Caroga News Flash

2026 Fire District Open House Highlights

September 26, 2026

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The Caroga Lake Volunteer Fire Company held an open house and informational session at the Fire Hall.

The meeting focused on the proposed transition of the Caroga Lake Volunteer Fire Company with a Town Fire Protection District Contract to the publicly funded Southern Adirondack Fire District.



Why change? Equipment costs — such as fire trucks, fuel, equipment, and insurance — are rising quickly. Plus, volunteer recruitment and retention require dedicated effort, given that membership has declined from about 65 firefighters in the 1970s to 32 today. If the Fire District can focus on delivering the operational management and the Fire Company can focus on volunteer recruitment and retention, that can help each to address needs and get the jobs done in efficient and cost-effective ways.

How would it work? A five-member Board of Fire Commissioners would oversee operations, approve budgets, and set a separate fire tax rate. Commissioners would be appointed initially by the Town Board and would be required to complete training.

What are the financial impacts? The Fire Company anticipates relatively little additional administrative expenses, estimated at approximately $10,000 annually for a secretary / treasurer. The proposed 2027 budget already accounts for this expense. The department will have a full year's operating expenses in reserve and approximately $200,000 set aside for the next fire truck. They do not anticipate a significant increase in taxpayer costs solely because of the transition, and it could provide greater flexability, allowing funding to respond more directly to rising operating costs and changes in property values. Specific financial details will depend on the final budget and tax rate that have not yet been established.

Bottom Line: The proposed transition is intended to strengthen the long-term financial stability and operational effectiveness of local fire protection, reduce administrative burdens on volunteers, and prepare for rising costs and changing volunteer participation. The proposal is still under consideration, and its final financial arrangements, governance, and timeline depend on the approval process.

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CLVFC FAQs on Fire District forming

Who will be elected by Fire District voters as a Fire Commissioner?

Any resident is eligible to be elected as a fire district commissioner. The town board will appoint the first five commissioners until the next regularly scheduled election held in December. The ideal candidate will have knowledge of the needs and functions of a fire department and/or be able to address other operational concerns of the fire district. This would include: recruitment and retention of fire and EMS personnel, training needs, equipment needs & costs, operating budget needs, facility requirements, OSHA & PESH (public employee safety & health) requirements, fire department Best Practices, and fiscal operations including budget and planning. Of course, the most important trait is the willingness to learn and ask questions.

Will taxes increase?

The new fire commissioners will determine the budget. However, the budget is limited by a "statutory spending limit" as well as a two-percent tax cap. Today, the town pays the fire company for fire protection. This same money would be raised from the taxpayers by the fire district, and the town would no longer raise funds in the fire protection district (which would be dissolved). The expenses should be the same as they are today.

How does the budgeting process work?

The Board of Fire Commissioners adopts a preliminary budget with the input of the Fire Chief and the Treasurer. The amount of the budget is limited by various laws. The public has the opportunity to comment on the proposed budget at a public hearing before it is adopted in final form.

Who is qualified to run for Fire Commissioner?

There are no official qualifications for Fire Commissioner other than being a resident of the fire district and having no criminal convictions for arson in any degree. Commissioners receive no compensation for their services. The first year of the fire district will require significant time and dedication from the commissioners, who will need to create a new set of policies, complete six hours of initial commissioner training, adopt a budget, and review all operational practices of the fire department.

How do Fire Commissioners know what their job entails?

Fire Commissioners are required to complete a six hour course within the first 270 days of their appointment. This course is viewable on line at www.pinskylaw.com/lectures.

How long is a Fire Commissioners term of office?

The term of the first five commissioners appointed by the town is only until the next annual election. After that, the voters select five new commissioners in December. The terms of the commissioners are five years, but the terms of the first elected commissioners are staggered from five years down to one year based upon the ranking of the number of votes received. Thereafter, one commissioner is elected each year for a five year term.

Where do Fire Commissioners work?
The Board of Commissioners will have its own locked office and admin facility within the fire station.

Who approves members and officers?

The Board of Fire Commissioners oversees and approves any new members to the Fire District. The Board of Fire Commissioners can approve or reject the recommendations of the Fire Company for its choice of Chief Officers. The Fire

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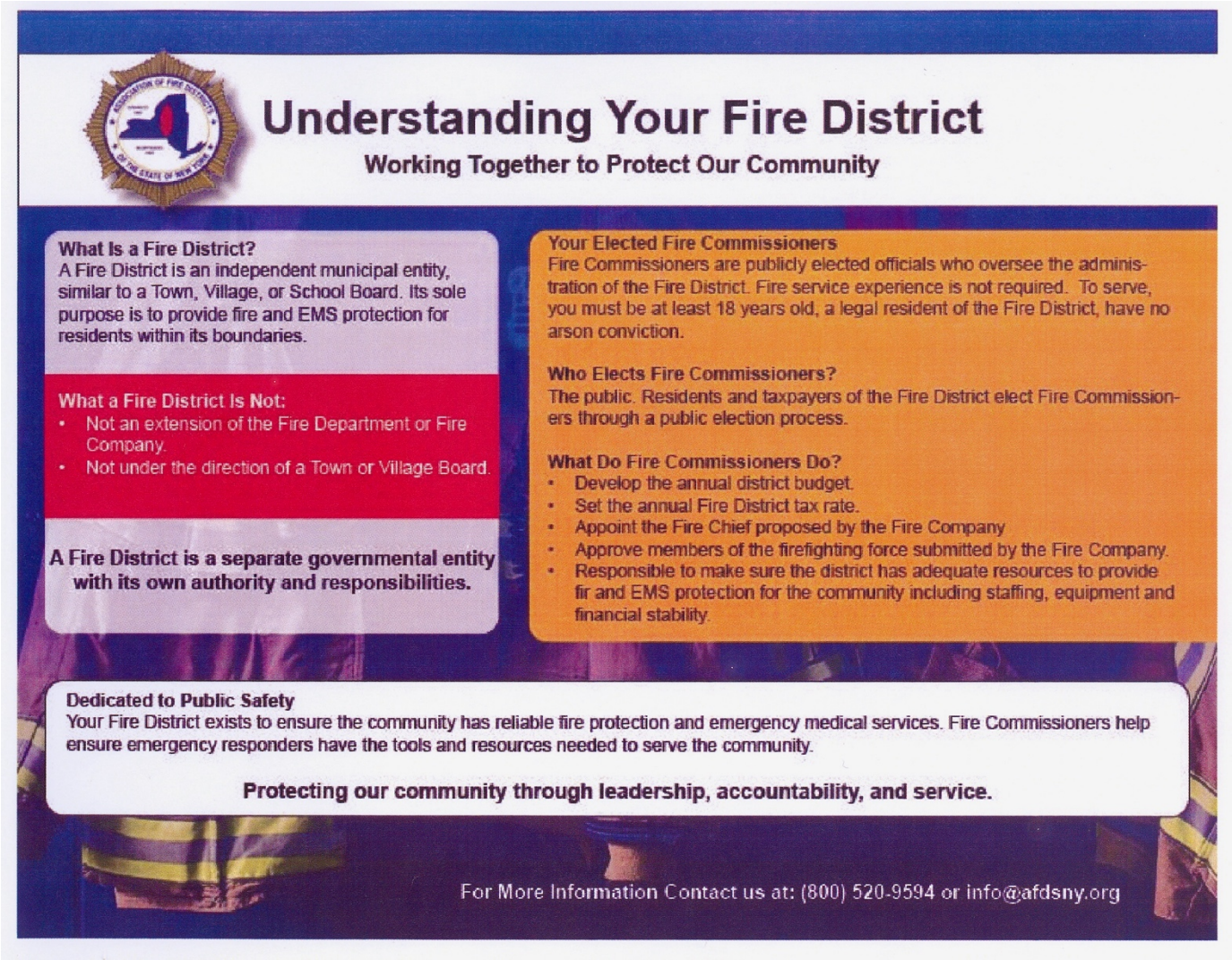
Fire District FAQs (continued)

Commissioners do not appoint Fire Chiefs, but they do have the authority to approve or reject the recommendation of the Fire Company.

Who will own the equipment, vehicles and fire station?

The Fire Company presently owns all equipment, vehicles and real property utilized in providing fire protection. The Fire Company will consider transferring all firefighting equipment such as the vehicles and other non-real property to the newly formed Fire District. These discussions will be held with the newly appointed commissioners.

The Fire Company intends to retain ownership of the fire station and property and lease the same to the Fire District for a negotiated fee to garner funding to maintain the fire station and property. We will do this to save taxpayers money in repairing and maintaining the building. If the fire district owned the property, it would have to pay prevailing wages to all contractors, thus increasing the price of all repairs and maintenance by approximately 32%.



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