

**This is a copy of the
Response Letter from FWFC**

January 8, 2009

Dear Resident;

Recently you may have received a newsletter from Ward 1 Commissioner Bob Pesavento. The newsletter discussed at length the Upper Dublin Township funding for the Fort Washington Fire Company (FWFC). We are sending out this mailing to clarify some of the statements made in the newsletter.

The Fort Washington Fire Company has a proud 100 year history of volunteer service to the residents of Upper Dublin Township. We are not a department of the Township but rather a separate non-profit corporation (501 (c) 3) that provides services to, and is funded by, Upper Dublin Township. Upper Dublin is not "unique" in its full funding of the fire company; many other local Townships do exactly the same thing.

Commissioner Pesavento's newsletter stated that the FWFC annual fund drive, in the past, had been "turned...over to the Township to be used for purchasing capital equipment for the FWFC." Historically, the Fire Company had always used a portion of the annual fund drive to fund the Fire Fighters Association of the FWFC (the primary tool for providing "esprit de corps" within the Fire Company). The remainder was donated by the Fire Company to the Township to purchase capital equipment. In reality, *never* were all the monies used for purchasing capital equipment.

The FWFC had numerous concerns with this practice, especially when the donated money became a line item in the Township budget. First and foremost, the 30% of Township residents who generously donated were effectively decreasing the tax burden for everyone else, because their donations were being used to buy capital equipment. Secondly, a Township is not legally able to solicit donations, and the co-mingling of donations with tax dollars for the purchasing of equipment is questionable. The Fire Company had a concern with the legality of that situation.

Because of these concerns, the FWFC felt it necessary to change the existing practice of turning over the excess donated money to the Township. The result of this change was that your donated money now goes directly to the Fire Company, to be used directly for recruitment and retention measures. In these days of declining membership in many other local volunteer fire companies, the Fort Washington Fire Company's membership numbers have remained strong.

Additionally, the newsletter did not mention that simultaneously with the decision to keep the Fund Drive "in house", the Fire Company agreed to provide revenues to the Township that are obtained by the FWFC for performing contracted services on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. This totals an extra \$25,000 per year for the township. That money *is* used exclusively to decrease your tax burden.

It should be further noted that the FWFC grant committee, over the past four years has secured State and Federal grants in excess of \$300,000. That is greater than our total annual operating budget. The grants

were obtained by the hard work of our members, yet that function does not necessarily fall within “our mission.” And yes, that money *is* used exclusively to decrease your tax burden.

Finally, the newsletter points with pride that the Commissioners removed \$10,000 from our annual banquet (an event which the Commissioners attend) since it “is clearly not part of [the] mission”. The annual banquet is the way that members and their guests are thanked for their dedication. It may not be part of the mission as stated in the Commissioner’s newsletter. It is, however, supplemental to that mission in that the Fire Company must continue to recognize its members and show our appreciation for their efforts. Our membership is totally dedicated to performing our “mission” of service to the residents of Upper Dublin Township. Many of our member’s families have had several generations of participation in the Fort Washington Fire Company. We volunteer our time to continually train and become nationally certified so that we may continue to provide the highest level of service possible.

Continually eroding the morale of the volunteers of the Fort Washington Fire Company will ultimately lead to the financial burden of a paid fire department. Based upon the numbers supplied by a Township study, it would cost the taxpayers over \$3 million dollars per year. Your taxes would have to make up that difference.

The newsletter appears to reduce this whole topic to a dollars and cents issue. It should be noted that the FWFC operating budget is less than 2% of the Upper Dublin Township annual budget! We believe that the fire service is about a lot more than just dollars and cents. It is about lost wages, it is about lost family events, it is about lost holiday events, and it is about countless hours spent away from our loved ones. It is about selfless service to the community and about risking one’s life to protect the lives and property of Upper Dublin Township.

The Fort Washington Fire Company stands ready to provide another 100 years of service to the residents of Upper Dublin Township. We thank you for your ongoing support of our volunteers.

We understand that you may have further questions and encourage you to contact us at any time at either (215) 646-2555 (prompt for President) or by email at President@FWFC.org.

Sincerely;

Jeffrey M. Fogel, M.D.
President
Fort Washington Fire Company

Sponsored and paid for by the volunteer members of the Fort Washington Fire Company.