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Forks plan keeps taxes steady

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By SARAH MAUSOLF
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FORKS TWP. | Supervisors passed a tentative budget that calls for holding the line on taxes for the 10th straight year.

The draft calls for spending about \$7.4 million in 2006, up from \$6.6 million spent this year.

Revenues are expected to reach nearly \$6.6 million, up from \$6.5 million this year. To close a gap between revenues and expenses, the township will use \$1.4 million in savings left over from this year.

Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas cast the lone "no" vote, saying she opposes giving salaried employees a blanket 4 percent raise.

Earlier, she proposed awarding raises based on merit, like a private company. Nicholas argued police Chief Greg Dorney should earn a higher raise than some other employees because he steered the department toward accreditation.

But a majority of the board argued the township should inform employees ahead of time if they are going to base raises on performance. And with budget deadlines pending, they wanted to stick with a uniform raise. Nicholas said the nine salaried employees without contracts earn a combined \$400,000.

Supervisors Chairman John Ackerman voted for the tentative budget, but agreed the 4-percent raises are steep. He wants to look into trimming the raises, saying he wants to save money for the township.

The budget calls for spending \$3.6 million for salaries next year, up from \$2.9 million this year.

Plans include doubling the number of corporals at the police department, bringing the total to four. Salaries and benefits for those positions will cost the township \$108,000.

The township currently levels a 4.6-mill property tax rate. A mill represents \$1 in tax for every \$1,000 in assessed property value. The owner of a home assessed for tax purposes at \$50,000 now pays \$230 in property taxes. Final adoption is scheduled for Dec. 15.

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