



The League of Women Voters of New Castle
P.O. Box 364 Chappaqua, NY 10514 lwnnewcastle@optonline.net

Comments on DEIS for Millwood Firehouse #1

November 2, 2008

Background on the League of Women Voters of New Castle

The League of Women Voters of New Castle is a nonpartisan civic organization whose mission is to promote informed and active participation in government. Through activities such as our Candidates' Nights; forums and informational meetings; public questioning and comment before relevant town boards; and coverage in our newsletter, *The Voter*, the League provides public education and outreach on a broad array of issues with impact on our local community. The League's Local Planning Committee has been following developments regarding plans for a new Firehouse #1 in the Millwood Fire District, and offers the following comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement adopted by the Board of Fire Commissioners on September 15, 2008.

Introduction to the League's Comments on the DEIS for Millwood Firehouse #1

The Millwood Fire Company plays a vital role in the Millwood Fire District. These dedicated volunteer fire fighters selflessly give their time and risk their lives to protect people, homes, schools and businesses in the district. They have the respect and gratitude of the community they serve, and they deserve an up-to-date firehouse that supports their critical mission.

The League recognizes the task of the Board of Fire Commissioners to provide a facility that meets the needs of the district now and in the future, while not unduly burdening the taxpayers of the district. To achieve this, there must be open dialogue to resolve key questions that surround the construction of a new firehouse. These include transparency about costs, financing and tax implications of a new firehouse; firematic and community needs that must be met by this facility; and projected impacts on the community as a whole. These criteria should apply to the preferred plan and all alternatives. The League feels that only through open discussion and analysis can community members make an informed decision regarding the shared goal of providing a new firehouse #1 for the Millwood Fire District.

Analysis of the Existing Site of Firehouse #1

The DEIS states that the existing site of Firehouse #1 was studied in 2000 with regard to “site size relative to the proposed firehouse.” Since then, however, multiple configurations for a new firehouse have been put forth. Using the proposals for smaller firehouses that are now under consideration, please discuss whether the existing site, including the adjoining parcels that are available to augment the lot size, is a suitable location for the new firehouse.

This discussion should provide a comparison of the existing site with the preferred site of the Realis property. While the DEIS lists the drawbacks of the existing site, we note that the Realis property presents considerable challenges of its own, among them steep slopes, location within the New York City Watershed, wetland encroachment, the need to condemn a residential covenant, the need to acquire a portion of the Cortez property, relocation of the firehouse to a busier section of Routes 120/133 (see traffic discussion below), and the loss of direct access to the main road for emergency response.

Therefore, it is not sufficient to simply list the disadvantages of the existing site. There must be a comparative analysis of the existing site with the Realis property, which should include a full discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each property. There should also be a full discussion of the methods and costs associated with mitigating the disadvantages of each site.

If the existing location is still determined to be unsuitable for the new firehouse, please address how the old site would be used after construction. If the intention is to sell the property, please provide an estimate of the sale price.

Traffic

The Realis property is located at a much busier section of Routes 120/133 than the existing site of Firehouse #1 on Route 120. Please discuss how traffic generated by firehouse activities and emergency response operations will interact with existing traffic at the proposed Realis location. Some of the factors at this location include trucks that block traffic along Routes 120/133 as they enter and exit the Millwood Lumber Supply; pedestrians and cyclists who cross Routes 120/133 to access the North County Trailway; and a steady stream of vehicles turning on and off Station Road.

Justification for Size and Specifications of New Firehouse

While the needs assessment report prepared by JLN Associates has been included with the DEIS as Appendix K, it is unclear how its recommendations have been incorporated into the design for the new firehouse, or into district planning. Further, some relevant information about surrounding fire districts does not appear to be included in the needs assessment report.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement should demonstrate how the needs of the Millwood Fire District are reflected in the design of the proposed firehouse and alternatives. It should provide a comparison with other districts of similar size in the surrounding area. For each district including the Millwood Fire District, the comparison should include, but not be limited to, the following factors: number of households each district serves; the size of the business community each serves; the total assessed tax value of each district; the number of fire stations and number and type of bays in each district; the square footage of the fire stations; other facilities offered in each of the stations, such as offices and public meeting rooms; and other relevant factors.

Financial Analysis and Impact on Taxpayers

At present, the DEIS does not provide information about the cost and financing of the firehouse. A full discussion of this issue should be included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, with a budget for the project that details all costs that have been incurred to date as well as all future costs; how the entire project will be financed and the amount of financing that will be sought; and the projected impacts on tax rates for the district. Please break down the projected tax burden per household in the Millwood Fire District.

Outdoor Activities at Firehouse #1

The DEIS does not include a discussion of possible outdoor activities on the site, in spite of assurances given to the League of Women Voters of New Castle at the Fire Commissioners' meeting on April 28, 2008, that the scope would be expanded to include this issue.

In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, please discuss any outdoor activities, including training activities, that would take place on the site and alternatives. If no outdoor activities are planned, please state this clearly. In the case of training activities, it would be useful to know where these activities are carried out for district fire fighters.

Other Possible Development in the Area of Firehouse

The Realis site is located in the immediate vicinity of other properties where possible development is under discussion or may occur. Please discuss how the construction of a new firehouse on the Realis property will relate to these other developments, including, but not limited to, alterations at the Devereux Learning Center, a possible realignment of Allen Avenue and Schuman Road, any plans for the Vesce property, and plans for the site of the historic train station. Please consider the impact of these developments on alternative sites for the new firehouse as well.

Retaining Walls

The Final Environmental Impact Statement should include a full discussion of the retaining walls proposed for the Realis site. In addition to the dimensions of the walls, information should also be included on steep slopes and the disturbances that will take place; soil composition at those locations; blasting or other excavation techniques that will be used; and all estimated costs of the retaining walls through their completion.

Disaster Preparedness

The Final Environmental Impact Statement should provide a full discussion of how Firehouse #1 will function as both a responder to and a safe harbor during emergency situations. This should include detailed information on how the firehouse has been utilized in past emergencies; how the use of Firehouse #1 as a safe harbor is integrated into the Town of New Castle's disaster response plan; and how utilizing the firehouse as a safe harbor is consistent with other responsibilities of the firehouse and fire fighters during emergency situations. In this last instance consider, for example, how emergency response is affected by cars and people arriving at the firehouse to seek shelter, while at the same time fire fighters and vehicles are trying to exit to respond to emergencies in the district.

Screening from Neighbors

In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, please include photographic simulations of screening that will be provided to mitigate the view of the firehouse from neighbors at the Realis site and alternatives.

Siren

In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, please discuss the role of the siren in modern firematics. Specifically address how the siren is used in emergency response, and how fire fighters are summoned to respond to emergency situations. Also provide an analysis of the impact on neighboring homes and businesses by the proposed relocation of the siren to the intersection of Route 100 and Shinglehouse Road.

Approvals and Permits

In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, please provide a comprehensive list of all approvals and permits that are being sought for the project, the issuing authorities or agencies, and a brief description of the need for each approval or permit.