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Forks aims to hold tax rate steady

Township officials will ask departments to pare spending for next year.

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Forks Township will ask its department heads to do some cutting as it continues to prepare its 2007 budget with an eye toward avoiding a tax hike.

Township Finance Manager James Farley said next year's general fund budget should be similar to this year's budget of about \$7 million. He said items in this year's budget related to the construction of the municipal complex won't be in next year's budget, but will be replaced by some capital purchases, particularly in public works.

This year's budget kept the real estate tax millage rate at 4.6 mills for the 10th straight year, meaning a home assessed at \$50,000 pays \$230 in real estate taxes.

Farley said there is about a \$300,000 gap between requested expenditures and projected revenues. "We're going to try to get to zero if we can," he said.

Farley said the Finance and Administration Committee was adamant about not raising property taxes and was sure the rest of the board was in agreement. He said the township could dig into its cash carry-over if necessary, but not for the full amount of the current budget gap.

He said the township typically figures conservatively on revenues and aggressively on expense levels. He said tax revenues this year have been running ahead of projections because of growth. Supervisors will hold a budget workshop Nov. 13.

At their next meeting, supervisors likely will consider a 5-year plan for the Police Department. Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas, chairwoman of the Public Safety Committee, said the plan, which calls for possibly 11 additional officers over the next five years to meet potential growth, does not commit the township to anything. "It's just a guide. It's not set in stone," Nicholas said after the meeting.

Two additional officers are being considered for next year, which Nicholas said would allow an officer on each shift to be devoted to traffic enforcement. The plan calls for four police vehicles to be purchased next year, something Nicholas said was still in the tentative budget.

In other business, supervisors voted to temporarily suspend monthly township Youth Sports Organization student dances at the community center after receiving a complaint from a resident about inappropriate behavior at the events, specifically sexually suggestive dancing. Supervisors said they'll meet with YSO officers over the concerns.

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