
From: Rick Tonetta
Sent: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 10:56 AM
To: Minotola Secretary
Cc: Chief Habersham; David Zappariello; Patricia Andaloro; Douglas Adams; Gina Andaloro; Jorge Alvarez; Marina Barsuglia; Joseph Fabrizio
Subject: FW: ***EXTERNAL*** Minotola Fire Company

Dear President Chapman,

Thank you for your letter of November 30. I read it and feel it is necessary to address some of the misstatements of facts contained therein. I understand that the misinformation is due to the lack of communication as you rightly point out in your letter and hopefully we will all address this joint problem.

In your letter, you advise that your Solicitor indicated that no agreement is necessary for the Fire Company to operate within the Borough. While your Solicitor is correct that no "formal" agreement is required under the statute, some understanding which is considered an agreement must exist to give the Fire Company the authority to do what they thankfully do within the Borough. I am aware that many fire companies do not have formal agreements with their town or district as the case may be, having represented a fire district since 1984.

In your letter you reference "the process and methodology to dissolve Fire District No. 2 which the Council has chosen." This statement is incorrect. Council has not made any decisions regarding the dissolution or addition of a fire district, and cannot do so without first having a public hearing with reasons to consider either one or the other. Council has received two petitions, one to add a district in accordance with NJSA 40A:14-70 which is begun "upon application of at least 5% of the registered voters..." and the other to dissolve all fire districts in accordance with NJSA 40A:14-90, also upon receipt of a petition as set forth above. Council cannot simply ignore the petitions and must act upon them by law after a public hearing by either voting them in the affirmative or negative..

You further state that the Minotola Fire Company has been negatively portrayed. I have no information relative to this claim, but I can assure you that no one from the governing body or the Mayor's Office has ever said anything but praise for the first responders of Minotola Fire Company. I am also quite sure that on numerous occasions members of the governing body have indicated that at no time do they want Minotola Fire Company to stop fighting fires in the Borough. Quite the contrary, they implore the Company to continue in the same fashion they have existed for so many years.

As for the statement that "Council has not extended the courtesy of one meeting with them (Minotola Fire Company) to inform them of their decision to dissolve District 2 or offer any reason for this action." Again, no decision has been made on either petitions submitted to Council and this statement is simply untrue. As for meetings with the Fire Company, I am sure you know that requests for meetings were made much before your letter to which I am addressing. Further, the issue will and must be the subject of a public hearing. It is important that the governing body be as transparent as possible, which is the reason I requested a joint public meeting.

In your letter you also address fire companies being under the governing body rather than a fire commission. You state that this application is left to large municipalities. If you check throughout the state of New Jersey, most small towns such as Buena are not under the guise of a fire district, but the governing body. As such, Buena was and still is the exception. The reason is quite clear. With a small municipality, there is no need for duplicative services including legal, auditing, etc. which you get with fire districts combined with governing bodies. That is why most communities such as Buena do not have both. Fire Districts work well in large townships such as Pittsgrove or Buena Vista where towns are spread over many miles.

I am a bit confused, however when you state that the fire company is somehow becoming a “political football” as whatever the governing body decides, no change is or would occur to the fire company. Quite frankly, it is disheartening when it is the fire company that wishes to prohibit the governing body of a municipality from carrying out their oath of office and following through with the will of the voters whatever that may be by threatening to abandon their mission and oath to protect property and the lives of the Borough if the vote goes one way or the other.

It is agreed, however that no one knows fire suppression better than our first responders, certainly not the governing body. However, being a great fire fighter does not assure that the needs and best interests of all of the taxpayers are being considered. That is why the combined knowledge of the Minotola Fire Company and Borough Council would be a consideration, however, that is for Council to decide, not me.

I hope Council and the Fire Company can find some common ground to assure the safety and financial concerns of the residents are in everyone’s best interest. To that end I will again ask you to advise if the meeting to be held on December 20 can be a public meeting so it is as transparent as possible. I would generally copy your Solicitor, however I do not know who that may be and I would appreciate it if you could please forward it to him/her and advise who is the solicitor for the Fire Company.

Rick Tonetta

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From: Minotola Secretary <minotola112secretary@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, November 28, 2022 9:16 PM
To: Rick Tonetta <solicitor@buenaboro.org>
Subject: ***EXTERNAL*** Minotola Fire Company

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Solicitor Tonetta

Kevin M. Chapman
President
Minotola Fire Company