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2 INSPECTORS CONTINUE COURT FIGHT FOR LOST JOBS

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Two zoning officers whose posts were axed in Upper Saddle River are appealing a judge's decision to dismiss their claim that they wrongfully lost their jobs when the town switched to a regional service. [REDACTED] of Mahwah and [REDACTED] of Ridgefield Park were dismissed last year when Upper Saddle River decided to scrap its building department and join a regional code enforcement department based in Hillsdale.

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] sued Upper Saddle River and Hillsdale to get their jobs back, saying they were illegally fired.

They argued that borough officials ignored their tenure as well as their status as volunteer firefighters. They cited a 1970 state statute forbidding volunteer firefighters from being fired from governmental jobs for political reasons, court papers say.

But in June, Superior Court Judge Lawrence D. Smith in Hackensack dismissed [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] claim, saying the town has a right to provide a regionalized service to its residents, even if it means disbanding a department, said Thomas Randall, Hillsdale's borough attorney.

"The judge felt there was no improper motive," said Randall of the decision to uphold the regionalized system.

"It's a very old statute and old fashioned," he added of the exempt firemen statute.



Late last week, **Michael Beatrice**, an attorney representing the two inspectors, filed an appeal with the Appellate Division of Superior Court in Trenton.

"Frankly, I find it appalling that long-term employees with a history of dedicated service to the community can be discarded so easily," he said.

■, a full-time inspector in Mahwah's building department, worked more than five years as Upper Saddle River's part-time fire subcode official. ■, who works part-time jobs as an inspector, spent more than five years as the borough's plumbing code official before the borough axed the department.

An Upper Saddle River official said the regionalized system, which includes Hillsdale, Allendale, and Westwood, is serving the town better than the previous arrangement.

"Now we're making money and servicing our people with more hours during the week," Councilman Allan Greenberg said.

Hillsdale Borough Hall serves as the headquarters for the "interlocal" zoning operation. Contractors and Allendale property owners pick up and submit applications for building permits at an office staffed by more than 10 full-time and part-time inspectors for fire prevention, construction, and plumbing.

Upper Saddle River signed a contract with Hillsdale, and borough residents now use the regional department, for which the borough pays Hillsdale \$120,000 a year.

In Allendale, a former zoning officer sued the borough and Hillsdale in federal court after his building department was scrapped earlier this year. He says he was denied due process when the borough sacked him to merge with Hillsdale's zoning office.

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