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Forks Township supervisors approve \$7 million budget that keeps land tax level

By Fred Walter
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Forks Township supervisors have adopted a budget of nearly \$7 million that includes an upgrade and expansion of the township police force.

Total expenses are up about \$300,000, but the real estate tax will remain at 4.6 mills for the 10th straight year. The owner of property assessed at \$50,000 will keep paying \$230 in property tax next year.

The final budget was approved 3-1 Thursday with Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas objecting because she opposed a blanket 4 percent salary increase for all department heads and employees not covered by union contracts. She said raises should be based on job performance. An evaluation process will be put in place in 2006 for use in 2007.

The board split 2-2 on the salary issue at the Dec. 15 meeting, with Supervisor John Ackerman joining Nicholas in opposing the 4 percent raises. Supervisor Dave Hoff was absent at that meeting, but he joined Supervisors Henning Holmgaard and Donald Miller on Thursday to adopt the budget. Ackerman was absent.

Township Manager Cathy Kichline said the 2006 spending plan is about \$153,000 less than proposed last month because employee health care costs are less than projected.

Supervisors unanimously approved recommendations from Police Chief Greg Dorney for five changes in the department, which recently received full accreditation in meeting state standards and will expand to 20 full-time officers:

Patrolmen Jack Dressler and Shawn Hummer were promoted to the rank of corporal to begin duties as night shift supervisors on Jan. 8. Dressler, a former Easton police officer, has seven years' experience, and Hummer has six years of service with the township force.

James Rowden, a 10-year veteran of the township force, was promoted to the rank of detective specializing in juvenile case investigations.

Sean Stark and Joseph Effting were hired as full-time patrolmen to replace Dressler and Hummer. Effting is a retired Allentown detective sergeant and Stark is leaving the Nazareth police department to join the township force.

Members of the police department commended Holmgaard for his dedication to helping to improve the police department. Holmgaard lost his bid for a second six-year term and will be replaced by C. David Howell.

A workshop was set for 7 p.m. Jan. 24 by the planning commission to discuss the final version of a new township zoning ordinance. Supervisors will hold a public hearing at 7 p.m. Feb. 7 on the proposal.

Fred Walter is a freelance writer.

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