

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### Rhinebeck Mayor at odds with Rhinebeck Town Board

Mayor Jim Reardon announced today that he is less than pleased with what he is calling a total lack of communication and cooperation from the Town of Rhinebeck Board regarding two issues that affect the Village and its' residents.

The first issue has to do with the fire contract between the Village and the Town. The Village provides fire protection for part of the town and annually there is a contract signed by the Mayor and the Town Supervisor. Reardon states "when I took office in 2009 I began a detailed look at the operations of the Rhinebeck Fire Department. We identified that we did not have an accounting of Fire Department call volumes as they relate to number in the village and number in the town. In 2010 we implemented a tracking report and with the help of the fire department officers began recording the breakdown of the number of calls in the village and the town. This summer I charged Trustee Heath Tortarella with the task of analyzing the data we had gleaned and reporting to the Village Board his findings. His report found that on average 52% of the calls that Rhinebeck Fire Department responded to between November 1, 2010- October 31, 2013 were in the Town Fire district and 48% were in the Village. Based on these findings we determined that the town contract was not adequately funding the coverage provided.

On October 21st I and Trustee Tortarella attended the Town budget workshop meeting and informed the Town Board of our findings in writing and informed them that we intended to increase the amount of the contract for fire protection to \$187,953.00. Subsequent to that meeting Trustee Tortarella arranged for Councilman Bruce Washburn to have access to the last 4 years of department call records and met with him on October 27th. Trustee Tortarella then attended another budget workshop on October 28th and presented this information again. At this meeting, the contract rate was actually reduced from a tentative number that was established at their previous workshop held on October 25th. On November 12th, the Village Board by resolution approved the contract rate for 2014 and this was presented on the same night to the Town Board during their last public budget hearing. They again ignored the reality of the cost associated with fire protection and approved their budget. At no time prior to October 21st did the Town Board approach the Village to request information related to this contract. Also subsequent to the October 27th meeting between Trustee Tortarella and Councilman Washburn their was no further communication or request for further information from the Town Board either verbally or in writing.

On November 18th the Town Board adopted their 2014 budget and included \$156,829 for the Village Fire Protection contract, a shortfall of \$31,124 from what was stipulated at the

October 21st meeting. They did this without any discussion or negotiation with the Village Board. This past Monday December 9th I attended the Town Board meeting and questioned the board as to why they had not communicated to the Village about the contract and that their budget had not included the requested amount and asked if they intended to sign the contract. Quite frankly you could have heard a pin drop. Once there was a response they ranged from “you came to us too late, this is a big increase, and we met with our attorney in executive session prior to this meeting and we were hoping we could sit down with him and you and negotiate a different amount. My response was we presented this information to you in October, Councilman Washburn met with Trustee Tortarella and provided him with the information he requested, we received no other contact or request for information and now you are telling us you met with your attorney in executive session this evening and want to negotiate. I also stated that as far as the Village Board was concerned there was no room for negotiation, as we have no intention of having the village taxpayers subsidize the town fire protection.

It is our stance that clearly this a stall tactic employed by the Town Board and there is no legitimate reason that they waited to discuss this in executive session until this week. They should have addressed this immediately after their October 21st meeting and certainly prior to approving their budget. Now they are asking that we operate on a month to month basis at the under funded amount until this is resolved.

It is their legal obligation to provide for coverage of the established Fire Protection District as well as the Town as a whole. Their failure to act in a timely manner and ensure that this obligation is met presents an example of gross negligence.

Further, as has been identified by others on the Village Board, to continue at the current rate represents a failure on our part in the management of tax generated funds. Raising money via taxes from village residents to pay for services provided to town residents is not an option.

It is the Village Board’s position that they have acted in the best interest of Village Residents and have provided the Town Board with all necessary information to act in the same way for their residents. They have failed to do so and we do not feel that we should answer their negligent actions with Village dollars.

The second issue that needs to be addressed is the proposed enactment of a new local law by the Town Board to change from three elected assessors to one appointed. As the Village shares assessors with the Town I would have expected to have had some type of communication from the Town Board regarding this proposal so that we could have had the chance to be part of the process. The Town Board claims to have been considering this change for a year or two yet the first time I became aware of this was in November through a post on the Rhinebeck Community Forum notifying of a public hearing regarding the proposal. I attended the public hearing in order to gain a better understanding of why they were proposing the change. Strangely the public hearing was opened and there was no statement from the Town Board as to why this was being proposed. I and several others asked questions of the Board as to why the change was

being proposed. No answer. If this was being done as a cost cutting measure where are the figures that will support this? No answer? If this position goes from three people to one does it then become a fulltime position with benefits? No answer. The public hearing was adjourned to be continued on December 9th. After that meeting oddly enough Cate Long a resident of the Village provide me with some documents from the Department of State about the issue, yet nothing from the Town Board was forthcoming.

Fast forward to December 9th and the public hearing is continued. There still was no statement from the Town Board as to why they are proposing the change. The majority of the comments from the public once again surrounded why and where is the information that justifies it. Three people spoke in favor of the change but other than we are one of the few remaining communities that have elected assessors, and that the state recommends it there was no significant or compelling reason provided as to why we need this change. I commented that I would be in favor of any change that would be of benefit to the taxpayer however I did not believe we should be using the state and its' recommendation as a shining example of what is best for us here in Rhinebeck. A recent comptrollers report found that the state has spent \$460 million dollars in overtime costs so far this year and is on pace to set a record with over \$600 million, and they are going to tell us what we need to do here in Rhinebeck? The other point that bears mentioning is that as elected officials assessors are answerable directly to those they are taxing. With this change this will no longer be the case. Also worth mentioning is that in 2014 only one member of the Town Board will be a village resident so if this change is approved town residents will have the say on who the assessor is, totally removing the village voters from the equation. The public hearing was once again adjourned to be continued on December 23rd and will come to a vote. Our assessors were put in office by the voters and have done an excellent job. If anyone is unhappy they have the ability to go before the Board of Assessment Review. To my knowledge there is no reason for this change. The 3 assessors are part time and make a total of about \$30,000 per year. If changed to one what is the workload for that person, will that person be able to handle the workload, and what will the cost be? These are all questions that the Town Board should answer. The lack of information and justification is a failure on the Town Boards part to conduct business in a transparent fashion and is unacceptable.

I urge everyone to let the Town Board know either in writing or by attending the December 23rd meeting that they will not accept this type of government. If this continues it does not bode well for Rhinebeck.