



BOROUGH OF FOREST HILLS

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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOREST HILLS COUNCIL OPPOSES UNILATERAL PLANS FOR MERGER

On June 18, 2013, Forest Hills councilpersons each received a letter sent to their home addresses from an attorney representing the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department announcing the intent of Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department to merge with Braddock Hills Fire Department in a unilateral decision with no input from the Borough of Forest Hills. At that time, Braddock Hills relied upon other municipalities for fire services due to their lack of fire fighter volunteers (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Thursday, May 9, 2013). Additionally, Braddock Hills Fire Department was embroiled in public allegations of racial prejudice towards persons of color interested in volunteering for the fire department (New Pittsburgh Courier Thursday, May 22, 2013).

At the request of Braddock Hills Council, Forest Hills provided a preliminary quote to Braddock Hills for contracted fire services in a letter on May 2, 2013. The estimate provided was based on a per capita basis from the most recent census numbers available for residents in Braddock Hills. The estimate used the same rate assessed to Forest Hills residents and business owners via the borough fire protection services fee. Forest Hills Council has not received correspondence indicating further interest from the municipality of Braddock Hills to contract fire services.

As of January 5, 2014, Forest Hills has received no formal correspondence from the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department retracting plans for merger with Braddock Hills Fire

Department. The Borough of Forest Hills, PA is committed to strong and vibrant municipal services. Forest Hills is home to single family dwellings, larger multi-family high-rise buildings, and businesses both large and small. Sound fire protection is one of the primary responsibilities of public safety for the municipality. To that end, Forest Hills Council is equally committed to preserving tax payers' interests and creating policy that is sustainable and fiscally sound.

The elected officials of Forest Hills have expressed that it is not in the best interest of Forest Hills residents to merge with Braddock Hills Fire Department. Markus Erbedinger, President of Council states, "Forest Hills welcomes multi-municipal collaboration provided it is an equitable and mutually beneficial relationship between Forest Hills and the other municipality. We cannot subsidize another municipality's fire services on the backs of our current constituents."

Forest Hills borough continues to support the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department in the 2014 budget found under the Fire Protection Services Fee fund. Since 2012, Forest Hills has collected and administered money for a specific fire protection services fee. Details of the fee can be found on the borough's website homepage: <http://www.foresthillspa.org/>. By law, all monies are dedicated to and must be used solely for fire protection related costs for the borough of Forest Hills.

To date, the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department received \$54,688.50 in 2012 and \$33,617 in 2013. Additionally, the fee has provided for yearly payments of \$70,678 towards the purchase of a new ladder truck requested by the fire department. Currently, \$26,185 remains in escrow from the 2013 fire fee collections earmarked for fire services that the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department may request at any time. Forest Hills Council has stipulated that a request for purchase or an invoice be submitted prior to release of funding which is in line with current policy governing all purchases made for or on behalf of Forest Hills Borough. No requests or invoices were submitted in 2013.

Forest Hills Council representatives have met with Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department representatives on two different occasions seeking a resolution to the open issues

regarding the letter received from the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department announcing its intent to merge with Braddock Hills Volunteer Fire Department. Elected officials welcome further discussion and resolution upholding the interests of the community of Forest Hills.

A press release packet with written correspondence from various entities as well as budget details may be obtained at the Forest Hills Borough Building, 2071 Ardmore Boulevard, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.