



FROM MAPLE SHADE TOWNSHIP

March 24th, 2024

Despite learning this week that it will be back in service and that its petition is no longer necessary, the leadership of the Independent Fire Company No. 1 (IFC) felt a need to issue an inflammatory statement that disregards the truth of what occurred during the mediation process. We want to address each of the unfounded accusations. It is disheartening that our Fire Department will reopen with such contempt. Rest assured that the Township will do its utmost to ensure a smooth reopening and that our Fire Department delivers the necessary services to our community.

Fiction: *One of the first demands of council was for Chief Andrew Simonsick to step down as Chief of IFC1*

Fact: The Township did not issue a demand for Mr. Simonsick to resign as Chief of the Independent Fire Company No. 1. On June 22nd, 2023, the State of New Jersey Division of Fire Safety revoked Mr. Simonsick's licenses permanently due to conduct deemed revocable.

Fiction: *On the second day of mediation council and its solicitor brought an unfounded claim of racism and misogynistic membership practices against IFC1*

Fact: The Township informed the court that allegations were raised by an individual within the IFC regarding violations of the State discrimination laws by the Independent Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 (IFC). On December 28, 2020 an outside firm was engaged to investigate these allegations. This investigation revealed serious complaints and, as a result of these findings, Mr. Simonsick, Sr. was directed to provide sensitivity and inclusivity training to all officers and members as there was evidence that violations may have occurred. To date there has been no confirmation of such training.

Fiction: *Town Council requested IFC1 obtain a Club License for any events where it was purchasing alcohol.*

Fact: The Town Council indeed required (and the court agreed) that the IFC obtain a Club License, as it had in the past, to allow its service or sale of alcohol in the firehouse. In the August 2021 Memorandum of Understanding with the Township, the IFC leadership agreed it would secure a club license but never did so. During the mediation, the mediator and court appointed 3rd party neutral consistently confirmed that the IFC was moving forward with the license application. Yet, in the final days of mediation, the IFC asserted that it did not need a license because it would no longer be holding events where alcohol was served or sold. The Township



agreed that if the IFC provided confirmation from the State that a license wasn't needed, given the IFC's new policy on alcohol, that would resolve the issue.

Fiction: *Related to alcohol and discipline....there was a video that has been circulated of younger members on the roof after a fatal fire.*

Fact: The video referenced by the IFC leadership was recorded on February 20, 2021 and posted by its own members on social media. It shows IFC members holding beer bottles while one member, dressed only in underwear, runs along the snow and ice-covered roof. Whether or not disciplinary action was taken remains unconfirmed, as the IFC leadership has never responded to the municipality as to whether any action was taken. Given that the Township of Maple Shade insures the building, covers all worker's compensation insurance and rents a portion of the building where these actions occurred, the IFC leadership's casual dismissal of the gravity of these actions raises concerns on its own.

Fiction: *Town Council requested a physical key for access to the leased section of the firehouse.*

Fact: The Township did want a physical key, especially where the fobs had been unworkable in the past.

Fiction: *Town Council wanted access to a bathroom as there was not one in the area that it was leasing. The IFC1 quickly provided a solution where the adjacent bathroom to leased space could be cordoned off and used as a unisex bathroom as there was a lock on the door.*

Fact: As recognized by the court, the IFC needed to provide the Township, with bathroom access for the men and women firefighters. The IFC leadership did not want non-IFC firefighters using bathrooms in the firehouse outside of the area rented by the Township. Their solution was to tell the Township they could build the necessary bathrooms. The Township has been renting the same space in the firehouse since the mid-1980's but the IFC leadership has now decided the Township cannot use that space, leaving the non-IFC volunteers with only one (1) one-stall bathroom, no sink or showers and a small space to use as a duty room.

Fiction: *On multiple occasions through the mediation process the township mediation team failed to respond to questions from the judge, this led the judge to continue on without their responses in an attempt to not drag out mediation. After final documents were complete and posted to the mediation teams the township wanted to know why they were not a part of the final drafts, this led the judge to prepare a lengthy timeline outlining the several times the township failed to answer emails and questions.*



Fact: It was the IFC leadership that took extended periods to respond on the development of the SOP's, the proposed lease space and the disclosure of its position on the liquor license. There was no "lengthy timeline" prepared by the judge outlining deficiencies on the part of the Township.

Fiction: *The Township decided to quit mediations and filed its complaint of bias against the judge.*

Fact: After ten weeks of mediation and weekly conferences with the judge, the Township withdrew from the mediation process as there was no progress on the essential issues. There was no "bias" complaint filed.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- ✓ *The IFC Firefighters will be back in service with the rest of the Maple Shade Fire Department in the coming weeks.*
- ✓ *The Township had proposed a plan for the Township Fire Department where the IFC firefighters would be back in service and operating out of the firehouse and receiving rent from the Township. The other Township firefighters would be based in another location so there was no issue of "outsiders" in the IFC firehouse. Stipends would be available for all firefighters. The IFC leadership rejected this plan.*
- ✓ *There was a petition filed to overturn Ordinance 2023-23. The Township advised the court and counsel for the IFC that the Ordinance will be repealed by the Township Council meaning there is no need for the petition; the relief the petition sought (repeal of the Ordinance) is being provided by Council.*

Township of Maple Shade