

Minutes of April 11, 2023 Public Hearing on Local Law A regarding an exemption for Volunteer Firefighters and Volunteer Ambulance Workers, held in the Germantown Town Hall, 50 Palatine Park Road, Germantown, New York and via Zoom, commencing at 6:55pm.

Present: Supervisor Helsley
Councilman Sullivan
Councilman Kukon
Councilmember Suarez
Councilman Christian

Town Attorney, Corinne Smith

Recorded by: Town Clerk, Joyce Vale

Supervisor Helsley opened the public hearing and asked for public comments. Tony Albino said he is in strong support of the Local Law A. Tony said that right now there are 8-10 people that qualify and there are 2-3 lifetime members. Tony also said the volunteer firefighters are putting their life on the line for a few extra dollars. Councilmember Suarez read the letter from Jen Crawford.

Town Board,

I will be unable to attend the public hearing on March 14 because the Germantown Hose Co #1 has a drill scheduled at 6:30 that evening. I imagine many of my fellow firefighters will also be unable to attend, but I write with a personal comment that does not reflect the opinion of the Fire Department/Commission/Company.

I truly appreciate the Board's interest in providing a modest compensation to our volunteer firefighters, who dedicate countless hours to train, fundraise, and help our community in their time of need. I write to with apprehension towards the adoption of this law, however, because I think it unfairly benefits those who are wealthy and own land. Currently, all active firefighters in NY are eligible for a \$200 income tax credit from NY State. It is my understanding that if one were to take advantage of the proposed real property 10% credit, then they would be ineligible for the \$200 income tax credit. This means that the only folks who would benefit from the proposed law are active firefighters who own property inside the district and pay over \$2000 in annual property taxes. As Financial Secretary, I used an active members list to cross check against public records of 2022 property tax bills. There were *very few* active members who appear to satisfy all those criteria. I say this as likely one of the *very few* who might benefit once I purchase land hopefully this year. None of the active line officers appear to be likely to benefit. Wealthy landowners are not our primary demographic for recruitment.

That said, I'm told that the power to (modestly) compensate volunteer firefighters has been within the Town Board's power all along, prior to the Governor's announcement about real property tax credits. Municipalities such as the Village of Philmont, the City of Hudson, and the Town of Taghkanic are among those who have implemented "Length of Service Awards Programs" (LOSAPs). LOSAPs do not render one ineligible for the \$200 NYS income tax credit. I encourage the Board to explore the creation of a LOSAP to help recruit and retain volunteer firefighters in our district.

-Jen

Corinne said this law only provides a benefit on town tax portion and Corinne is not sure if the county or the school district is adopting it. Councilman Christian said what Jen was saying is that the town tax is typically less than 10% and Jen's figure of \$2,000 is correct and if your town tax is under \$2,000 there is no point applying for this benefit because you would be getting rid of the \$200 that the state gives you want more than a \$200 benefit that the town is giving you. Councilman Christian with Corinne's help said the town tax of \$2,000 corresponds to a full market value of 1.5 million dollars and he went through the tax roll in Germantown and there are only 22 properties that have a full market value exceeding 1.5 million dollars and if you cross

check that with the fire department there are no members of the fire department that would benefit from this the only way they would benefit if any other tax entity would do the same thing. Councilman Christian also said there are 500 properties with a FMV value above \$350,000 and he can't fully match the fire department members names. Councilman Christian and Jen Crawford discovered there are at least 2 likely fire fighters that qualify. Councilmember Suarez asked what's the negative of passing this law? Corinne said as long as fire fighters are educated on what they would actually be receiving. Councilman Sullivan said why would they have brought this to us if they didn't think they are eligible. Tony Albino said there is a small membership now they need to bring in some perspective people. Corinne said the town board has set this at the highest percentage and the tax status date is March 1, 2024. Corinne suggested to circulate this to the school and county after we adopt this. Councilman Sullivan said the fire department should bring this matter to the school board meeting. Martin Overington agreed to that. Martin also thanked the fire department.

Motion to close the public hearing made by Councilmember Suarez, seconded by Councilman Christian, with all in favor and none opposed.

Public hearing closed at 7:01pm.

Town Board will take a short break before Town Board meeting.

Respectfully submitted,