

# Memorandum

To: Forestville Dissolution Committee  
Forestville Fire Department

From: Paul Bishop  
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Date: December 16, 2015

Re: Fire Department Options

There are two options<sup>1</sup> available to provide fire protection to the Village of Forestville that are up for consideration. Both options involve the existing Forestville Fire Department remaining in operation for both EMS and fire in the village and the surrounding areas that it currently serves. The difference is in the governance and funding structures between a Fire District and a Fire Protection District (FPD).

Most of Hannover has fire protection districts – the Irving Fire District is the exception. In a FPD, the elected town board negotiates the contracts for fire service, raises the necessary funds and gives the money to the fire company, such as Forestville. In a District, there are five separately elected commissioners that are responsible for governing the fire department, establishing the budget and setting the tax limit. The Town must raise the requested taxes and cannot adjust the budget. A brief synopsis of the fire district is below.

*A fire district is public corporation established for the purpose of providing fire protection and responding to certain other emergencies. Fire districts have certain characteristics of general purpose municipal corporations, such as powers to incur indebtedness and to require the level of taxes. A fire district is almost a completely autonomous political entity; it has its own elected governing body, its own administrative officers and it must observe its own expenditure limitations. However, it is dependent upon the parent town for its initial creation, extension and dissolution. - NYS Local Government Handbook*

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<sup>1</sup> A third option would be for the Town of Hannover to contract with a different fire department, but that doesn't have any known supporters.

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Both solutions will require the action of the Town Board to either create the FPD or the FD at dissolution. It is quicker and easier to expand the existing Hannover FPD # 1 into the village than to create a Forestville Fire District.

A fire district has a taxing limit that can be restrictive in a rural community of \$2,000 for the first million and \$1,000 for each million after in assessed valuation. In the case of the Village of Forestville plus Hannover FPD # 1 the total assessed valuations is about \$53 million which would lead to a property tax levy of about \$54,000 for a fire district. Any levy above that amount needs to have a referendum.

The Town Tax Rate for the FPD outside the Village is \$1.01 per thousand and raises \$32,617. If that same rate were applied to the Village, it would raise \$ 20,030. That total would be essentially the same. The Town also has a separate agreement for fire protection in FPD # 2 that also funds the Forestville Fire Department.

In the most recent budget, the Village had \$84,000 listed in revenue for the fire department outside of its own property tax. This includes contracts with Hanover and Arkwright to provide service to their Fire Protection District.

From the level of the citizen receiving services and the line firefighter, there is very little distinction between the two types of fire service. For the fire department administration, particularly the newly minted commissioners, there are substantial new reporting and governance requirements to operate a fire district to gain some autonomy in the setting of tax rates and the operation of a department.