

MIDDLETOWN

Supervisors debate new post

One supervisor said he'd rather spend money on more cops than a new administrative post.

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

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Approval of a final 2008 Middletown budget is hung up over a disagreement on creating a new administrative position, the township supervisors said.

Final approval was scheduled for Tuesday's meeting, but after a half-hour executive session to discuss personnel issues, the board came back and voted 4-0 to table consideration of final approval for a week.

After the meeting, Supervisor Robert McMonagle said the board is split 2-2 on whether to hire a director of community development, a newly created position first proposed earlier in the year. McMonagle and Lisa Pflaumer favor the position while John J. Kelly III and Jasper Caro are opposed. The fifth supervisor, Bucks County commissioner-elect Diane Marseglia, resigned last month to get ready for her new job, and no replacement has been appointed by the board.

The director of community development would take over the job of zoning officer now contracted out to Keystone Municipal Services. He or she would oversee both the fire marshal and licenses and inspections departments and have a few other duties, township officials said.

The new director would start at an annual salary of \$56,575 to \$84,000, depending on experience and other factors, said township finance director Betsy Reukauf. Figuring on the upper end of that range, she estimated salary and benefits for the new position would be about \$118,000 next year. Continuing to contract out the zoning officer job would cost about \$60,000 in 2008, Reukauf estimated.

"The problem with contracting things out is they are not here as much as a full-time staffer would be and you're at the mercy of their availability," McMonagle said. "You're sometimes waiting a couple of days to get an answer on something or get feedback. I think we provide the best service to our residents if we have an in-house position."

The Courier Times was unsuccessful in reaching Pflaumer for comment.

Kelly would rather spend the money on additional police officers. Police Chief Frank McKenna recommended four more during a budget workshop meeting, Kelly said.

"Why are we creating this position we've survived forever without and not hiring more cops?" he asked.

"I'm thinking I'd rather hire more people like technicians or typists or something like that, rather than just create another level of management," added Caro.

Kelly's upset because other supervisors and township administrators are proposing a \$10,000 raise for a township employee. He wouldn't name the employee because the matter hasn't been decided and has been discussed in executive session.

"That's a phenomenal pay raise," Kelly said. "Everyone would like to get a raise like that. I don't see how we can give a \$10,000 raise to one employee. It's way too much money. It's ridiculous."

McMonagle said the person is a department head. He said the raise is deserved and would bring the salary in line with other township department heads.

"If this position was open, you couldn't bring someone in at \$10,000 less than what everyone else is making," McMonagle said.

McMonagle expects fellow Democrat Chuck Thompson to be appointed to fill Marseglia's seat on Tuesday when a vacancy board convenes. The vacancy board will consist of the present board of supervisors — Republicans Kelly, Caro and Pflaumer and Democrat McMonagle — plus vacancy board chairman and Democrat Bill Cosen, appointed at the beginning of the year.

The vacancy board meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, with the regular board meeting, including the probable vote on a final budget, to follow at 7 p.m.

Pflaumer and McMonagle favor Thompson, and McMonagle expects Cosen to follow suit. The Courier Times was unsuccessful in its attempts to reach Cosen for comment.

Middletown's \$39.82 million proposed budget has a property tax increase of 1.5 mills, or about \$43 for the resident with a property assessed at the township average of \$29,012.