

Provision in manager's raise draws criticism

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middletown

The township manager hadn't gotten a raise since starting in July 2008.

After almost a year and a half on the job, Middletown township Manager Ray Stepnoski got his first pay raise, but it didn't come without a lot of debate and hand wringing.

On a motion made by Supervisor Robert McMonagle late at Tuesday night's meeting, the board approved a 6.75 percent raise for Stepnoski for next year.

A separate McMonagle motion to give Stepnoski the same annual pay raises given to township police every year also was approved. McMonagle, Chuck Thompson and Kathy Heuer voted yes on both motions. George Leonhauser voted no on both.

Jasper Caro voted for the pay raise but against the provision tying it to police raises. Future boards are not obligated to give Stepnoski raises tied to the police contract if they act before Dec. 1 of the preceding year to give him a different raise or no raise at all.

"It's just a way for a raise to be triggered without the board of supervisors going through a tedious evaluation process," said McMonagle. "It doesn't tie anyone's hands because future boards can always vote to give a different percentage raise or no raise at all."

The 6.75 percent raise approved for next year will bring Stepnoski's \$117,000 annual salary up to about \$125,000.

McMonagle arrived at the 6.75 percent figure based on the 4.5 percent raises in the police contract. Stepnoski started as manager in July 2008, so he worked half a year without a raise, or 2.25 percent. He then should get the full 4.5 percent for this year or a total of 6.75, McMonagle reasoned.

"The manager has done a fine job and does deserve a raise, but I'm just opposed to having it tied into another contract," said Caro.

Supervisor-elect Tom Gallagher said the tie-in provision could be perceived as a conflict of interest since Stepnoski sits in on negotiations for new police contracts.

McMonagle responded that he did most of the negotiating for the township on the current contract and that Stepnoski was mostly a "bystander." Also, the board is not bound by the tie-in provision, McMonagle reiterated.

"I understand all that but he's still involved in negotiations and this is a major perceived conflict," Gallagher said. "Give the man a raise if you want but doing it this way just plain looks bad."

Thompson said the board should have given Stepnoski a raise well before Tuesday night's meeting.

"It really was an oversight and that's one of the reasons Robert put in this trigger mechanism so it doesn't happen again," he said.

"I guess we depend on the manager for almost everything to do with employees and pay and he had just never brought this to our attention that he hadn't gotten a raise since he's been here. He never complained about it or mentioned it."

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