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July 10, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Putnam Valley Planning Board
Putnam Valley Town Board
Ms. Sherry Howard, Town Clerk

Re: Proposed new firehouse
Comments for Public Hearing- July 13, 2020

Dear Ms. Howard:

Following are my comments for the public hearing on the new firehouse. I would greatly appreciate it if you would include them in the record of the meeting, and if possible, to read them during public comment period. My understanding is that this meeting will be held online via Zoom.

Preface. The Putnam Valley Fire Department has been trying for over ten years to construct a new firehouse that they claim is urgently needed in our town for a number of reasons. Although I have opposed and continue to oppose this project, it is my belief that a new and very expensive firehouse is going to be built in the near future. Before any more money is spent, the Fire Department needs to provide much greater detail on their plans for the project as well as what will happen to the current fire station when the new one is built.

Unfortunately, this push to begin construction could not have come at a worse time. Many residents have lost their livelihoods and businesses due to the Covid Corona crisis and the Lock down that still has many businesses closed or only partially opened up.

Given the situation that we are in due to the Covid Crisis and the financial hardship that it has caused to many residents and businesses, it is imperative that the town board and PVFD take a hard look at this project and do everything they can to cut costs and seek outside funding.

Unfortunately, there has been no effort to do so and the FD is moving ahead with no plans to reduce the size and scope of the project or to obtain money from the many grants that are available from the state and federal government.

Fiscal implications. The concerns that I have are based on the financial implications to our community that this \$11 million dollar project will have on our town. It is really sad that the

interests of the taxpayers of PutnamValley have not been represented or considered by any of the town boards that have sat in the last decade that were secretly and improperly funding the project by over spending in the yearly budgets and contracts. According to the **Fiscal Analysis from Tim Miller Associaters** that was submitted on **January 20, 2020**, the PVFD has been able to save over \$2 million dollars as a direct result of overpayment by the Town in prior years.

However, what they don't discuss is the many hundreds of thousands of dollars that have been spent to date with zero accountability and oversight. This money has been spent on architects, attorneys, engineers, contractors, remediation, etc. and has not been accounted for by the FD in any of their submissions to the Planning Board. I think that before this application proceeds, the FD needs to provide a detailed list of ALL the money they have spent thus far on the project and who exactly has been in charge of administering the millions that they have taken in during the last ten years. This is taxpayer money that is being spent like there's no tomorrow. The supervisor and town board need to DEMAND accountability from the FD before they approve giving them millions more.

Size and scope of project- To get an idea of just how big the new firehouse will be, take a look at the new Peekskill FD building on Main Street that was recently completed. Does anyone really believe that the small town of Putnam Valley needs such a humungous structure that was designed for a populous urban center? Where is the justification for such a building and the 127 parking spaces they want?

Why are no alternatives being presented including a smaller building with fewer amenities?

Fire Department consultants, **Cornerstone Associates** have questioned the need for shared parking with the Ambulance Corps and why so many parking spaces (127) are claimed to be needed when only 54 spaces are required as per local law. No answer so far from the FD, but no worries since they have unlimited funding courtesy of the taxpayers. (Cornerstone Assoc. Preliminary Review, August 19, 2019)

Financing- one way or another, the millions of dollars for this project will be coming from Putnam Valley residential taxpayers. Supervisor Oliverio has announced that there will be no referendum or other public approval of this project even though the FD is contemplating floating a bond which may or may not be legal.

Ten years ago former town attorney Bill Zutt declared:

“The Town Board cannot incur, nor can it guarantee any debt incurred by the Fire Department as a matter of law.” (Public scoping session, 7/12/2010)

Furthermore, aside from a disastrous loan application (2010) that was rejected by FEMA, the Fire Department is not actively seeking grant money or outside funding from other sources. Instead they are placing the entire burden on our residential taxpayers, claiming as always that our costs will be minimal. Tell that to those of us who remember what was said before the high school was built- that it would only be a “cup of coffee” a day. Instead our taxes more than doubled with no apologies or explanation to the community.

What will be done with the old Firehouse and current town hall? Nobody has even mentioned the costs associated with renovating the old firehouse and what the plans are for that building. Over the years we have heard everything from moving the current town hall over to making it a courthouse. Judging by the spending habits of our town leaders, we can be sure that whatever is done will not doubt cost at least another million dollars, probably more.

The Planning Board must insist, as part of the application process, that the Fire Department and Town Board provide detailed plans and cost estimates for the renovation of the current fire station when the new one is built, as well as what other plans there are for the rest of the town center.

Conclusion- the PVFD needs to provide a lot more information about this project including some funding alternatives to alleviate the burden on our homeowners. The Planning Board and Town Board, as lead agencies, owe it to the residents of PutnamValley that they are supposed to serve.

Sincerely,

Patty Villanova