

Petition Drive to Begin in Voorhees Township to Support Voorhees Fire and Emergency Services Consolidation Safety Plan

International Association of Fire Fighters Local 3249 issued vote of “No Confidence” in Voorhees Fire District Citing Public Safety, Fiscal Mismanagement, Inadequate Staffing Levels and Improper Personnel Training

Voorhees, NJ – Members of Voorhees Township Committee have approved an effort to gather and verify signatures of registered voters by way of petition, in support of the Township’s plan to dissolve and consolidate Voorhees Fire District (the municipal fire district responsible for providing fire, rescue and basic life support emergency medical services) from an independent body to one that will operate under the direction and management of Voorhees Township.

Presently, Voorhees Fire District is under the control of the Board of Fire Commissioners elected by the residents of Voorhees Township.

A door-to-door petition drive will begin in Voorhees Township on November 12 and last approximately four weeks. Following receipt and verification of signatures of at least five percent of the Township’s registered voters, the Mayor and Township Committee will consider the dissolution of Voorhees Fire District at a hearing set for a future date.

There have been a series of serious, egregious and unfortunate occurrences within Voorhees Fire District involving fiscal mismanagement and staffing inconsistencies that have made it necessary for Voorhees Township Committee members to undertake a petition drive for the purpose of ensuring the long-term safety and well-being of residents, visitors, businesses and property owners.

These occurrences have also resulted in action taken by Voorhees Fire District’s own union, The International Association of Fire Fighters Local 3249, issuing a “No Confidence” vote against the Board of Fire Commissioners and Deputy Fire Chief Michael J. Wharton on August 29, 2016. Keith Kemery, the union’s president, presented the Voorhees Township Committee with a copy of the “No Confidence” Resolution at a public meeting on September 12, 2016 and spoke at length about the union’s concerns.

In addition to the “No Confidence” vote, an external fire expert cited numerous problems and S&P Global Ratings lowered its rating on Voorhees Township Commissioners Fire District N.J.’s general obligation (GO) debt and issued an outlook of “negative,” citing “significant financial deterioration.”

The International Association of Fire Fighters cited numerous infractions pertaining to fiscal mismanagement and staffing irregularities including:

- Inability to maintain a fully operational and balanced general ledger accounting system and controls over purchasing
- Issuance of false audits and financial statements
- Overspending and ignoring accounts payable

- Failure to make timely payroll reports and remittances
- Failure to reconcile payroll deductions payable
- Failure to develop and implement a business plan
- Failure to provide an adequate number of first responders on duty
- Failure to maintain appropriate policies on staffing levels
- Failure to provide adequate training to first responders

By undertaking a petition drive, the Township has formally begun taking the steps necessary to dissolve and consolidate Voorhees Fire District under the direction of Voorhees Township. Voorhees Township Committee members have taken this action to ensure residents, businesses and property owners have immediate access to the finest level of fire and EMS services available. Of equal importance is the Township's desire to ensure the safety of its firefighters and EMS responders who deserve great respect and gratitude for what they do every day.

A Facebook page entitled, "Voorhees Fire Consolidation Plan" will be launched shortly to keep residents up-to-date on issues relating to the plan. Information will also be housed on the Voorhees Township website. Anyone with questions not addressed via Facebook or the website, should direct them to Larry Spellman, Voorhees Township Administrator via email administrator@voorheesnj.com or phone 856-429-7174.

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