying for his legal fees. If the Borough went to a fire district there would be a great deal of legal help needed and who would pay for those legal fees.

Mr. Youssouff replied the fees would be paid out of the fire district budget. Mr. Youssouff stated at the rate of \$150 an hour, exclusive of meeting attendance which is a flat fee of \$500 a meeting. It would cost the average fire district between \$7,500 and \$10,000 per year and the accounting fees cost between \$8,000 and \$15,000 per year.

Councilwoman Shutzer asked how much in legal fees it would cost the Borough to transfer everything into a fire district.

Mr. Youssouff stated it would cost under \$10,000.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated that several times Mr. Youssouff has referenced paid firemen. She stated the governing body received a letter from a resident who was highly irate because she thought she was sold a "bill of goods". Some of the residents said they were told if they didn't approve the fire district the Borough would go to a paid fire department. She stated that getting volunteers is very hard. She asked if a fire district would encourage and create more volunteerism.

Mr. Youssouff stated yes. The reason LOSAP came into existence was because of the lobbying efforts primarily from the State Association of Fire Districts. They said we needed a tool to recruit and retain volunteers.

Councilwoman Shutzer stated the Borough already voted to approve LOSAP.

Councilman Newman stated the Borough does have a very good fire department in town. He asked Chief Bailey is it the fire departments belief that a fire district will encourage more volunteers than the current situation.

Chief Bailey responded yes and that's one of the reasons we are here.

Councilman Newman asked what new things have the fire department asked for and have not received from the Borough.

Chief Bailey stated we are currently short on cameras, radios and meters and a normal operating budget cannot absorb these things.

Councilman Newman asked what caused this decision to go to a fire district.

Chief Bailey stated it is pretty scary feeling knowing as a fireman that when this question was asked about going to a fire district only two people didn't raise their hands in agreement. When you look at the big picture (from a fireman's perspective) there is no replacement cycle in sight for our apparatus. We sat in the room and we talked about the dispatch transition and we were told don't even bother looking at another pumper truck because that's not in the cards. That's scary to a volunteer fireman. We live and breathe our equipment; that is why we keep it so nice. That is what led us into this direction that we are into tonight.

Councilman Newman quoted a fireman who was collecting signatures for the petition to form a fire district, "It's the only way a fire department would survive in my opinion and if this doesn't happen I think that in 15 years you will see the end of the volunteer fire department in Freehold Borough." Councilman Newman asked Chief Bailey if he really believed that.

Chief Bailey responded that when they sat at their fire department meeting to talk about a fire district a power-point presentation was made with key points and the whole department got a copy of it and no where in their training of the volunteers was it brought up that the fire department would close. That was not a supported statement from our fire department.

Chief Bailey stated in the last two years the fire department received two major grants. There was a grant of \$170,000 for air packs, \$67,000 for fire gear, plus the money that was used to transition the fire department to the County. When you stand back and look at that whole picture of what money funneled into the fire department over the last two years Chief Bailey asked if the Borough could sustain those amounts.

Councilman Newman stated he did not know and would have to find out. He asked when the fire department wanted the fire district elections. Would they want it done in February or November?

Mr. Youssouff stated the Fire District Association opposes a November ballot because of the technical problems of having each fire districts budget question put on a November ballot. In some municipalities there are several fire districts which would require separate distinct ballots which would be very complicated.

Chief Bailey stated it didn't matter.

Councilman Sims asked how old the thermal imaging camera was and how many do we have.

Chief Bailey responded they have one and it is 13-14 years old and it was provided to them through a grant from the Department of Homeland Security. It is a first generation camera.

Councilman Sims asked what the benefit was in having a thermal imaging camera.

Chief Bailey responded that whatever truck shows up first is going to have the availability and technology to be able to scan for victims, pets and finding fires that are in the walls.

Councilman Sims asked if physicals were factored into the revised \$549,000 budget.

Chief Bailey responded that firefighter physicals, vaccinations and fit testing are included. Every year firefighters should go for yearly physicals for respiration compliance.

Councilman Sims asked if the physicals were based on the age of the volunteer.

Mr. Youssouff stated the suggested frequency increases with age. But this is a suggested standard, not a mandatory requirement yet.

Councilman Newman asked what the fire department is not getting that they asked for.

Chief Bailey responded he hasn't even asked about the physicals yet.

Councilman Sims clarified that the vaccinations and physicals are two separate budget items.

Mayor Wilson opened the meeting to the public.

Christopher Guy, 30 Schiverea Avenue, asked why the Freehold Fire Department believes a fire district is better suited for them rather than how it is currently done. The Governor Christie administration has continually stated that individual municipalities need to re-think the way they do business. This sentiment has been echoed by at least two councilmen. If you look at our budget and that excludes the money that was going for dispatch services, it would be fair to say that our operational budget has stayed status quo for the last several years. During that period the price of equipment has gone up. Last year our department responded to 581 calls. In April our fire department will be 139 years old and that is the most amount of calls that we have responded to. During that period the diversity of calls has expanded. The population has exploded, more vehicular traffic and technology has increased. When we went to the residents, the budget we had composed was one that our department, chiefs and president felt can provide the best service to the Borough of Freehold and would give them the necessary resources to provide that for the least amount of money possible.

Mike Burt, Brookwood Drive, stated that it was his decision as chairman of the Fire District Committee not to knock on the governing body's doors. He knocked on over 1,000 doors in Freehold Borough and he had only 7 people tell him no and 9 people needed more information about the fire district. He stated he was quoted in the newspaper as saying in 15 years, in his opinion the fire department would see less volunteers. The reasons are due to the fact that as he was knocking on doors all through town he found illegal immigrants in most of the houses in town, that were supposed to have registered voters living there. As far as the fire district, this was first mentioned by Chief Henry A. Stryker, Jr., who brought up starting a fire district. As for physicals, the only physical I ever had was the one I had when I joined the fire department 35 years ago. He stated he never said what was quoted in the newspaper. What he did say was if Governor Christie had his way and the small towns, (donut towns as he puts them) we could lose the fire department if it was not a fire district. We could be absorbed by a Freehold Township fire district. I never said anything like the fire department would close its

doors. A lot of people were very upset over the dispatching being moved to the County. We also looked at fundraisers and mailers to raise money.

Nick Palumbo, Fire Chief East Freehold Fire Company, stated he has been involved with the fire department for 36 years. He has a master's degree in Fire Service Administration. He stated Freehold Borough is beyond being a municipal department. If the Freehold Fire Department became a fire district they would have one job and it would be to fight fires.

Joyce Stapleton, 11 Fulton Street, stated that no one came to her house to ask her to sign a petition but if they had she probably would have signed it even though she had no clue what the difference was between a fire department and fire district. But after sitting here this evening and listening to the meeting she would vote in favor of a fire district.

Lynn Reich, 6 Hance Blvd. stated most of her questions have been answered. But she asked if there was a plan for any paid staff in the proposed fire district and would that happen down the road.

Mr. Youssouff stated there is currently a paid houseman and the fire district would propose to keep his position, but there is no other proposal for anyone else.

Ron Griffiths, 86 East Main Street, stated he was a fireman for over 20 years here in Freehold Borough and is a lifelong resident with many friends in the fire department. The question has been raised three times about what were the benefits of a fire district and basically the answers that have been given is to get better volunteers. East Freehold has a fire district and has trouble with volunteers. If you look at the budget proposed there are approximately \$40,000 in administrative costs that do not exist today and the solution should be that the Borough and the fire department sit down and agree on what is necessary. If equipment is a problem and you need a capital equipment plan, then plan for it. If the figures are right and less than 2% of the residents vote than it is the voters fault for creating a fire district. He thinks the mayor and council need to sit down and seriously look at the budget. The fire district does nothing but provide \$40,000 in expenses to attorneys, auditors, accountants, secretaries, etc. He does not think in this economic situation a fire district is a viable answer.

Jason Howlett, Fire Chief Adelpia Fire Company, asked if the fire chief doesn't spend all of the money budgeted throughout the year do they get to carry it over to the next year.

Mayor Wilson replied that all of the money in the budget was spent.

Mr. Howlett stated his budget went down this last year so they have been putting money away. He stated that within two years the current radio system is changing and we will be required to buy all new radios for these trucks. My district has already started putting money away so that we will be able to purchase them. He stated the voters need to decide.

Mike LaRosa, 27 Brinckerhoff Avenue, stated he is an ex-captain of Monmouth Hose Co. and he signed the petition because he was told that his signature was needed to get the fire district on the ballot for election. He questioned whether the fire department owned the equipment and firehouse or was everything owned by Freehold Borough.

Mayor Wilson stated the Borough owns the fire house and equipment.

Joe DiBenedetto, 8 Kiawah Avenue, agreed with Mr. Yousseuff and what he explained about a fire district makes a lot of sense. The mayor and council do not know what is on each fire truck. Only the firefighters know what they need. He stated that for residents to pay \$80-\$100 more is well worth the money.

Billy Anderson, 112 South Street, member of Monmouth Hose Co., stated that he is an average resident of the Borough and if the fire department told me him he could have more control over what was going to be done in this town it would make him more excited to be a part of this town.

Linda Scanlon, 14 Vrendenburgh Avenue, asked if the governing body could guarantee a long-term capital improvement budget that would give the fire department the equipment they need.

Mayor Wilson said it would be possible on a 5 year program.

Ms. Scanlon asked if they could really put together a 5 year program.

Mayor Wilson said we would have to know what equipment the fire department would need. Then we would make a decision as to if the Borough can afford it.

Ms Scanlon replied that the fire department is asking for a new fire truck.

Mayor Wilson stated they are in negotiation talks for a new truck.

Mr. LaRosa asked if there was a way this could be put on a ballot so that everyone could vote on it.

Ms. Higgins replied that we can only put a non-binding question on the ballot.

Mr. Griffiths asked if the governing body would drop \$403,000 out of the budget and not replace it with something else.

Mayor Wilson replied we would have to do that.

Robert Taylor, South Street, asked if the \$400,000 would come off the tax rolls.

Mr. Bellina stated it would require a CAP based adjustment.

Mayor Wilson closed the public portion.

Mayor Wilson stated this is a very serious issue and the governing body is going to deliberate on this. There are three options:

- a. Pass an ordinance to establish a fire district.
- b. Deny establishing a fire district.
- c. Put a non-binding referendum.

Mayor Wilson thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

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TRACI L. DIBENEDETTO, RMC  
BOROUGH CLERK

TLD:aj