

## MIDDLETOWN

## Board: Hybrid cars too costly

*The board voted to buy four Ford Expeditions instead of the environmentally friendly vehicles.*

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

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Hybrid vehicles would have been nice, but not at these prices, the Middletown supervisors decided.

The board recently voted to buy four Ford Expeditions for the chiefs of fire companies serving the township. They opted to do that rather than spend almost twice as much for four hybrid SUVs.

After going out to bid on its own instead of buying from the state bid list, Middletown bought the four Expeditions from Tri-Star Ford in McKeesport for \$24,501 apiece. That was a savings of \$3,300 a vehicle over the best prices available on the state bid list, said assistant Township Manager Frank Farry, who's also chief of the Langhorne-Middletown Fire Co.

Farry said the best price he could find for hybrid SUVs were Chevy Tahoes for \$45,100 apiece. The hybrids he looked at can run part of the time on electricity, thus saving fuel and benefiting the environment, but the price was just too steep for the supervisors.

"In addition to the price, I think there is also a power issue in regard to the hybrids," Supervisor Robert McMonagle said. "These vehicles get into some pretty treacherous situations and I was concerned the hybrids might have lacked the power to do what they needed to do. I'm all for going green and saving fuel and doing what we can for the environment. We'll continue to look at hybrids, and it would be great to go hybrid when the technology meets our demands."

While the state compiles its list of equipment available to municipalities at supposedly the best prices, it can sometimes pay to go through the bidding process on its own, McMonagle added. He pushed for that and also to buy the SUVs from a Pennsylvania dealership.

"It was a simple thing nobody thought much about because we're used to living by the state bid lists," he said. "But we have to be innovative in how we spend the people's money."

Farry said the township provides new vehicles about every eight years for chiefs at the Langhorne-Middletown, Parkland, Pennel and William Penn fire departments. The money is set aside from the township's 1.25-mill fire tax, he added.

The chiefs' vehicles are often the first or one of the first on the scene of a fire or other emergency, Farry said. They're specially equipped and can act as command centers for small-to medium-sized incidents, he added.

"They have medical equipment, equipment to handle hazardous materials and other things that can be used until larger apparatus arrive," Farry said. "They have enough equipment to get started in the interest of our safety and the public's."

While equipment from the vehicles can be transferred into the new ones, installing the equipment, lettering and other items will cost the township additional money, Farry said. Those costs haven't been determined, but there is \$40,000 allocated in the township budget for each vehicle, he said. That figure includes the purchase price, Farry said.