



# DARIEN-WOODRIDGE

## Fire Protection District

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### **Fire district hopes revised public information effort better explains its need for a tax rate increase**

The Darien-Woodridge Fire Protection District now acknowledges that the wealth of information it provided voters before its referendum last March may not have made clear why a modest tax rate increase is needed. “We were so focused on telling people what, we neglected to tell them why,” lamented Fire Chief Robert J. Tinucci.

“The ‘why,’” Chief Tinucci explained, is that “since 1989 when voters last approved a tax rate increase for the District, our cost of operation—like everyone else’s—has gone up. Everything costs more and we no longer have sufficient revenue to be able to assure the quickest possible response to emergency calls.”

To hold spending to what it can afford, the District had to lay off two firefighter-paramedics from each of its three regular 24-hour shifts. A result was that one mobile intensive care unit was taken out of service. “In the case of concurrent emergency calls,” Chief Tinucci pointed out, “this could pose a very serious problem.”

In addition to being professionally under staffed, the Darien-Woodridge Fire Protection District is not financially able to replace aging fire trucks and engines. Both problems mean that District residents may no longer be able to count on prompt and up to date emergency services.

Many residents, Tinucci believes, may have played the odds in voting no in March. Granted, he concedes, “the odds of ever having to call 911 for a fire, accident or medical emergency at home are remote. But last year,” he reported, “Darien-Woodridge firefighter-paramedics responded to nearly 2,800 emergency calls—more than seven a day. The odds were against each of those happening too. Because emergencies can occur anytime to anyone of any age, playing the odds against having to ever call for help can be a dangerous game,” Tinucci warned.

## **Fire district hopes—add one**

To be able to raise its tax rate beyond the cap maximum, the Darien-Woodridge Fire Protection District must seek voter approval through the referendum process.

A fire protection district is a self-supporting entity. Unlike a municipal fire department, its principal support is revenue from a tax on real estate property that is paid as a portion of the annual county real estate tax bill. Not part of the City of Darien or Village of Woodridge, the District receives no financial benefit of any kind from either municipality or from sales taxes. Because of a state legislature-imposed tax cap, annual levy increases by fire protection districts are limited to a maximum of 5 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

If the District's needed tax rate increase is not approved by voters on November 7, its firefighter-paramedic staffing will remain at a level that is less than adequate to assure quick response, especially during concurrent-call situations. And aging equipment will just keep getting older.

If the referendum is approved, the funds generated by the tax rate increase would make it possible to restore the District's professional staffing level, pay down long-term debt, and replace aging apparatus and rescue equipment. The added funds, Tinucci emphasized, would be restricted to these applications.

The cost to property tax payers would be surprisingly low, he said, "just \$39 additional per year, or \$3.25 a month, for a home valued at \$300,000."

Chief Tinucci hopes local voters now understand the District's needs more clearly and will approach the November 7 referendum with their own and their families' immediate and long-term safety in mind.

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