

# **TOWN OF HANOVER ADOPTED FIRE DISTRICTS**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How was the assignment of my new Fire District determined?**

Working with the three Fire Districts as defined by the Fire District Task Force (1 – properties within 1000 feet of a hydrant; 2 – properties not served by a hydrant and generally west of Moose Mountain; and 3 – properties generally east of Moose Mountain bounded in the north by the Lyme town line and in the east by the Canaan town line), each parcel of property was evaluated against this criteria. Most properties fell cleanly into one District or another. Parcels were not split between different Fire Districts; rather, the access to the parcel (generally referred to as “frontage”) was used to determine its proximity to a fire hydrant or its placement among the districts east or west of Moose Mountain.

### **Why is the tax rate for those properties east of Moose Mountain lower than those properties west of Moose Mountain?**

The Fire District Task Force felt the area to the east of Moose Mountain represented a special case given the adoption several years ago of a policy restricting development in this area. As stated in documents such as the Town Master Plan, this policy is based largely on the Town’s inability to provide an equivalent level of services, such as fire protection, due to the difficulty accessing the area from the main part of Town.

### **My property was previously in old Fire District #1 and is moving to revised Fire District #2. Why is my tax rate increasing so significantly?**

When the previous Fire Districts were established in the early 1960’s, the Fire Department was very different than it is today. Full-time staffing has increased from 2 to 21 employees, and the effectiveness of pump and water tank capacities and supply hose flow pressure has improved significantly. As investments in these and other improvements were made to increase the level of fire protection services provided to all residents, there was no change in the cost allocation methodology to fairly allocate the impact of these investments among all citizens who benefit.

In short, your tax rate is increasing significantly because your property has not historically shouldered an appropriate share of the costs for improvements in the fire protection system that benefits all citizens; chiefly: an improved readiness response, and fully functioning fire apparatus.

**Will I see the full impact of this fire district reassignment in my November 2007 property tax bill?**

No, you will see roughly 20% of the full impact as the Board of Selectmen has agreed to a 5-year transition period for introducing the tax rate impact of these changes, based on a recommendation by the Fire District Task Force.

**Why is this change being phased in over 5 years?**

In recognition that these changes in Fire Districts will result in meaningful increases in Fire District taxes for some residents in the more rural areas, the Selectmen opted to roll out the full tax impact of the redistricting over five years.

**If I want to learn more about the process of setting the Fire Department budget, which then determines my tax rate, how can I do so?**

The amount of taxes to be raised is set each year when Town Meeting acts upon the Selectmen's Proposed Budget in May. The Fire District Tax Rates for the next billing will be established by the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration in October 2007 based on the reported assessed valuation in each district and the adopted budget at the May 2007 Town Meeting. All citizens are encouraged to attend the Selectmen's Public Hearings on the Budget in late February and early March to provide input on the budget proposed for the Fire Department. During these deliberative sessions and, of course, at Town Meeting, the public can provide direct input into the shaping of the upcoming year's budget and, consequently, the amount of taxes to be raised.

**What are the Hanover Fire Districts and why do they exist?**

The previous four Fire Districts were created at the time the Village Precinct (in-Town Hanover) and the Town of Hanover (Etna Village and rural Hanover) were merged in the early 1960's. These districts were created to recognize that some special services, such as fire protection, benefit certain residents and property owners more directly and to a different degree than others. The Town Charter stipulates that the Selectmen "shall divide the entire Town into two or more fire protection areas in proportion to the fire protection afforded to property owners within each area." Further, the Charter outlines that in devising such fire protection areas, the Selectmen shall consider the distance of each property from a hydrant and the pressure at the hydrant, and the distance of each property from a fire station.

**The four previous Hanover Fire Districts had existed since 1963, why change them now?**

Changes in fire-fighting technology have significantly extended the distance of effective fire suppression from a hydrant; plus, improvements in the water system have nearly eliminated the instances of low pressure hydrants. Where low pressure hydrants do exist, modern fire pumps can effectively boost pressure at the hydrant to insure effective fire

fighting. In addition, there have been major fire suppression improvements in the rural areas of Town through the creation of cisterns, dry hydrants, and the like.

The Fire Districts, and their tax rate basis, have not been modified since originally established though the key factors used to differentiate among the districts (location of the main fire station and hydrant capacities and locations) have materially changed in that period. In addition, during that time the Town has moved from an all volunteer department to a predominantly professional/paid department with significantly more capable equipment. The definition of the previous Fire Districts was antiquated and did not allow for a rational allocation of costs between the Districts. Over time, as we have invested in more fire-fighting personnel, there has not been the mechanism to insure that all property owners are contributing their fair share to an improved level of fire protection readiness.

**Why not eliminate the notion of separate Fire Districts altogether and handle the funding of fire protection services the same as police protection services (that is, through the General Fund municipal tax rate?)**

Unlike Police protection, for example, which provides a consistent level of service to all Hanover residents, Fire protection service is significantly different in those instances where the Hanover Fire Department can access the hydrant system and where they cannot. This distinction in the level of fire protection where there is an accessible hydrant and where there is not is also often reflected in homeowner's insurance premiums, which oftentimes will be lower where there is a fire hydrant nearby. And finally, the Town Charter, which reflects the merger of two communities, calls for a minimum of two Fire Districts. In order to eliminate the Fire Districts, the Town Charter would need to be amended.