

Good Morning / Afternoon Members of the Planning & Development Committee.

My name is Roger Alsbaugh

1. I am a seated Fire Commissioner on the Board of the Thompsonville Fire District, one year into my 2<sup>nd</sup> 3-year term
2. I have a degree in Planning and Archaeology and worked as an assistant planner for the Town of Enfield
3. I am committed to Thompsonville in general and the Fire District in particular. I have purchased two historic residential properties, live in one of them, and have invested over \$500,000 in the acquisition and rehabilitation of those two properties.

I support the taxpayers of the fire district (who elected me 3 to 1) and our fire fighters, personally and as a fire commissioner.

It is important that you folks understand the actual issues involved. Yes, it about getting our vote back. But it is all about why and how that vote was taken away.

Over the last six years fire commissioners have spent over \$800,000 on three iterations of proposed fire houses, including the present one, without voter approval.

The first proposal was for a more than \$7 million structure on a property of which half is in a flood zone and partially covered with water each year! The people complained and demanded the board stop spending such sums of money the electors had not approved. The proposal was eliminated.

Even though directed by the voters to stop spending money without a vote by the voters, the board proceeded with a second proposal for a more than \$5 million fire house on a piece of property that was illegal for the use class – the proposed could not be waived by Planning & Zoning and could not be varied by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Yet all boards, commissions, advisory committees and even the Town Council approved the application. The voters voted down the budget and the proposal failed even though approved by all town agencies.

All this development planning cost money – money for 3 major projects that the people had never approved. Frustrated twice in a desire to force a firehouse down the throats of the people, two members of the board decided to take away the vote on the budget the people had practiced for more than 35 years without my input. It was not until I had agreed to move forward purchasing the property for the building on my assumption the people would be voting that I was informed they were not taking it to a vote. Regardless, I felt secure the people would deal with the issue when they voted on the budget. Color me surprised on the night of the annual meeting when the people were not allowed to vote on the budget. I of course voted against the budget.

Currently there is a law suit to get our vote returned; that is still going through the court system, now in the appeals stage. While that is yet to be resolved we are pursuing the legislative process to get back the vote as recommended by our attorney and our state representative.

Bottom line – this began as a grass-roots effort to stop an unresponsive administration (the Board of Fire Commissioners) manipulating line items in the budget for a major capital improvement project that was not approved by the taxpayers and voters of the district.

This was a fight to gain control of the board and fix what was wrong.

I can not support Raised House Bill No. 5541 as amended under Section 1. Section 1 should not mention seating in July without stating that subsequently ALL commissioners elected at an annual meeting shall be seated at the end of the annual meeting, and that the new Chairman and the Secretary/Treasurer should also be voted on by the new board at the end of the annual meeting agenda. Requiring these two things to occur at the end of the annual meeting agenda will provide a full, 5-member board prepared for any subsequent special or regular meeting and in order that all commissioners are able to serve full 3-year terms.

It should also state that in 2014 and beyond the top vote getters will serve 3-year terms and the 3<sup>rd</sup> top vote getter shall serve for two years prior to subsequent 3-year terms. The intent is to ensure the voters need not vote for more than two commissioners at any subsequent annual meeting (2, 2 & 1).

I also can not support Raised House Bill No. 5541 Section 2, as amended under subsection b as amended at the request of the Fire Fighters Association and the Fire Chiefs Association. The reasons for their requests are neither pertinent to the intent of the voters request for their vote back nor are they valid. Any amendment reference to a percentage of yearly budget change below which voters will not be allowed to vote should be removed.

Any issues of fireman safety and job security are properly discussed and settled under the contract negotiation process and have no business being inserted into this process.

The voters have historically supported the fire fighters and approved budgets that have fully funded their safety and equipment needs. The one time a budget was voted down was to stop a new building that was approved illegally and the money for which was never approved by the people.

The right of the electors of the Thompsonville Fire District to vote on the budget should be returned unencumbered by any restrictions or limitations. Only with such a right will we be able to stop the abuse of the budgetary process, fix what has gone wrong in the past, and create safeguards to prevent future abuses to the best of our ability.

I thank the Committee for its attention and kind consideration of these statements.