

June 8th 2020

Dear President Collum and Board of Trustees

Unfortunately it has become necessary for the Police and Fire Departments to respond to the almost constant falsehoods being put forth by Village President Collum and now, unfortunately, this board of Trustees. The last thing any Police Officer or Firefighter wants to do is become involved in politics. We want to come to work and concentrate on doing our jobs; keeping the citizens safe and hopefully returning home to our families with our health intact. We cannot however sit idly by while the health and safety of Village residents and the first responders who serve them is jeopardized.

In order for there to be any semblance of a harmonious relationship moving forward, the foundation of this relationship has to be based on truth. President Collum stated "The fire contract was settled some time ago and any request was not retro so there would be parity among all employees to be fair." The contract was not settled "some time ago", it was settled on April 16th exactly one week before The Village and their attorneys issued the ultimatum.

Collum also stated "It was, to me, heartbreaking to learn that during these discussions, some individuals within police and fire unions offered up other people's jobs, even going as far to say that we don't need a public library." We are not sure who these "individuals" are but we would like to reiterate what was stated in one of our previous communications. Staffing is the sole responsibility of the governing body; there is no legal way any of the negotiating units could have "offered up" another employee's job. This statement is either disingenuous or demonstrates a concerning lack of knowledge. Many suggestions were made as to possible budgetary alternatives, in our last public statement and more will be made, in the future, if this unfortunate conversation continues. The Library and or SOPAC are and were not among any of these suggestions.

President Collum also wants to frame this as a new and COVID-19 related issue and it is not. The staffing levels at the Fire Department have been dangerously low for the entirety of President Colum's tenure. Members of the negotiating committees have begged for years just to have retiring firefighters replaced to merely maintain staffing levels previously set by the Board of Trustees. Ms. Collum has recently adopted a "blame Civil Service" excuse for the lack of hiring. This is patently untrue and can be easily proven so if President Collum wishes to continue to push this narrative. A new list of young Villagers came out in March of 2019, during a great economy a year before COVID-19, and no one has been hired. This understaffing has a severely detrimental effect on both the residents and particularly the Firefighters.

In closing, her letter states "Regardless of the combative nature of these letters/press releases, I still (and we still) remain grateful to all first responders in addition to our healthcare workers

and essential employees". Just to be clear, we do not find any of President Collum's letters or press releases to be combative, just incredibly lacking in candor. As most learn at a very young age, there is a difference between saying something and actually doing it. One doesn't purposefully short staff a department, putting its member's health at risk, during a great economy, then threaten them with pay freezes and more layoffs, when a crisis hits, if they "appreciate and support" them. We desperately need President Collum and the Board of Trustees to truly support us in additions to just saying they do.

From the Membership

NJFMBA Locals 40 and 240