

NORTH TONGASS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

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August 2, 2007

Residents of the North Tongass Fire & EMS Service Area,

There have been many inquiries about the property tax and structure fee assessed by the North Tongass Fire & EMS Service Area. The North Tongass Fire and EMS Board of Directors through the Borough Assembly developed the current fee structure as a way to level the “paying field,” if you will.

The Board realized that the mil levy alone placed an increased liability on those residents with higher assessments than those with much lower assessments. Some residents were paying hundreds of dollars a year while many were paying less than \$20 a year. They sought something more equitable.

The Board elected in 2004 to lower the mil levy and assess the \$100 structure fee in an effort to make the total costs to the residents of the North Tongass more uniform. The Assembly approved this action on August 16, 2004. The result of that action can be found in Title 50.130 located at <http://216.67.0.20/weblink7/DocView.aspx?id=14152>.

The \$100 fee was separated from the mil levy at the direction of the Borough legal staff. That is why it is billed separately. You are not being double billed. Like your mil tax, the structure fee is also deductible from your Federal Income Tax according to the best information available to the Board. Now, depending on who you talk to, this is either a good program or a bad one.

The Board is faced with a few differing opinions on how to make paying for the department as equal as it can be made. One opinion suggests the Board apply for a large loan to consolidate all of the debt and set up over a longer pay off period so more people, including future residents not yet living in the area, will share in the cost. The other method is paying the current loans off as quickly as possible to save on interest. However, this means only the people currently paying taxes would be responsible for bearing the burden. It's a tough call.

Regarding the fees, one opinion has the mil completely done away with and a flat fee, equal for everyone, be instituted. Still another suggests the opposite, a straight mil levy with no structure fee at all. Of course the mil levy only option would widen the payment gap between the higher assessed properties and the lower assessed properties as any process based on percentages would.

Somewhere in the middle of all this is a consensus answer. The trick, I believe, is to work through it openly and directly, allow all the input that the public wishes to give, and then attempt to make a decision that most can live with. That is the position the Board finds itself in now, finding that option. They need and seek your help.

Hopefully, everyone understands that there is no magic solution that everybody will agree to. There may be, however, a solution that everyone can feel ownership in because all opinions were heard and debated. You are encouraged to attend the Board of Directors meetings which are held the fourth Monday of each month. The meetings start at 6:30 pm and are held at Station 8, 13110 North Tongass. Your thoughts and concerns are vital to the Board.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

David Hull, Chief
North Tongass Volunteer Fire Department