

Village of Owego Board of Trustees Meeting

A Joint Fire District meeting was held on Wednesday, January 6, 2016 at 7:00 pm at 56 Main Street, Owego, New York, 13827. The following people were in attendance:

Mayor:	Kevin Millar
Trustees:	Jenny Ceccherelli
	Earl Hartman
	Rob Manville
	Steve May
	Phoebe Morris
	Mike Phelps
Clerk-Treasurer:	Rod Marchewka
Village Attorney:	Robert McKertich
Fire Chief:	Dan Gavin

Town of Owego:

Town Supervisor:	Don Castellucci
Town Councilman:	Dean Morgan
	Craig Jochum
Town Attorney:	Irene Graven

Town of Tioga:

Town Supervisor:	Lewis Zorn
Town Councilman:	Robert Klossner
	Gerald Hyatt
	Robert Strong
	Drew Griffin

Attorney for Owego Fire Department: Attorney Garwood

Insert "A" – Sign In Sheet.

7:00 pm - Pledge

Public Hearing on Local Law to Abolish the Village of Owego Fire Department.

Public Comment:

Jim King – Town of Owego, Allen Glen resident and owner of property in the Village of Owego – in favor of abolishing the Owego Fire Department so that it may become a fire district.

Mark Warfle – 207 E. Temple Street – read the following:

Good Evening fellow Village of Owego residents, taxpayers, Mayor and Village Trustees,

In the previous meetings related to the proposal of creating a Joint Fire District, we have heard from Mr. Jim King and Chief Daniel Gavin that there are 2 very real threats to the existence of our Fire Department. However, they have yet to provide any evidence to support this claim.

They have told you that our Mayor and the Chairman of the Town of Owego Fire District are conspiring to contract Emergency Services (Fire/EMS/Rescue) to the Town of Owego Fire District, instead of using the Fire Department of the Village of Owego. However, both the Mayor and ALL of the TOFD Fire Commissioners have gone on record (numerous times) stating that this is not true and no such conspiracy exist. Nor is there any desire to pursue such a contract.

Additionally, Mr. King and Mr. Gavin have also suggested that the Village of Owego is in a dire state financially and because of this the Village may cease to exist in the near future. And if this were to happen, the Fire Department would also cease to exist. This is not true. Some of our Trustees have stated that the Village is not wealthy, but we are paying our bills and remain solvent. Additionally, the Fire Department of the Village of Owego was formed by the NYS Senate and Assembly, via a Charter in 1862, and will not be dissolved in the event the Village ceases to exist.

So, we are being asked to support a proposal to form a Joint Fire District based on 2 untruths.

I do not deny that our Village is in very difficult financial times. Our economic growth has not kept pace with the financial burdens being faced by our Village leaders, and the recovery from multiple major floods has reduced the amount of taxable property. But, forming a Joint Fire District does not solve our financial problems, it simply moves the problem from one taxing authority to another, and will result in increased taxes to all Village residents and taxpayers.

In fact, the proposal to form a Joint Fire District is a lie. There is no Joint anything. What is happening is a manipulation of NY Town Law 11-a Section 189. This law provides a procedure for neighboring Towns and Villages to form a Joint Fire District, presumably to share services and reduce cost to their constituents.

What is really happening with this proposal is that the Town of Tioga will give to the Village of Owego the other half of a bridge. This would allow the two governmental bodies to have contiguous borders. Contiguous borders are a requirement in NY Town Law 11-a Section 189, to pursue a Joint District.

As I said, there is no Joint anything. When I asked Mr. King what the new Joint Fire District border would be, he explained that it would be the Village of Owego, plus the other half of the bridge. When I asked about the governance of said district, Mr. King sated that 5 Fire Commissioners would be elected from the Village...NOT the Village and Tioga. No Tioga money will be involved. The point that I am trying to make clear to Village resident and taxpayers is that the only change that will occur as a result of this proposal will be the creation of a new taxing authority (Joint Fire District), and that change will result in us paying more taxes for the same services.

I have reviewed the proposed budget for the Not Joint Fire District, and found it to be lacking. Using the budget planning forms and formulas from the NY Fire District Officers Guide book, and inputting the budget numbers from the proposed budget, it would appear that the proposed budget is short by 19,300 dollars. This does not account for the tax dollars necessary to meet the financial contributions for the 5 or 6 Capital Reserve funds you are wishing to establish. If those capital accounts were to be met, it would add another \$205,318, thus making the budget \$905,102 instead of the \$643,269 that you are proposing.

As I stated before, I understand that we are facing financial challenges in the Village, but adding a new taxing authority, and ultimately a higher cost of living in the Village is not the answer. If this proposal is about the fire department not having enough money, then let's start by looking at ways to cut cost. I would like to recommend that we look at the number of fire stations. Why do we need 4 fire stations in a Village that is only 2.3 square miles? Could we reduce this to 2 fire stations? Could we then move the savings into future spending for the fire department?

I will close by sharing with you a portion of the NY Town Law 11a, 189-a, section 2.a, where it states “Whenever it shall appear to the participating municipalities to be in the public interest”. So the question before us, or rather, the question before our Village Board tonight is:

Is this in the Public Interest?

Meeting with Walt 12/30/15 District budgets and taxing

Jim King – previously personally apologized to the mayor for stating that he was trying to get rid of the Owego Fire Department.

Rusty Fuller – Liberty Street – is opposed to the formation of a new Fire District. The fire department has been relying on fear, anger, frustration and paranoia. The fire department budget numbers do not add up. There will be a very large tax increase. Do not take this proposal to the voters.

Chris Knickerbocker – 24 Paige Street – when you vote on this issue could you give an explanation not just a yes or no?

Public Hearing closed at 7:30 pm

Motion by Trustee May, seconded by Trustee Phelps, on a Resolution and Order Approving Formation of Joint Fire District (copy on file at the clerk’s office).

Trustee Morris – do not vote for this motion. It is not in the best interest of the village residents.

Motion by Trustee May, seconded by Trustee Manville, to table this vote until a Special Meeting on February 8, 2016.

Mayor Millar – if you do this it will not be on the March ballot.

Roll Call Vote:

Trustee Ceccherelli	No
Trustee Hartman	Pass – Recused
Trustee Phelps	Yes
Trustee Manville	Yes
Trustee May	Yes
Trustee Morris	No
Mayor Millar	No

Motion Failed 3-3-1

Vote on original motion of a Resolution and Order Approving Formation of Joint Fire District.

Roll Call Vote:

Trustee Ceccherelli	No
Trustee Hartman	Recused
Trustee Phelps	Pass - Abstained
Trustee Manville	No
Trustee May	Abstained
Trustee Morris	No
Mayor Millar	No

Motion Failed 4-2-1

VOOBM 1-6-2016

Mayor Millar thanked the Town of Owego, Town of Tioga, Owego Fire Department, Village Board and concerned citizens and those that put so much time into this matter.

Meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm

