

MIDDLETOWN

Taxes to go up an average of \$29

By *CHRIS ENGLISH*
STAFF WRITER

Middletown supervisors Monday night approved a final 2009 township budget with a tax increase of one mill, or \$29 for a resident with a property assessed at the township average of \$29,012.

The increase is in the debt service fund and will give the township more money to pay back bond issues. The supervisors have approved \$20 million in issues since 2006 to pay for road reconstruction, a new public works complex, new fire and emergency substations and other items.

A preliminary budget approved last month had a two-mill hike, but township Manager Ray Stepnoski was able to whittle down expenses to arrive at one mill.

"The manager did everything he could to reduce the budget, but unfortunately the one mill is necessary unless we want to cut back on services or start laying people off, and we don't want to do that," said Supervisors Chairman Robert McMonagle.

Supervisor George Leonhauser, a former township cop who voted against the budget, questioned Stepnoski on how he could cut back on police overtime by \$287,000 without compromising safety or meeting minimum standards for officers on the street.

"I certainly don't want to compromise safety, but something absolutely has to give," Stepnoski answered. "The police department is \$8.5 million of our budget. Our goal is to keep everyone employed, and everyone has to chip in. We have to reduce overtime. It is something we have to get control over."

The final budget was approved 3-2, with McMonagle, Kathy Heuer and Jasper Caro voting yes. Leonhauser and Chuck Thompson voted no.

Thompson felt the tax increase possibly could have been cut down further to less than one mill.

"I don't know for sure but felt it was something we could have looked at," he said.

With the increase, total township property tax millage for 2009 will be 15.84, or \$460 for the average property owner.

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or .