

MIDDLETOWN

Details of manager's salary debated

The township is taking steps to reduce police overtime, the acting public safety director said.

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The approval of township Manager Ray Stepnoski's employment agreement led to a discussion of police overtime and the disclosure that one Middletown officer was paid \$160,000 last year, including overtime and other extras.

Stepnoski has been township manager since July 9 of last year but had been working without a written agreement until it was approved 3-2 by the supervisors at Tuesday's meeting.

Before the vote, Supervisor George Leonhauser, a former township detective who voted against the agreement, voiced concerns about a clause in the deal that requires Stepnoski to be the highest paid township employee.

Leonhauser felt the language should have been more specific to state that Stepnoski must have the highest base salary.

Otherwise, the township might be forced to pay Stepnoski more than his annual salary (now \$117,000) if another employee's pay, including overtime, topped the manager's, said Leonhauser.

"What if someone else makes \$130,000?" said Leonhauser. "Will we then have to give the manager an additional stipend of \$13,000? That would be a waste of taxpayer money in my opinion."

Township resident Andy Warren, a former Bucks County Commissioner, PennDOT administrator and Tullytown manager, agreed the language should be more specific to protect the township.

"All the good intentions in the world won't mean squat if this ever gets into a legal situation," said Warren. "Would it also not create a situation where the manager might pile on overtime to increase his own pay? You're going down a slippery slope."

Stepnoski said he's trying to reduce overtime, not pile it on, and that he understood the language in his employment agreement to mean base pay.

The majority of supervisors didn't think a change in the agreement was necessary.

"It's always been understood to mean base pay," said Supervisor Robert McMonagle.

"You change one word and the next thing you know you're changing the whole agreement," added board Chairman Chuck Thompson. "One officer made \$160,000 last year. We should probably be looking at that."

"Overtime has gotten out of control," said McMonagle. "It's something we're looking at."

Stepnoski said the newspaper would have to submit a written public information request to find out the identity of the officer who made \$160,000. One of his goals this year is to reduce police overtime by more than \$200,000.

Total police overtime last year was almost \$1.1 million, according to township records. Overtime in all other township departments combined was about \$58,000.

Leonhauser defended police overtime.

"Someone has to work to keep up manpower and keep the streets safe," he said. "Police put themselves on the line every time they go out there."

Acting Public Safety Director Patrick McGinty said he has two officers away on military duty, three on temporary disability and one on administrative leave, all factors that can contribute to overtime. All those officers should eventually be back on full duty, he said.

"We've initiated some steps to cut down on overtime," said McGinty. "We have minimum manpower requirements and have to adequately staff the streets when people are on vacation or leave, and that can result in overtime. A lot of the overtime is reimbursable, like if we have

to send officers to the Oxford Valley Mall or Sesame Place in a lot of cases, we're reimbursed for that."

McGinty, head of the police department, makes \$100,000 a year.

Stepnoski's agreement, effective as long as he is manager, provides for annual salary increases to be reviewed and approved by the supervisors.

Among its many provisions, the agreement requires that instead of getting a township car, Stepnoski will be paid \$500 a month for use of his private vehicle.

If Stepnoski is fired within his first year of employment, he'll get two months pay as severance. If he is fired after a year, the severance will be six months salary.

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