Town of Penfield Supervisor's Column

Week of November 30, 2015

During the 2016 budget process, several residents asked about the various fire districts within the town. People wanted to know how fire districts operate, what their relationship is to the Town of Penfield, and how their budgets are set or established. The intent of this column is to provide a high-level overview of fire districts. For more information and details I encourage you to reach out directly to the fire district in which you reside.

First, there are three fire districts within the town of Penfield. The Penfield Fire District covers the southern portion of the town, the West Webster Fire District covers the northwest area, and the North East Joint Fire District covers the northeast section of town. If you don’t already know which fire district serves you, review your combined Town and County tax bill and you will see your fire district named under “special districts.”

A fire district is a political subdivision located within a town. Fire districts are established for the purpose of providing fire protection and response to emergencies. A fire district is a political entity with an elected governing body (board of commissioners) and administrative officers. There are five commissioners on the board with terms are five years. Voting for commissioners is done by the registered voters of the fire district. Commissioners, or those seeking office, do not need to be members of the fire department. A fire district has the power both to incur indebtedness and to require the levy of taxes. Fire district taxes are assessed, levied, and collected at the same time and in the same manner as town taxes.

The office of the New York State Comptroller has developed a Fire District Accounting and Reporting Manual that helps guide the commissioners. The board of fire commissioners must adopt a proposed budget and, subject to certain public hearing requirements, hold a public hearing on the proposed budget. After the public hearing, the board of fire commissioners can adopt changes, alterations, and revisions to the proposed budget. The budget must be adopted on or before November 4th and filed, along with the district’s fund balance statement, with the town clerk of each town in which the fire district is located. Neither the town budget officer nor the town board may make changes to the fire district budget. The town budget officer is required to forward the fire district’s adopted budget and the annual town budget to the county. Once the fire district budget is adopted, it becomes a public document and the district secretary is required to reproduce a sufficient number of copies for distribution to the public upon request and without charge.

As with any election it is important to vote—the annual elections of the fire districts are no different! All residents have the opportunity to vote for a commissioner(s). The following information is provided for the upcoming annual elections that will be held on Tuesday, December 8, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. To vote for the Penfield Fire District go to station #1 located at 1838 Penfield Road; for the West Webster Fire District go to the fire house located at 1051 Gravel Road; and for North East Joint Fire District go to the Enderlin Station located at 35 South Avenue in the Village of Webster.

I hope this overview is helpful to those residents who have questions. I also want to reiterate that if you have additional questions, please reach out to your fire district. You will find the commissioners and their staff very accessible and knowledgeable.

Until next week be well and be safe!