

From The Morning Call
November 17, 2006

Forks poised to keep tax rate steady

Supervisors approve proposed budget that adds 2 police officers.

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Forks has managed to hold the line on the township property tax for the 11th straight year.

Township supervisors on Thursday approved the introduction of the proposed 2007 budget of just more than \$7 million, a spending plan that keeps the local property tax rate at 4.6 mills and adds two police officers.

The lack of a local real estate tax hike in the proposed budget didn't come as a surprise. Township Finance Manager James Farley in September said he was hopeful the tax rate would remain steady. Expenditures this year will total about \$6.85 million, Farley said.

At the current tax rate, the owner of a property assessed at \$50,000 pays \$230 to the township. The Northampton County assessment office said the current median residential property assessment in Forks is \$65,800, a level that would bring a local property tax bill of \$302.68.

Forks, according to census figures released in July, was the second-fastest growing municipality in the state since 2000, trailing only Lower Macungie Township. Forks now has more than 13,000 residents.

The additional full-time police officers are included in the Police Department's proposed five-year plan, a document that will be discussed further in a work session in January. It proposes an additional 11 officers over the next five years, including the two for next year.

The police plan also proposes the purchase of modular furniture over the next several years to better use space in the newly expanded police station on Sullivan Trail. Forks now has 20 full-time officers.

The police plan also said township growth has directly affected call volume, sending it from 3,428 in 1999 to 7,012 last year. As of late June, the plan said the call volume was already 580 over the same time last year. The plan also calls for a more aggressive vehicle replacement program and the 2007 budget provides for four new police cars.

Real estate tax revenues are forecast at \$2.1 million next year, up from an expected \$1.9 million this year. Real estate transfer tax revenue is expected to remain level, at about \$800,000. Earned income tax revenue is projected at \$1.64 million next year, compared to a forecast of nearly \$1.6 million this year. Building permits should bring \$343,500 in 2007, compared to a projected year-end total of about \$225,000 this year.

The township had some breathing room in the proposed 2007 budget because of the completion this year of the \$10 million municipal complex, which included a new municipal building and fire station, and an expanded police station.

Farley had said that some items included in this year's budget for the construction project won't be necessary next year. As an example, the township no longer needs a construction manager.

Supervisors hope to adopt the final budget on Dec. 21.

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