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## **Forks Township holds taxes at same level for 10th year Board tentatively adopts draft plan.**

By Joe Nixon  
Of The Morning Call

Forks Township's proposed 2006 budget, riding a wave of continued strong development, will keep municipal property taxes at 4.6 mills for the 10th straight year.

The draft spending plan was tentatively adopted Thursday by township supervisors. The township property tax for a home assessed at \$50,000 will continue at \$230. Final budget adoption is set for Dec. 15. Supervisors voted 4-1 for tentative adoption, pending further review of funding requests from the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley and the Forks Emergency Squad.

Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas dissented, saying she continued to disagree with 4 percent across-the-board raises given to salaried employees who are not part of negotiated union contracts. An evaluation process will be used for non-contract raises in 2007.

Forks proposes spending just under \$7 million next year, up from the \$6.57 million originally proposed for this year. The revenue side of the budget anticipates a \$723,169 cash surplus at the end of next year.

According to Township Manager Cathy Kichline, the total property assessment in Forks at the end of this year will increase an estimated \$26 million over the Jan. 1 level to just over \$429 million. Real estate taxes, at \$1.71 million for 2004, are forecast to hit \$1.89 million this year and grow to \$1.94 million in 2006. Real estate transfer taxes, from property sales, are expected to grow by \$50,000 next year to \$900,000.

The township also expects to take in \$220,000 in building permit fees this year, a figure that will remain relatively unchanged next year.

Growth has not been limited to new homes or businesses.

With the completion of the new township municipal building next month, the township will have finished the balance of \$10 million in capital projects that included the expansion of the township police station and construction of a new fire station. The township budget message said another \$1.9 million was spent this year on swale improvements and a new sewage pump station.

Over half the budget is fixed costs for salaries, benefits and insurance. Kichline said salaries and benefits account for 52 percent of expenditures, with insurance costs taking up another 3.5 percent.

[joe.nixon@mcall.com](mailto:joe.nixon@mcall.com)

610-559-2145

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