

# WCM

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company is correct, the 11th year would have been in the mid-80s, and he doesn't understand why the fire company waited so long to make an issue of ownership.

McPherson said the borough included a lease agreement into the legislation naming them as the official fire company. He said he has no problem with a lease, but he doesn't understand why the borough ties their recognition to a lease.

Fire Captain Bob Elwell said lawyers are now making the issue overly complicated. He said the fire company has been covered by municipal insurance for 30 years, and the borough should recognize them officially and pave the way for grant money to be received.

Fire officials are also at loggerheads with the commissioners over the issue of the "all call" procedure.

McPherson said he joined with the fire chiefs in Cape May, Cape May Point and the Coast Guard Base to form an association of fire chiefs. Later, he said, the Erma and Town Bank fire companies joined and they named it the Lower Cape May Fire Chiefs Association. He said it was at an association meeting where the chiefs discussed an

All Call procedure, where when a fire alarm was sounded, all companies would respond because the closest company might be in an adjoining community.

"We tried it for a year and it wasn't working," McPherson said.

McPherson said there were too many fire vehicles responding to a fire and it was actually slowing the response. As a result, the fire company decided to put All Call on the shelf.

McPherson emphasized that doing away with all call did not affect mutual aid agreements already in place.

Burke said in late February 2007, he received a call from Lt. Robert Sheehan from the Cape May Police Department, who told him he was concerned about public safety due to the West Cape May Fire Company abandoning the All Call procedure. Burke said Sheehan had a concern not only for general safety, but for his officers, who are probably the first to arrive at any fire. He said without fire fighting apparatus, the officers might be forced to endanger their own lives in order to rescue someone from a burning building.

Burke said the longer it took for firefighters to respond, the more risk the officers faced. Burke said the Cape May Fire Department,

because it has full-time firefighters, usually has a quicker response to a fire in West Cape May than the volunteers. Burke said Cape May wanted him, as director of public safety, to order the fire company to participate in the All Call procedure.

"The volunteer fire company has always felt they were independent and didn't answer to anyone at borough hall," Burke said. "They always felt they knew what is best in terms of fire fighting, that's their purview, and I wouldn't argue with that."

Burke said McPherson was indignant the police called him and felt it was not borough business. He said the all call procedure was an agreement between chiefs and was operated on a trial basis. He said McPherson said there were some problems with All Call but they could be tweaked.

On Tuesday, McPherson said All Call could be reinstated, but the kinks had not been worked out, and not having it didn't affect fire companies giving mutual aid.

"The service is the same as the community has gotten in the past. We still get 100 percent of what we had without All Call," McPherson said.

Resolving the lease and all call procedures would not eliminate all points of contention between the fire company and the governing body. The fire company says it needs 30 parking spaces for

firefighters personal vehicles when they respond to a fire call. The fire officials said during the Farmers Markets held on Tuesdays in the summer there were no parking spaces for firefighters until they started roping off spaces.

The borough has also asked for access to the fire company's books, which their lawyer advised them they don't need to do.

"Anything they give us, they write checks for," Elwell said. "So they have a record of every dime they have ever spent."

As far as the funds raised by the fire company, they believe it is a private organization and doesn't have to account to the borough for how it is spent. However, they wished to go on record as having raised and spent \$41,500 to outfit the kitchen for the rental hall - the payment for which is about one hall rental; \$35,400 for a tool van; \$30,000 for a non-skid bay floor as required by OSHA; \$35,000 to refurbish a 30-year-old pumper; \$6,500 for an air station to fill the air bottles required for all firefighters; and \$5,000 for a Suburban purchased from the city of Cape May.

"None of that cost the taxpayers a dime," Elwell said.

Burke said the board of commissioners budgeted \$60,000 for the fire company in 2008. He said they also budgeted \$20,000 for insur-



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## Raise

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The Teamsters Union Local 676 member will receive another 3.8 percent for 2008, and 3.7 in 2009 and 2010.

Township manager Joe Jackson said the AFSCME

contract was settled earlier in the year, so contracts have been settled for all township employees. Jackson said the township has been negotiating with the unions for the better part of a year - the police and Teamsters have been working without a con-

tract since Jan. 1. The unions ratified the contracts prior to them being authorized by council.

Jackson said the township had worked out a number of givebacks, including lower starting wages for Teamsters Union members, and higher

co-pays for health insurance.

The vote to authorize the contracts came after only a 30-minute closed session meeting, but Jackson said council had been kept abreast of the contract negotiation process for the better part of a year.

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