

# CLOSE

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to fires in the 2nd Ward will not suffer, said Lynch.

Currently, the engine company from the Remsen Avenue firehouse is backed up by the engine company from headquarters and — as of two-months ago — by the engine from the Rutgers Village firehouse as well.

Yesterday, as a reporter was visiting Caltaldi's Pharmacy, the Remsen Avenue engine left the station in response to a fire call. Less than half a minute later, the engine from headquarters sped by on Suydam Street, followed a bit later by the ladder truck from headquarters.

Marcinczyk said the headquarters' engine takes 20 to 30 seconds longer to respond to most 2nd Ward fires than the Remsen Avenue engine. The response to yesterday's fire alarm demonstrated that this is true.

Councilman Edwin G. Carman takes the view that a 20- to 30-second loss in response time when the Remsen Avenue firehouse is closed could be critical. "The only thing a fireman has going for him is time, and response time is absolutely critical. It may be only seconds, but that's a little bit longer yet on top of going to 911."

Carman, who is an informal spokesman for the needs of the low- and moderate-income families who live in the 2nd Ward, noted that when the fire alarm boxes at curbside were removed and the city switched entirely to the 911 emergency telephone number for fire alarms, response time around the city was lengthened by a few seconds.

To Lynch, the answer is clear. He wants the city to save as much money as possible in preparation for the critical budget year of 1982 — a year when sharply diminished federal and state aid will be evident.

Because money can be saved by transferring Engine Company 4 and because Harkins and his aides have assured him that public safety will not be

impaired, Lynch said he opted for the experimental closing of the fire station.

The Fire Department "is way over budget in overtime," said Lynch, noting that the less that can be spent this year, the less need for emergency appropriations near the end of this year that would have to be funded out of the 1982 budget.

Lynch noted that more than six high-ranking firemen are on terminal leave and are being paid costly accumulated benefits for long periods. Under the contracts with Fire Department personnel, the city must continue to pay what in effect are high salaries for non-working employees, he said. Until the terminal leave ends for these men a few months from now, the city cannot afford to hire any new firemen, he said.

Meanwhile, the department is understaffed because the city cannot afford to replace the officers who are still being paid on terminal leave. So overtime — at the time-and-a-half rate — mounts.

"Taking the firehouse away from that neighborhood is definitely not a good idea," said Charles Toth, president of Local 17 of the Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association. "The station has been there so many years that the people, more or less, rely on it."

Toth said the administration should be replacing the retirees because "we are undermanned."

Lynch said that new firefighters likely will be hired within the next few months, but this will not automatically mean the Remsen Avenue station can be reopened. When the 1982 budget is completed next April, the cost savings of the preceding four to five months can be evaluated to help determine the future status of the station, he said.

Lynch said he is certain that fire insurance rates of 2nd Ward homeowners will not go up. Despite the presence of "a lot of old wood-frame houses," he said, the competence of the Fire Department and the fact that it is full time, in contrast to those in other Middlesex County municipalities, gives the city a good fire rating.