

Relationship between Fire Company and Fire District

There appears to be some confusion or lack of understanding regarding the relationship between the District and the Fire Company. I know that before I became involved with the District, my knowledge of its function and responsibilities pretty much consisted of they provided the money for our equipment and training. The upcoming elections appear to have generated some discussion regarding District functions. I thought it might be helpful to issue a review of the regulatory relationship as dictated by the District bylaws in order to help us all be more educated voters.

Although there is regular communication between the Chief and officers of the district on routine matters, the Fire District bylaws dictate that the Chief reports to the Board of Fire Commissioners not the elected Fire District Officers. Article 9 section 3 of the District bylaws states "The Fire Chief shall be accountable to the Fire Commissioners only" This is the official direct link between the two organizations. The bylaws direct that the Commissioners appoint the Chief and state he serves "at the pleasure of the Fire Commissioners". Normally the Chair of the Commissioners serves as the single point of contact with the Chief. I believe the intent of this structure is to isolate the Fire Company and its Command Staff from political influence. Additionally, the Chair is not appointed but elected by a vote of the three commissioners. Other duties of the Commissioners are responsibility for approving the purchase of apparatus and equipment with concurrence of the Chief and supervision of the physical plant properties.

There are two other occasions where the District Officers may exert influence over Fire Company matters. The first involves the case of the Chief relieving a Fire Company Officer for cause. His decision must be ratified by a majority vote of the Fire Commissioners. The other situation involves the prerogative of the District to reject a Company bylaws change. I realize this last provision has recently caused some ill will between the Company and the district. Let me assure you that the District only exercises this function with great deliberation. We try very hard not to interfere with but rather, support the operation of the Fire Company. The District is charged by statute with the fiduciary responsibility of taxpayer funds. If a Company bylaws change will in any way impact use of those moneys it is only proper we have the final approval. Finally, let me make an editorial comment. This Fire District administration has and always will have the best interests of the Fire Company at heart. Of the seven members of the District leadership team (four elected officers and three commissioners) five of us are former SVFC firefighters. We are extremely proud of our Fire Company and the long and continuing history of providing excellent emergency services to the citizens of Simsbury.

Jeff Giddings, District Fire Commissioner
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