

McKownville, Westmere Vote Today On Proposed Water District Merger

By STEPHEN GOLDSTEIN
Gazette Reporter

GUILDERLAND — Today's public referendum on the proposed merger of the McKownville and Westmere water districts is open to any Town of Guilderland resident now eligible to vote in a general election who also owns taxable property in either of the water districts.

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John W. Tabner, counsel to the town for its special districts, cited the eligibility requirements at last night's public information meeting on the merger issue.

The voting will be held from 4 to 10 p.m. at the Westmere and McKownville fire stations, both on Western Avenue.

A petition drive forced the referendum, after the Town Board voted for the consolidation after a July public hearing.

Advocates and adversaries of the merger who spoke at last night's meeting apparently had not convinced each other of their views.

Favoring the merger, for example, Fred Abele of the

McKownville Board of Fire Commissioners said the consolidation would end McKownville's "stepchild" relationship with the Westmere Water District, if a water emergency ever affected Westmere's ability to supply water to McKownville.

However, John Esler, a former member of the McKownville Advisory Board, suggested the extra connections favored with the consolidation would benefit only commercial properties, particularly the Ramada Inn and the United Bank of New York.

Esler suggested those who benefit from the extra connections should pay for them.

Esler cited a number of times in the past when the town has exchanged land or added sewer lines without what he said was adequate public notice, and he asked if McKownville's interests would be protected with a consolidation.

Dennis Tyson, superintendent of the town's Department of Water and Wastewater Manage-

ment, explained how a consolidated water district would absorb the costs of any improvements.

With the consolidation, he said, there could be additional connections between McKownville and Westmere on McKown Road and off Dillenbeck Road.

He then would have an engineering study determine what improvements are needed and plan for making them over a period of five or 10 years to keep the tax rate stable. Some of McKownville's pipes need to be replaced, for example.

Dr. Lindsay Childs said he doesn't argue with consolidation as an issue but more with its occurring while there's still time to affect the legal fight over the proposed Crossgates Mall.

"The main problem with this consolidation is the timing," he said. "By January, we will know whether Crossgates is coming or not. Then, we can consider consolidation on its merits, and I'd probably be in favor of it."

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