

From The Morning Call

July 22, 2006

Supervisors approve deal for ex-manager

Forks officials also designate emergency services provider.

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Forks Township supervisors Thursday night approved a severance package for former Manager Cathy Kichline that includes just over \$13,500 for wages and unused vacation and personal days.

In an unrelated matter, supervisors also were updated on the continuance of emergency medical services in the township in the wake of the suspension of operations earlier this week by the Forks Township Emergency Squad.

Kichline, 45, of Upper Nazareth Township, was fired July 10 at a special meeting called by township supervisors, and the dismissal followed a nearly three-hour executive session. The reasons for her dismissal have not been made public, but Township Solicitor Karl Kline has said she was not fired for any willful misconduct. Under the Second Class Township Code, supervisors can fire a manager with or without cause. The resolution approving the severance package reiterates earlier comments that Kichline was fired "in order to move the township in a new direction."

After an executive session late Thursday, supervisors voted 3-1 to approve the severance deal, worked out between Kline and Kichline's lawyer, Lawrence B. Fox of Bethlehem. Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas voted against the package, and later declined comment. Supervisor John Ackerman was absent from Thursday's meeting.

Fox attended the July 10 meeting and Thursday's meeting on Kichline's behalf. In addition to pay, the agreement extends Kichline's health insurance benefits through Sept. 30.

The severance pact, in which both sides assented not to discuss her dismissal, must still be signed by Kichline. The deal also includes an agreement that releases the township from any claims related to Kichline's employment or firing.

Kichline was hired in September 2002 and was set to make \$65,936 this year, according to the township budget.

On the ambulance front, supervisors formally designated Suburban Emergency Medical Services as its emergency medical services provider. The move is expected to be temporary while the Forks Township Emergency Squad develops a plan to restart operations.

The Forks squad suspended operations Tuesday in the wake of reported financial problems, the extent of which have not been publicly detailed. Suburban EMS, of Palmer Township, is staffing the Forks station on Sullivan Trail and responding to emergency medical calls in the township and neighboring Stockertown. Some full-time Forks squad personnel have been hired by Suburban to ensure adequate staffing levels.

Township police have confirmed an investigation involving the organization. Bill Carver, advanced life support coordinator for the Forks squad, said Wednesday the police probe involved "financial matters" but was not more specific. Carver said Wednesday he expected the Forks squad to have a financial restructuring plan in place in 60 days and anticipated it would return to serving the township.

He told township supervisors Thursday that the squad was not capable of providing service "for a couple of different reasons that I can't get into right now." The Forks squad operates independently of township government, but receives an annual contribution. This year, the township gave \$15,000.

"I must say there has been no drop in coverage at all," said Nicholas. "[Suburban EMS] stepped up to the plate right away." Suburban EMS Executive Director Barry Albertson Jr. said his organization would honor subscriptions of Forks residents to the Forks squad.

Supervisor Chairman David Hoff urged the Forks squad to consider all alternatives, including regionalization.

"Six or seven years ago, I was an advocate for a merger between Forks and Medic-9 and that did not take place," Hoff said. "I was opposed to Forks Township [squad] becoming the sole [Advanced Life Support] provider here in Forks Township, not because I didn't believe they could provide the service to the citizens. I didn't think our community was large enough to support a single ALS/[basic life support] unit."

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