

MIDDLETOWN

Police agree to new contract with township

Employees should start helping out with health insurance costs, said the only supervisor who voted against the new police contract.

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

Middletown officials avoided arbitration with the township police recently by reaching an agreement on a new three-year contract that starts Jan. 1 and runs through 2010.

With the current three-year deal about to expire, police and township negotiators had scheduled a Dec. 19 hearing before a panel of three arbitrators after failing to reach agreement on a new contract earlier in the year. However, an agreement was reached before the arbitration hearing and the new three-year contract was approved by police. The township supervisors then approved it in a 4-1 vote at their Dec. 19 meeting.

Township Manager Richard Gestrich said the new deal has raises of 4.5 percent in each of the three years, higher than the 3.5 percent hikes in the current contract. However, the township will save some money by giving police lumpsum longevity payments instead of basing them on a percentage of an officer's pay. Longevity pay is given after five years, in addition to annual raises and is based on length of service.

Gestrich said the contract still has to be put in writing and signed by all parties.

The new deal was approved by Supervisors Robert McMonagle, Jasper Caro, John J. Kelly III and Chuck Thompson. Lisa Pflaumer cast the lone no vote. Among her objections was that police, like all township employees, still will make no contribution toward health insurance benefits in the new contract.

"We have to get employees to start paying into their health care," Pflaumer said. "What we do in government is not reflective of the private sector and we have to chip away at that. We need a health care plan that is good for our employees but also pennywise when it comes to taxpayer dollars and reflective of the real world."

The Courier Times was unsuccessful in reaching representatives from Middletown's police union that participated in negotiations for comment.

McMonagle said he was satisfied with the new contract.

"I guess nobody is 100 percent happy but I think it's a fair contract for both sides and for the taxpayers," he said. "Most importantly, we avoided arbitration."