

## MIDDLETOWN

## Homeowners could be facing \$58 tax hike

*Half of the proposed tax increase for 2009 is needed to start paying back a \$10 million bond issue passed this year.*

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Taxes would go up about \$58 for the average Middletown property owner under a preliminary 2009 township budget adopted by the supervisors at Monday night's meeting.

Under the proposal, property taxes would be increased by two mills, one mill in the general fund and one in the debt service fund, or \$58 for a resident with a property assessed at the township average of \$29,012.

The preliminary budget will be on display at the township municipal center, 3 Municipal Way, starting Wednesday. It must remain on display at least 20 days and the supervisors can make changes until they vote to make it final next month.

If the tax increase remains, total township property tax millage for 2009 will be 16.84, or \$489 for the average property owner. In addition, residents are looking at a possible \$50-perhousehold increase in the trash collection fee next year, township manager Ray Stepnoski said.

Township property taxes increased 1.5 mills this year, or \$43.50 for the average property owner.

Stepnoski said he did his best to look at all other options other than a tax increase for 2009 but that it appears it is necessary.

The one-mill increase in the debt service fund is necessary so the township can start making annual payments on the \$10 million bond issue passed this year to pay for repaving of roads in the Levittown part of the township, improvements to two parks and other items, Stepnoski said.

"There is no other way to fund it," Stepnoski said of the proposed tax increase to start paying back the bond issue.

The one-mill general fund increase is needed to meet rising expenses, he added.

Stepnoski said he has exhaustively searched for ways to cut expenses.

"I've told all department heads overtime is out except when absolutely necessary," he said.

Stepnoski, who started as manager July 8 after Richard Gestrich left to take a job in Florida, said he will listen to all suggestions for cutting down on the proposed tax increase.

"I'm all ears," he told the supervisors.