

FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

Both the Village and Town are required by law to provide their respective constituents with fire protection. For many years, the Village's Fire Department has provided Town of Oakfield residents with fire protection through a series of contracts for this service. Fire protection is expensive, highly regulated and continues to increase in terms of the need to provide funds for sustainable operations. This is a fact of life and despite honest efforts to economize, it is a constant challenge. The maintenance of a fire department involves the constant purchase of gear, hoses, fire trucks, and all other associated equipment. Village residents pay about twice as much in their tax rate when compared to the Town's tax rate for fire protection. For Village residents this is \$1.62 per thousand of Full Value which is included in the Village's total tax rate of \$6.02. (This is more than one quarter of the Village's General Fund budget.)

Since June of 2020, the Village has continued to provide the Town with fire protection through good faith, despite the fact that the Town has refused to sign a fire contract for such services. To date, the Town has not reimbursed the Village for this service and continues to refuse to pay for the fire protection services rendered. This is despite the Town collecting the tax from Town residents to pay the bill and continuing to accept the service provided. Pursuant to the New York State Comptroller, this is illegal and improper. While the Village has participated in discussions to resolve the impasse, the Town has refused to agree to terms. This means that for over 15 months the Village has provided fire protection to the Town without being reimbursed for the cost of the services rendered and does not have a signed contract for fire protection for all of last year and the three months beginning this year.

In light of the refusal of the Town to pay for the services rendered, the Village has commenced legal proceedings to collect last year's money due from the Town. The Village Board is united in recognizing that the Village cannot burden Village residents and businesses with providing fire protection to the Town without reimbursement. Therefore, the Board has directed that a letter be sent to the Town stating that effective November 30, 2021, the Village will no longer be able to provide fire protection to the Town with the exception of the Oakfield-Alabama Central School. This notice gives the Town about double the time to make arrangements for fire protection than the 30-day notice provision contained in past contracts with the Town.

The Village Board recognizes those who live and do business outside the Village are our friends, families and businesses that are close to us as "community." Unfortunately, providing such a major service without compensation and cooperation needs to cease. Legally, the Village is not able to shoulder the entire burden for providing a service to an outside entity or municipality. For the 2020-21 fiscal year and the past three additional months, the Town knew what to budget, collected tax revenue for this expense and continued to avail itself of Village provided fire protection but did not make payment or sign successor agreements.

In closing, the Village Board wants to emphasize that our Village Fire Department has responded to every call in the Town and that the Department has provided exemplary service without blemish while the Village has controlled cost as much as possible. The service needs to be provided on a sustainable financial basis. To that end, we remain hopeful that the Town will pay the amounts already due, and will agree to contract once again with the Village for fire protection. However, if the Town refuses to make arrangements for fire protection in the Town, the Village can no longer provide the service for free and must take the difficult action to cease fire protection coverage for the town.

In Service,

Mayor David Boyle
Deputy Mayor John Igoe
Trustees Michael Cianfrini, Michele Graham, John Mullen