

## Budget approved with \$50 tax hike

23 Dec 2009 — Bucks County Courier Times

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Most of the increase will go into the debt service fund to give the township money to pay back its bonds and loans.

Property taxes will go up about \$50 for the average Middletown landowner under a 2010 township budget approved by the supervisors at Tuesday night's meeting.

Taxes in the debt service fund were increased 1.62 mills to give the township more money to pay back bonds and loans. There was also a 0.1-mill increase in the street lighting fund and a 0.01-mill hike in the fire hydrant fund.

The total 1.73-mill hike is about \$50 for a resident with a property assessed at the township average of \$29,012.

Supervisors Chuck Thompson, Kathy Heuer and Jasper Caro voted for the budget. Robert McMonagle and George Leonhauser voted no.

"I thought there were places we could have made cuts to get the increase down to at least one mill," said McMonagle.

The budget includes a transfer of \$1.7 million from the investment fund into the general fund to handle expenses there.

The investment fund is made up of the \$40 million that Middletown received from the sale of its water and sewer systems several years ago, plus accumulated interest. The transfer will leave the fund at about \$42 million, said finance director Dennis Penko.

Two police officers will be hired to bring the department back up to the 54 officers it had last year before Officer Chris Jones was killed in a car accident and Chief Frank McKenna retired. Several officers are on military or other leave, though some are expected back soon.

Union employees, which make up most of the township work force, will get raises averaging about 4 percent in 2010.

The 2010 budget leaves total township property tax millage at 17.57, or \$510 for the average property owner.

Toward the end of the meeting, the board voted to give Manager Ray Stepnoski a 6.75 percent raise. He hasn't had a pay hike since starting as manager on July 8, 2008. The raise will bring his annual salary from \$117,000 to about \$125,000.

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or [cenglish@phillyBurbs.com](mailto:cenglish@phillyBurbs.com).

*"Budget approved with \$50 tax hike" Bucks County Courier Times 23 Dec 2009: B9*