

Water District Merger Put To Town Board; Repairs, Proposed Apartments At Issue

5/10/66

Do the taxpayers of the McKownville Water District have a moral responsibility to accept their neighbors in the Birchmont Water District on an equal basis and to continue to share with them the limited output of the McKownville Reservoir?

This was the issue outlined for the Guilderland Town Board on May 10 at a public hearing concerning a merger of the two water districts in the eastern end of town.

Lined up on opposite sides of the question were James J. Barber of 12 West Dillenbeck Drive who represented Birchmont's 66 households and J. Francis Purdy of 1439 Western Avenue, a member of the McKownville Water Advisory Board.



J. FRANCIS PURDY

Mr. Barber told the town board that the proposed merger would consolidate the hamlet of McKownville into one solid community since the Birchmont area is already part of the McKownville Fire District and the McKownville Improvement Association. He said that one-third of the members of the fire department live in Birchmont as well as one-seventh of the members of the Western Turnpike Rescue Squad. "We are willing to pay our share" he continued as he gave what he had figured to be the tax costs if the consolidation were to take place. According to Mr. Barber's calculations water tax rates would increase 34 cents per thousand of assessed valuation for all the tax payers of the merged district which would take on the indebtedness of both districts.

The chairman of the McKownville Water Advisory Board, Fred Abele, said that it had been unable to arrive at a satisfactory decision on the matter. "It was the feeling of the board that we could not recommend in favor if it would cost taxpayers money. We could only recommend further study."

Mr. Abele is also a fire commissioner. He reported that the New York State fire insurance rating organization had declared the Birchmont system inadequate for fire protection. The one hydrant in the district

on West Dillenbeck Drive did not deliver water of sufficient pressure. The insurance raters recommended that the hydrant be replaced and others added.

The McKownville fire commissioners had resolved in favor of the consolidation if it would result in better fire protection, Mr. Abele said.

As a private citizen Mr. Abele outlined some of the considerations he felt were important:

Birchmont residents have been receiving water from McKownville reservoir for 10 years.

The district was created in 1956 as an emergency measure.

It is a small hardship district without a commercial tax base.

Water to the Three Hills district flows through Birchmont mains without compensation.

There is no definite plan to include the Birchmont area in the Westmere Water District. Even if there were, water from Westmere would be expensive.

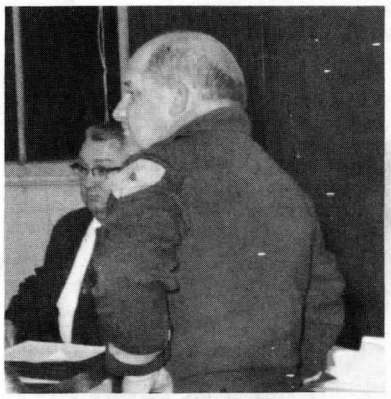
The residents of Birchmont have been active in community affairs.

"If we turn them down" he added "we will be giving preference to apartments and outside developers."

The solution, as Mr. Abele expressed it, would be for the Town Board to sit down with the Birchmont group and the McKownville Water Advisory Board and consider all the factors. "I think there's a lot of room for study on this thing" he concluded. "Possibly we have a moral responsibility to them."

J. Francis Purdy, who said he was not speaking for the Water Advisory Board of which he is a member, declared that Birchmont residents wish to join the McKownville district because they believe that costs would be less than at present and that McKownville would absorb improvement costs. "The taxpayers of the district never have and do not now want to extend its boundaries." In the past, he continued, water has been supplied to other districts only on a temporary basis and in situations of extreme distress.

Mr. Purdy reminded the town



JAMES J. BARBER

board that there were prospects of development within the boundaries of the McKownville district which would have to be supplied with water.

John Feldman expressed concern at the request "to consolidate the inadequate system and pass the burden on to others." In his opinion it would cost \$10,000 to comply with fire insurance regulations.

Neither for nor against the merger was Herbert B. Sunshine who suggested that the Birchmont system make its repairs first, then apply for the consolidation.

Frank Casatelli of Williams Court recalled that since 1956 McKownville had also agreed to supply the Quadrini development and Three Hills Terrace. He wondered why no one had objected to a proposed 106 unit apartment development in McKownville on the basis of a shortage of water. "Now you're telling people who've lived here for 16 years to go and get their water somewhere else."

George Hurley, 17 Norwood St., answered him. "The people of McKownville came to this town board and opposed the zoning ordinance which permits the building of apartments. Now that the ordinance is on the books they've got a right to build these apartments. We've got to supply them with water whether we have it or not."

The town board deferred the matter for further study.