

Sleepy Hollow Fire Department

Dear residents,

I hope this letter finds you well. The Sleepy Hollow Volunteer Fire Department has been 100% volunteer since 1876. As long-time residents of this village, our members have volunteered their time to render invaluable services for the past 135 years. We will always, no matter the circumstances, continue to serve the residents of Sleepy Hollow.

We have a flag attached to one of our fire trucks that has a thin red line and a thin blue line going through it. This flag, which we placed on the firetruck in 2020, is a memorial flag that is solely meant to honor the Firefighters and Police Officers who have died while serving their community in the line of duty. The flag represents Firefighters such as the 343 who died on September 11, 2001 and most recently the three who died in a house fire in Baltimore on January 24, 2022. But it also represents the NYPD Officers who were killed last month while responding to a domestic incident in NYC. The flag is not a political statement, but a coping mechanism for our members. It helps them endure through tragic events, rationalize the risks we voluntarily take as part of service and honor and memorialize those that paid the ultimate sacrifice.

On July 27, 2021, the Village Board of Trustees passed a resolution prohibiting any symbols, images, objects, words, or phrases to be displayed on any Village owned vehicle unless authorized by the Village Board. The Fire Department was not directly advised of this resolution until four months later, on November 3, 2021. The memorandum states "Please have this symbol removed from these vehicles **or** seek authorization from the Village Board to have it displayed." On November 9, 2021, we wrote a letter in response to the memorandum, seeking authorization to have the flag on our trucks. It has been over three months since we have asked, and we have yet to receive a response from the Board of Trustees.

Instead of creating a response, the mayor took it upon himself without involving the board, to write a letter to the community. I would have expected the mayor to outline a balanced and fair representation of the situation but unfortunately the personal opinions and biases of Ken Wray prevailed. We are appalled by Ken Wray's utilization of this topic for political maneuvering utilizing a proprietary platform where we are unable to discuss or respond. We are disappointed that we were painted in a way that makes it seem as though we are "pro-Blue Lives Matter" and "anti-Black Lives Matter". We were hoping for an opportunity at an open dialogue, but that was quickly shut down.

We, as your volunteer firefighters and fellow residents do not wish to create a further divide. We agree with the mayor that we want to work together to unite Sleepy Hollow, the place we call home. We pride ourselves in being a diverse group whose membership represents all aspects of the community. As I stated at the public board meeting on Tuesday, February 8, 2022, our department is made up of "Hispanic, White, African American, gay, straight, bi-sexual... we are the rainbow of this Village."

We want our residents to know that the mission of the Sleepy Hollow Fire Department will never be compromised. We will continue to protect life and property from the adverse effects of fire, and exposure to dangerous conditions created by nature or man. We will continue to respond to emergencies in a professional and courteous manner. Ethical values will remain the core of every decision made by each member of the department. Despite how we are labeled, we are still going to perform our duties as we have taken an oath to do. To protect you, the residents of Sleepy Hollow.

We patiently wait for the Mayor and Board of Trustees to provide us direction on how to proceed with the flag.

Sincerely yours,

Chief of Department,
John E. Korzelius