

# Water Consolidation: One Fireman's View

By FRED B. ABELE

Why the consolidation of the McKownville and Westmere Water Districts should be supported with a YES vote on Wednesday, Aug. 27:

## McKownville Residents:

1. To make possible immediate and future improvements to provide better hydrant water volumes in McKownville through additional non-metered connections between the two districts at a minimal cost to taxpayers.

2. To provide your firefighters with the capability for improved protection to safeguard lives and property in the district.

3. To permit McKownville taxpayers to share in the much greater tax base of the combined Westmere Water District and its extensions including the North-eastern Industrial Park at Guild-erland Center.

4. Elimination of the hazard of a single metered connection to Westmere with potential fire danger in the event of a break on the McKownville side. Such a break did occur about a year ago, and there was not one drop of water in McKownville for hours. Fortunately, no fire emergency occurred. Could we be so lucky again?

5. Elimination of McKownville's status of a "stepchild" district in the event of severe drought or water shortage.

6. The possibility of improved insurance rates by removing some of the deficiency points given by the Rating Bureau for the Water System.

## Westmere Residents:

1. The addition to the Westmere tax base of an additional assessed valuation of the McKownville Water District of 40 to 50 million dollars, which includes the office buildings and commercial properties of McKownville (based on full valuation).

2. The advantage of this enlarged tax base at the time when the filtration capacities of the district must be increased in size, as currently under study.

## To Residents of both Districts:

Consolidation would give the advantage of a unified water district, free of duplicated administrative costs and accounting difficulties.

McKownville is the last independent water district in the Town which is contiguous with the Westmere Water District and still separate. Birchmont Water District became part of McKownville by merger some years ago. Three Hills,

Water District, as well as the Westmere extensions, have all been merged into the Westmere

District. All water for the McKownville Water District has been purchased from the Westmere District since November 1973.

The cost of the merger to both groups of taxpayers is negligible. On the basis of current budgets, McKownville's rate would be lowered \$1.14 per thousand and Westmere's increased by 20 cents per thousand. On the basis of full value assessments, this represents an 11.4 cent per thousand decrease and 2 cent per thousand increase, respectively.

Consolidation of the Districts will have no effect on the status of the McKownville Reservoir. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has provided a statement in writing, under date of Aug. 13, 1980, to that effect. It states the reservoir status may not be changed without a separate application and public hearing, and that it is Encon policy not to declassify any potential water supply.

Arguments by the opponents to consolidation are groundless. The McKownville Fire Department has pledged to fight to keep the reservoir as a potential source of water.

Concerned with the awareness of substandard fire flows in certain areas of the McKownville District, an increase in the number of structure fires, and the discovery that the Westmere ladder pumper and our own deck guns could not be supplied from McKownville hydrants, the McKownville Board of Fire Commissioners and the Fire Department entered into a study of this alarming deficiency. These are men trained in the expertise of firefighting and knowledge of fire flows. The study was aided by the cooperation of the water superintendent and the water advisory boards.

All that stands between that multi-thousand dollar home and/or business and a potential pile of ashes is your fire department, a non-political, unremunerated group of volunteers who give their time and effort — and potentially their lives — to protect your lives and property. Mutual aid agreements make the various departments of the town one to increase the firefighting capabilities in all the districts. McKownville already responds automatically to all daytime structure fires in the Westmere District, and this is reciprocated. An efficient town-operated dispatching system speeds the response time immeasurably.

You trust your firefighters to protect your lives and property. Why not trust their judgment now?

Don't be misled by those who oppose the consolidation whose only thought is political motivation and dreams of power — and a complete disregard for public safety. Opponents of consolidation would be more than willing to let this intolerable situation continue ad infinitum — as it may if this referendum is defeated.

Witness their complacency since the 1977 vote. Other solutions they propose are only partially effective and at greater cost to the taxpayer. Let's not wait for a test case to prove the point with a needless injury or death.

The help of all property owners in both districts is needed with a YES vote on Wednesday, Aug. 27. Please get out and vote.