

## MIDDLETOWN

## Township to pay for officer's funeral

*Supervisors agreed to reimburse organizations for expenses related to Officer Chris Jones' funeral.*

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STAFF WRITER

After almost a half-hour of angry debate, the Middletown supervisors Tuesday night voted 4-0 to reimburse the police union and other organizations for all funeral expenses for township police Officer Chris Jones.

Jones, a 10-year veteran of the Middletown force, was killed Jan. 29 in an accident after he stopped a motorist for speeding on the Route 1 Superhighway. He was the first Middletown officer ever killed in the line of duty.

Supervisors George Leonhauser, Chuck Thompson, Jasper Caro and Robert McMonagle voted to reimburse the expenses once the township and Bucks County police unions submit an itemized list and it's verified by township Manager Ray Stepnoski. Supervisor Kathy Heuer was absent from Tuesday night's meeting.

Before the vote, recriminations flew back and forth, mostly between Middletown Officer Steve Forman, president of the township's police union, and Leonhauser on one side, and Thompson and McMonagle on the other.

Forman said that two days after Jones' death, he asked Leonhauser, a former township cop, to ask Thompson whether the township would be paying for Jones' funeral expenses.

After explaining in discussions and e-mails to Leonhauser the life insurance, pension and medical benefits that would be coming to Jones' widow Suzanne and her three children, Thompson added that the township would also be paying \$3,000 toward funeral expenses.

"We cannot in good conscience ask the taxpayers to do more," said one of Thompson's e-mails to Leonhauser.

However, subsequent communications, including a memo from Stepnoski, indicated the supervisors on further reflection were willing to pay for all funeral expenses, said Thompson.

Thompson added he thought his communications with Leonhauser would be kept between the two supervisors and not spread around the township. Thompson and McMonagle accused Leonhauser and Forman Tuesday night of spreading misinformation for political purposes, charges Leonhauser and Forman denied.

In the days immediately following Jones' death, one rumor floating around the township was that the supervisors had voted 3-2 in a secret meeting to not pay for the funeral expenses.

"A person with integrity would have gotten back to me and would not have just started spreading rumors around the township," Thompson said Tuesday night, aiming his criticism at Leonhauser.

"You're the one that needs some integrity," Leonhauser shot back at Thompson.

Forman said he wished township officials had communicated with the police union and Jones' family quicker about what was being paid for. Leonhauser also criticized McMonagle and Thompson for not coming to St. Mary Medical Center, where Jones was treated, on the day of the accident.

"I was told the hospital was a mob scene and I didn't want to add my presence to that," said McMonagle. "There was certainly no disrespect intended. I think the last thing a family needs at a time like that is a total stranger crowding them."

Forman said he hoped issues like the ones surrounding Jones' death can be avoided in the future.

"Moving forward, if we have another incident like this, and let's hope we never do, let's all get on the same page so we can prevent this," he said.

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