

MIDDLETOWN

Public safety director applicants 'tremendous'

One supervisor said the background and experience of candidates interviewed so far has been amazing.

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After sifting through 35 applications and conducting 11 interviews with more to come, the Middletown supervisors should be ready to name a director of public safety in two or three weeks, board Chairman Robert McMonagle said.

The township is switching to that position when police Chief Frank McKenna retires Jan. 31.

McMonagle said the supervisors, township Manager Ray Stepnoski and consultant Paula Kearns interviewed 11 candidates during a marathon session that lasted more than eight hours on Veterans Day. Four or five more will be interviewed, several will be brought back for second interviews, and an announcement could be made before Thanksgiving, he said.

"I'm not surprised at the number of applicants," McMonagle said. "Middletown is a desirable place to work. This could be the most important decision in my career as a supervisor. This person will likely serve the township for 20 years, so we're not taking it lightly."

The director will be in charge not only of township police but also oversee fire and other emergency operations in the township. Unlike a police chief, a public safety director serves essentially at the pleasure of the supervisors and receives much less protection against dismissal than a chief.

McMonagle and Supervisors Kathy Heuer and Chuck Thompson voted to switch to director, and Jasper Caro and former township cop George Leonhauser voted no. Caro and Leonhauser said the position might be subjected to political influences. The other three said having one person in charge of all emergency operations is an advantage.

McMonagle said 28 outside applications were submitted as well as seven from people who already work for the township.

Township officials have declined to name those applying for the job. Among the outside applicants are three Philadelphia police captains and three highranking New Jersey police officials, said McMonagle. Applications also came from New York City; Davenport, Iowa; Mesa, Ariz.; and Austin, Texas, he added.

McMonagle denied rumors that the board majority already has decided on a candidate.

While he favors a police chief, Caro said he has been impressed with the quality of applicants for public safety director.

"The candidates we've interviewed are highly qualified, with credentials that are tremendous," he said. "The background, education and experience are amazing."

The director's starting salary will be determined by experience and other factors, but McMonagle said it would be "around \$100,000 a year, give or take."

McKenna, a Middletown cop for 51 years and chief the last 20, is making \$111,115 this year, including a \$103,487 base salary and \$7,627 longevity payment.

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