

A History of the McKownville Improvement Association (1924 to 1955)
by Fred Abele (? written about 1960)

The McKownville Improvement Association was organized at a meeting in May, 1924, held at the McKownville schoolhouse. Mr. L. C. West was elected first president. The territorial boundaries extended from the Albany city line west as far as what is now Westmere.

In June 1924 a meeting was held to discuss the installation of trackless trolleys to provide transportation. This was at that time being proposed by United Traction Co. as a substitution for trolley cars of the #4 Country Club route which operated only as far as the city line.

During the year 1925 the association was active in attempting to obtain local bus service extension by United Traction Co. On August 24, 1925 United Traction Co. abandoned its Country Club trolleys and substituted a Western Avenue bus route which extended to a turnaround loop at Fuller Road.

In October 1925 a meeting was held at Ebels Hotel. This was located near the gas station later operated by Witbeck and now by King.

At the May 1926 meeting the treasury had a balance of only \$14.90 with unpaid dues of \$26.00. At this meeting the late Walter Marden was elected president.

From 1926 none of the records of the Association are available until a reorganization meeting was held at the McKownville schoolhouse in July 1931. Former president, Walter Marden was re-elected president, with John Feldman, Vice Pres., Walter Seim Treas. and Ainsworth Scott, Treas. The principal business up to October of 1931 was the drafting and adoption of our present by-laws.

In April 1932 the efforts of the Association to obtain a night collection of mail were successful. The annual meeting was held in May 1932 and John Feldman was elected president, a post he held until 1945.

From 1932 until the present firehouse was erected the meetings were held in the firemens rooms over the Country Club garage then operated by Mr. Wendell Holmes. During 1932 and 1933 several well attended social functions were undertaken. A card party and dance at Ye Old Inn increased the treasury \$48.00. A dance at Rest Ye Inn netted \$72.00 and a card party and dance at the Albany Country Club netted \$79.75. These parties were sponsored by the Ladies Auxiliary. A fund was created from the proceeds of these parties from which the present street signs were purchased and erected.

In April 1933 it was announced that Shell Oil Co. had donated a lot to the Fire District for the erection of the present Fire House. At about this same time the sidewalk committee endeavored to secure permission from the State of New York to erect a sidewalk on the North side of Western Avenue from the city line westward to the end of the present sidewalk. The cost of this project was beyond available means and the matter was tabled.

In November 1933 the limits of the Association territory were established as the confines of the McKownville Fire District.

During the summer of 1934, Mr. Roach, a resident, donated his time and \$80.00 to erect seats and backstop for a ballfield.

During 1934 a complaint was received from the State Health Dept. on account of the open sewer in the lower end of the District. Through the untiring efforts of the sewer committee \$420.00 was collected from residents and a tile drain was laid in the creek from Hillcrest Avenue easterly through the Helme property. Another was laid in the upper end of this stream at the end of Glenwood and Norwood Streets at a cost of \$447.00. These were quite sizeable sums to raise in this depression year.

In October 1934 two mail deliveries served this area. Now we have but one.

In May 1935 the Association and ladies auxiliary purchased 75 steel chairs at a cost of \$150.00 which were contributed to the Fire Hall.

In order to equip the new firehouse a bazaar was sponsored jointly by the Association, the ladies auxiliary and the fire dept. Held 3 nights in December 1935 in the firehouse, receipts amounted to nearly \$900.00. The joint committee turned over to the building fund the sum of \$551.51 which was spent in purchasing a great part of the present housekeeping equipment, cabinets and many other items. With the services of volunteers tables were built from the lumber left over from the booths and shelving from the bazaar.

In 1937 a water and sewer district was proposed. However, the formation of these districts was not successful at that time.

In 1939 the State Health Dept. called attention to a sewer ending in a vacant lot at the end of Elmwood Street which overflowed into the brook which feeds the swimming pool at McKowns Grove. Investigation showed that an outlet from the Farley development sewer system had been connected to the existing sewer causing an undue flow. The sewer committee collected \$525.00 from residents and property owners, many of whom were not directly affected by the sewer. Under the supervision of the committee and with help from the Farley interests a sewer line was laid along side of the brook from opposite Elmwood Street to a pipe that had been previously laid under the swimming pool to carry the sewage beyond. The total cost was \$1200.00.

During 1940 the Association was active in support of the plan to widen Western Avenue from two to four lanes. About this same time a meeting was held and a committee appointed to circulate a petition for a sidewalk on the south side of Western Avenue. The committee was not successful in securing the required number of signatures.

The years 1941, 1942 and 1943 were inactive years due to pressure of war business.

On July 25, 1944 a meeting was held to reorganize the McKownville Improvement Association. By laws of the predecessor organization were adopted with an amendment to make the boundaries the same as the Fire District boundaries.

At the meeting of Sept. 19, 1944 committees were formed for the following: water and sewers, streets, transportation, finance and law and entertainment.

As of the November 21, 1944 meeting the membership committee reported 106 members.

On December 14, 1944 a resolution was forwarded to the Town Board requesting said board to adopt a zoning law.

At the January 23, 1945 meeting the water committee reported that the Latham Water District reported it could not handle any additional subscribers. This was in reply to an inquiry by the water committee.

March 20, 1945 the streets committee reported that Tracey, Providence, Warren and Mercer streets had been turned over to the town. At the April meeting the water and sewer committee turned in a report.

At the May meeting the streets committee reported that the Wilbur Land Co. of Boston had deeded the following streets to the Town: Arcadia Avenue, Hillcrest Avenue and Don Street.

In August 1945 the Association bore the expense of \$150.00 to repair a sewer break on Hillcrest Avenue.

In October 1945 the Association circulated a petition to have all night bus service provided by United Traction Co. UTC made a survey and later reported an average of only 10 persons per night, not enough.

During 1946 the water and sewer committee was active in drawing up a petition for the creation of a water and sewer district. The petitions were circulated through the district by a committee and at the meeting of Feb. 18, 1947 it was reported that said petitions had been turned over to the Town Board.

At the March 19, 1947 meeting the Association again voted to request the Town Board to set up a zoning commission. The Town Board on April 1, 1947 created such a commission for the township with two members of the Association serving on the commission.

Sept. 16, 1947 the water and sewer committee reported that the Town Board had formed the water and sewer district. The board was then getting permission and acquiring property for the purpose of drilling test wells. Drilling of these wells on the Witbeck property was begun in December and moved to the Hoag property in January 1948.

During April a bazaar was held with the Improvement Association working with the Fire Dept. \$500.00 was realized which was used for the redecoration of the fire house.

A committee was formed in May 1948 to investigate the paving of Fuller Road. It later reported that both Albany city and county had appropriated funds for this purpose.

During October 1948 it was found that the District could not support both a water and sewer district at this time due to increased cost over estimated cost of project. It was decided to retain the water project only and another petition was circulated successfully during November to cover the increased cost of the project. At the February 15, 1949 meeting it was reported that the pipes for the new water system had been delivered. During May 1949 it was reported that installation of the water distribution system was underway.

In May 1949 the Association went on record as favoring installation of a traffic light at the intersection of Fuller Road and Western Avenue.

In August of 1949 a letter from the State Traffic Commission stated that the traffic at the intersection of Schoolhouse Road and Rte 20 did not warrant a traffic light. A traffic count for Fuller Road and Western Avenue was to be deferred until after completion of paving of Fuller Road then in process.

During September and October 1949 special meetings were held to consider and take action on United Traction Co.'s proposal to cut the Western Avenue route back to the City line or even to Russell Road. Members attended a hearing held by the Public Service Corp. The result was that the route was retained intact. A petition was also presented to Public Service Corp. for bus service on Fuller Road.

At the November 1949 meeting it was voted to ask the Town Board to advise the Supt. of Water to properly notify subscribers in advance of water shutoffs.

On December 17, 1949 the new water supply was put into operation.

On December 20th it was again voted to write the State Traffic Commission regarding the traffic light at Fuller Road. At the meeting of January 17th, 1950 a letter from the state Traffic Commission was read advising that traffic at Fuller Road did not warrant a traffic light.

January 17, 1950 it was announced that the underwriters had inspected the new water system and will put new rates in effect. It was also voted at this meeting to write Albany County regarding having sidewalks installed on Fuller Road.

At the meeting of February 21, 1950 it was reported that a copy of the zoning ordinance had been filed with the State Commerce Dept. for checking. With regard to sidewalks on Fuller Road, Albany County said in a letter that a petition should be submitted.

On February 21, 1950 it was also announced that Fred Cross had presented a bill to the Senate to authorize the Town Board to take over the existing sewers.

On April 18, 1950 it was reported that school trustees from our district school had attended a meeting on school centralization in the township. It was also voted at this meeting to request street lights on Fuller Road at Western Avenue, Westlyn Court and Western Avenue, and in the center of the park at Westlyn Court.

On May 16, 1950 a letter was written to The Albany County Highway Dept. enclosing a petition, signed by residents on Fuller Road for sidewalks. This was submitted to the Albany County Board of Supervisors as per a letter of May 20, 1950.

Early in 1950 United Traction Co. announced it was planning to cut back service to Russell Road in Albany. Residents and members of the Association and Mrs. Van Loan worked to avert this.

On June 16, 1950 a letter was again sent to the State Traffic Commission requesting a traffic light at Western Avenue and Fuller Road and that a traffic count be made.

A petition circulated in June 1950 by the Fire Commissioners to purchase 1000 ft. of hose was successful but it was found that the old Fire Truck could not operate satisfactorily with the additional hose. The Commissioners therefore instituted a petition for a new fire truck to cost approximately \$7,500.00.

At the meeting of October 17th, it was reported that maps were being prepared for expansion of the Fire District.

December 19, 1950 A letter from the State Traffic Commission stated that traffic at the intersection of Western Avenue and Fuller Road did not warrant a traffic light. However, in a reversal of this decision another letter was read stating that a traffic light was to be installed at this intersection soon.

It was also reported at this meeting that the bond issue for the fire truck had passed by a vote of 73 to 1.

At the January 16, 1951 meeting it was reported that the telephones for the fire dept. had been installed and an inspection of equipment made by the Board of Underwriters. A resolution was sent to the Town Board requesting the Thruway Authority to protect the watershed of our reservoir.

At the February 20, 1951 meeting it was reported that the zoning committee had turned over its report to the Town Board. Harold Miller reported that a fire truck had been ordered from Albany Garage at a cost of \$8,600.00. This left a deficit of \$128.25 which was collected by a committee from property owners affected by the saving. Members of the Association are also serving on the committee to form a central school district.

It was announced at the March 20, 1951 meeting that a Water Commission had been set up for McKownville to act in an advisory capacity. The committee consists of:

Mr. C. J. Knoener - chairman
Mr. John Feldman - secretary
Mr. August Lux
Mr. Allen R. Herber
Mr. F. K. Miller

It was decided to look into the matter of a second dam at the upper end of the reservoir to hold back some of the sediment which runs down from the thruway construction.

At the April 17, 1951 meeting it was announced that the traffic light is finally being installed at the intersection of Western Avenue and Fuller Road.

In a letter dated May 16, 1951 Mr. Nickerson of the State Dept. of Public Works said our watershed would be protected in the course of Thruway construction.

On May 15th the water advisory board reported it is impractical to rebuild the upper dam. It was suggested that evergreens be planted in the watershed.

On June 1, 1951 the Association requested the town board to investigate reported pollution of the water supply, specifically from an open sewer on Tracey Street.

On June 19, 1951 at the meeting it was decided to send a letter to the Town Board endorsing the zoning ordinance. Mr. McLaughlin of the County Health Dept. reported pollution of the McKowns Grove pool from McKownville sewage and recommended that something be done about it.

At meeting of Sept. 18, 1951 it was reported that the zoning committee is rewriting a portion of the proposed zoning ordinance and will resubmit it within the next 60 days. Dr. Becker was made chairman of a committee to secure and plant evergreens for spring planting in the watershed from the Conservation Dept. It was also announced that United Traction Co. intends to operate a bus over Fuller Road for school children.

The new Dodge fire truck was received about July 1, 1951.
Tests of this equipment by the underwriters were conducted in October.

On November 20, 1951 regular monthly meetings of the Association were discontinued in favor of meetings as required.

At the meeting of Nov. 20, 1951 it was decided to investigate installation of a traffic light at Western Avenue and Norwood Street as well as a stop light at Arcadia Ave. for the benefit of the Fire Dept. It was announced that the new Fire truck had been approved and insurance rates lowered. The Association contacted Mr. Farley about removing pump houses in the Warren Street area formerly used by the Farley water supply. The Association was advised that Mr. Farley had sold this property during the previous year.

At the meeting of December 3, 1951 it was announced that street lights were to be installed in Westlyn Court.

At the meeting of January 15, 1952 a civilian defense committee was appointed. A program on this topic was presented at the meeting of February 19, 1952 including films.

At the May 7, 1952 meeting it was announced that the sewer committee had met with the Town Board relative to taking over the sewer operation with favorable results. In line with civilian defense the Association is sponsoring a self help course at the fire house.

On May 24th, 2000 evergreen trees were planted in the watershed with the help of the boy scouts and other volunteers. Lights have been installed on Westlyn Court and Westlyn Place and on Glenwood Street.

At the November 18, 1952 meeting it was announced that the petition for town operation of the sewers had been taken around for signatures. The total valuation for the district is \$1,087,000.00. The petition has been called in. The zoning committee has completed its work on the ordinance and turned over same to the Town Board. There was discussion of the sewer condition on Providence Street.

At the March 18, 1953 meeting a letter was sent to United Traction Co. asking Western Avenue bus service be restored to original schedules. Another letter was sent the Town Board advising passage of the zoning ordinance as soon as possible.

At the May 19, 1953 meeting Justin Tiernan, secretary of the zoning commission gave a report on zoning and answered questions. Rules for the watershed have been drawn up by the Albany County Health Dept. and submitted on May 4th to the Town Board.

At the meeting of October 13, 1953 the matter of Thruway interference with operation of the reservoir was discussed. Silt had been pushed and allowed to wash into the reservoir. Mr. Bixby of the Thruway authority had been contacted and had agreed to dredge the pond, supply us with Albany Water during dredging and refill the pond with Albany water.

At the meeting of October 20, 1953 it was reported that the sewer petitions are now in the hands of the Town Board. The rules for operation of the watershed have been adopted and put into force. A letter was sent to the Town Board requesting them to get in writing the promise by State Thruway Authority to dredge the reservoir. The question was brought up of whether we could supply the Ayre development (Glen Water Co.) with water in emergency without detriment to our own district. A motion was made to send a letter to have the Town Board adopt an ordinance whereby violators of the water restrictions could be fined. Another letter is to be written to the Town Board to establish a time limit for property owners to connect to the new water mains.

Letters were written to the Town Board and Albany County Highway Dept. relative to regulating speed on Fuller Road.

At the meeting of March 23, 1954 Mr. C. R. Roseberry of the Times Union was invited to be present to give his side of his recent attacks on McKownville. Mr. Ember gave a history of the water system and the work which had been done to establish it. Mr. Roseberry advocated annexation to the City of Albany.

On May 26, 1964 the Town Board held a hearing on establishment of the sewer district.

On December 27, 1954 a letter was written to the Town Board advocating that a new water main be installed on the North side of Western Avenue from Knowles Terrace to the Tydol station and the old main be abandoned to eliminate the leak in the vicinity of Arcadia Avenue; also that immediate action be taken about the Thruway Authority promise to dredge the reservoir.

On November 16, 1954 a letter was sent to the town board requesting them to do something about the condition of the streets in McKownville.

On January 31, 1955 the matter of the proposed arterial highway was discussed relative to how it might affect McKownville and its water district; letters were written requesting information. A letter was sent to the Town Board requesting better lighting on Western Avenue following several deaths of pedestrians on the highway.

On March 7, 1955 an association met with the Town Supervisor relative to securing water from Albany in emergency and the Thruway Authority's promises to clean the reservoir.

Meeting of May 24, 1955 it was decided to cooperate with the Kiwanis Club in requesting establishment of a town planning board. The association also went on record as favoring a building code.

On June 29, 1955 a special meeting was held to permit both sides of the question of rezoning for a shopping center at Western Avenue and Fuller Road to be discussed. Mr. Simmons presented his plans and residents presented their arguments pro and con. There was a large attendance. Part of the property had already been rezoned. The balance was subsequently rezoned as requested.