

Water merger vote to be held tomorrow

Residents of the town of Guilderland's Westmere and McKownville water districts will vote tomorrow on the proposed merger of the two districts. Voting will be at the McKownville and Westmere firehouses between 4 and 10 p.m.

The referendum was requested by the McKownville Improvement Association. The merger was proposed by the McKownville Fire Department and approved by the town board last month.

The Firemen:

The following is a fire department statement outlining its reasons why the merger should be approved.

By **FRED B. ABELE**

Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners,
McKownville Fire District
MCKOWNVILLE RESIDENTS:

1. To make possible immediate and future improvements to provide better hydrant 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 Northeast Industrial Park at Guilderland 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 improving 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 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:

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, Guilderland and Fort Hunter water districts, 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

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The Association:

The following is a statement outlining the McKownville Improvement Association's position on the proposed merger:

By **MEL BEHN**

President, McKownville Improvement Association

The McKownville Improvement Association Inc., in keeping with its charter "to promote the public interest" of the hamlet of McKownville, supported a referendum on the question of merging the McKownville and Westmere Water Districts. It did so because it felt that the public interest would be served by a full and thoughtful discussion on the numerous issues which have risen in connection with the merger. The association has not taken a position for or against the merger.

The main arguments presented in support of the merger relate to the adequacy of the McKownville water system for fire protection. McKownville presently obtains its water from Westmere at a single metered connection. For security in the event of a break in the line, additional connections of the two systems would be desirable. In addition, the water available in the system for fire-fighting at certain commercial locations is well below that recommended by insurance rating agencies. This problem would also be improved by additional connections between the Westmere and McKownville systems.

The problems raised by the proponents of merger have been present since 1974, and could be solved with or without sufficient accuracy without metering the new connections.

The main arguments against merger relate to the property of the McKownville Water District, and particularly the McKownville Reservoir. Located between Western Avenue and Stuyvesant Plaza, the reservoir is an oasis of green surrounded by commercial development. Many McKownville residents wish to see it preserved for recreational use and as a potential reserve water source, and not swallowed up by commercialization.

Without merger, the desires of the people of McKownville would have great weight in any public hearing before the town or the state arising from attempts to declassify or to dispose of "their" reservoir. With merger, the reservoir becomes an asset of a town-wide water district, no longer just of McKownville, and the voices of McKownville residents would have no more impact than those of residents of Guilderland Center, or Carman Road or elsewhere, who are not so aware of the problems of McKownville — its lack of recreation space, its heavy traffic, its over-commercialization. In particular, at this time, the threat to the reservoir from the proposed Crossgates Mall is a matter of public record, and opponents of merger fear that merger will be a step towards the removal of the reservoir as an obstacle to the development of Crossgates.

Firemen's position on water vote

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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 \$1,000. On the basis of full value assessments, this represents an 11.4 cent per \$1,000 decrease and 2 cents per \$1,000 increase.

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.