Enfield Fire District No. 1

Our Position on Fire District Consolidation

The Enfield Fire District No. 1 Board of Fire Commissioners recognizes and respects the efforts of the other four fire districts as they pursue consolidation. We share their commitment to providing dependable fire protection and emergency services to the residents of Enfield.

However, as commissioners, we have a responsibility to carefully evaluate how any proposed changes would affect the taxpayers, financial stability, and emergency services of our own district.

At this time, we have not identified sufficient financial or operational benefits to support Enfield Fire District No. 1 joining the proposed consolidation. We believe our residents deserve to understand the considerations behind that position.

Responsible Financial Management and Taxpayer Protection

Enfield Fire District No. 1 has worked diligently to maintain financial stability while meeting the growing demands of emergency services. Through responsible budgeting, long-term planning, and careful management of taxpayer dollars, our district has maintained comparatively low fire tax rates, responsibly managed its financial obligations, and established a planned approach to replacing essential fire apparatus and equipment.

One of our primary concerns regarding consolidation is the potential financial impact on our taxpayers.

Combining districts could also mean sharing responsibility for existing debt, aging apparatus replacement needs, employee benefit obligations, workers' compensation liabilities, and other financial commitments accumulated by participating districts.

Additionally, consolidation does not automatically result in cost savings. Changes to administration, staffing structures, and operations could introduce new expenses that offset anticipated efficiencies.

Before considering consolidation, our taxpayers deserve a comprehensive and transparent financial analysis demonstrating what they would gain, what financial obligations they could assume, and how their future tax rates might be affected.

Without that information, we cannot conclude that consolidation would be financially beneficial to our residents.

Protecting Local Control and Emergency Services

Equally important is maintaining local accountability for decisions affecting fire protection.

Enfield Fire District No. 1 serves a substantial geographic area of the town and has successfully transitioned to 24-hour, seven-day-a-week coverage. This has allowed our department to meet increasing emergency service demands while maintaining dependable protection for the community.

Our district currently makes decisions regarding staffing, equipment, fire stations, budgeting, and emergency response based on the needs of the residents we serve.

Under consolidation, these decisions would be made through a broader governing structure representing multiple districts. While that approach may offer certain advantages, it also raises important questions about local representation, the allocation of resources, and the ability to maintain the service levels our taxpayers currently support.

We would need clear assurances regarding future firehouse operations, staffing levels, response capabilities, and operational standards.

Our residents have invested in a fire district that has planned for its needs and established reliable emergency coverage. Any significant restructuring should demonstrate how those services would be maintained or improved without unnecessarily increasing costs or reducing local accountability.

Collaboration and Creating Efficiencies Does Not Require Consolidation

Although Enfield has five independently governed fire districts, our departments already work together in important ways.

We collaborate through mutual aid, joint training, purchasing, education, and other coordinated efforts that benefit the entire community.

These partnerships allow us to share resources, improve capabilities, and identify efficiencies while maintaining local oversight and financial responsibility.

We remain committed to strengthening these relationships and exploring additional opportunities for cooperation and shared services.

We believe it is important to distinguish between improving cooperation among fire departments and transferring financial and operational responsibility to a consolidated organization.

Important Questions Remain

Before Enfield Fire District No. 1 could responsibly consider joining a consolidated district, several important questions would need clear, documented answers:

- **Taxpayer Impact:** What would be the actual short- and long-term financial impact on our taxpayers, and what verified savings would consolidation produce?
- **Existing Debt and Liabilities:** How would outstanding debt, future apparatus replacement costs, employee benefit obligations, and other liabilities be allocated among the districts?
- **Fire Stations and Emergency Coverage:** What assurances would exist regarding continued firehouse operations, staffing levels, response times, and emergency service standards?
- **Administrative and Operational Costs:** Would consolidation reduce expenses, or would new positions, transition costs, and organizational changes offset anticipated savings?
- **Local Representation and Accountability:** How would our residents retain a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their fire protection, tax dollars, and allocation of emergency resources?

These are fundamental considerations that deserve thorough evaluation before making a decision with potentially significant, long-term consequences.

Our Position Moving Forward

We recognize that each of Enfield's fire districts has its own financial circumstances, operational needs, and challenges. Consolidation may provide meaningful benefits to some districts, and we respect their decisions to pursue that option.

However, what may be beneficial for one district does not necessarily provide the same advantages to another.

Enfield Fire District No. 1 has established a financial and operational structure that we believe serves our residents effectively. We are proud of the progress our department has made and remain committed to responsible financial management, reliable emergency services, and thoughtful planning for the future.

After considering the information currently available, Enfield Fire District No. 1 is declining to participate in the proposed consolidation at this time.

This position does not reflect an opposition to consolidation as a concept or a reluctance to work with our neighboring departments. Rather, it reflects our responsibility to ensure that any significant change provides demonstrable benefits to our taxpayers without compromising emergency services or local accountability.

We remain open to reviewing future proposals supported by comprehensive financial analysis, clearly defined operational standards, and a governance structure that appropriately protects the interests of our residents.

We will continue to monitor consolidation discussions, collaborate with our neighboring districts, and explore opportunities to strengthen fire protection services throughout Enfield.

Our responsibility remains unchanged: to protect the lives and property of our residents, provide reliable emergency services, exercise responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and ensure that the community we serve continues to have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting its future.