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Forks Township supervisors donate funds to local charity, Safe Harbor after cancelling annual Christmas party

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By SARAH WOJCIK

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FORKS TWP. | Funds normally reserved for the township's annual Christmas party will be donated to the Safe Harbor shelter this year.

The resolution Thursday to donate the \$2,000 did not sit well with Supervisor Erik Chuss, who believes the township should use the money to help pay its debt.

He said the party was not canceled to make altruistic donations, but rather to help the ailing financial state of the township.

"The initial intent was to relieve the tax burden on residents of Forks Township," Chuss said. "I think to give that money to a charity is an injustice not just to employees, but an injustice to residents."

The township's debt as of Thursday stood at about \$7 million, according to Supervisor Robert Egolf.

"We're not setting a precedent. We're simply saying we know food bank shelves are empty and many more are seeking help," said Egolf, who introduced the resolution to donate the funds.

Chuss feared a resulting snowball effect from the contribution, bringing other charities to Forks Township looking for help.

Chairman David Howell said if national charities come to the board he will turn them down, but local agencies are different. He spoke strongly of the integrity of Safe Harbor.

"Two years ago, I was on the board and was embarrassed that we stopped supporting not-for-profits in our community," Howell said.

In November, Katharine Watt, senior planner with Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley Inc., made a municipal funds appeal to the township for \$5,634. The board did not immediately respond with any pledges to contribute.

In 2007, 11 residents of Forks Township took advantage of shelters in the Valley, according to a shelter census by CACLV. Two of those residents used Safe Harbor.

Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas wasn't sure whether to support the donation, but decided the need to help such agencies is stronger than ever.

"We don't know how many people will have to go to Safe Harbor," she said.

Howell, Nicholas, Egolf and Donald Miller voted "yes" to the donation, while Chuss voted "no."

Watt said though the township's donation was exclusive to Safe Harbor, she is very grateful to see any contributions officials in Forks can spare.

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