

Manager's contract creating waves

14 Jun 2010 — Bucks County Courier Times

middletown

One supervisor claimed the vote to work out a new deal with the township manager was a ploy to force out Raymond Stepnoski, an assertion denied by the other board members.

The Middletown supervisors are looking to save money by renegotiating the employment agreement of township Manager Raymond Stepnoski.

After emerging from a late executive session at a June 7 meeting, the supervisors voted 4-0 to not renew Stepnoski's current agreement and negotiate with him on a new one. He has declined to comment on the matter in the days since the meeting.

Robert McMonagle, the lone Democrat on a five-man board that is otherwise Republican, left the township building after the executive session and didn't vote on the Stepnoski matter.

Provisions in Stepnoski's agreement that took effect July 9, 2008 - when he became township manager - automatically renew every year unless the supervisors provide him at least 30 days' notice of their intent not to renew. That was the reason for the action June 7, said Supervisor Patrick Mallon.

Stepnoski makes \$124,897 a year and among the provisions in the 11-page agreement is that his annual raises be at least equal to those in the police contract.

Among the many other provisions is that Stepnoski always be the highest paid township employee, that he get 20 vacation days a year, that the township make a \$10,000 annual contribution to his retirement account and that he get unrestricted use of a township vehicle during the work day.

The supervisors wouldn't be specific on what provisions they are looking to change.

"We have authorized our township solicitor and labor attorney to negotiate a new contract (employment agreement) with Ray, and I don't want to negotiate in the newspaper," said supervisors Chairman Tom Gallagher. "These are very distinct and troubling economic times and I think we have to practice some real fiscal responsibility, and I think that needs to start at the top by example. I've told Ray myself at a meeting that I want to keep him and I'm hoping he will agree to a new deal and we can work something out."

Prior to Middletown, Stepnoski was township manager in Buckingham for five years before being let go in January 2008. He said at the time he felt he did a good job in Buckingham and was never given an explanation for the dismissal. The supervisors did not elaborate. Stepnoski had been a township supervisor in Buckingham for nine years before becoming manager.

McMonagle said the move to renegotiate Stepnoski's agreement is a ploy to force the manager to resign and is being pushed by the township's police union leadership. He said that leadership doesn't like Stepnoski because he has reduced police overtime and cut other expenses within the department.

"The whole thing is a charade to force him out," said McMonagle. "It's being ordered by a handful of (Police Benevolent Association) members."

The newspaper was unsuccessful in attempts to reach Middletown's top two police union leaders, Officer Steve Forman and Sgt. Pete Feeney, for comment.

"That's absolutely ridiculous," said Gallagher of McMonagle's claims. "We're trying to do something for the benefit of taxpayers and the minority board member continues to say it's for other reasons. We're worried about the taxpayers and township business and one person is worried about the politics of the situation."

Mallon had similar thoughts.

"That's completely unfounded," he said of McMonagle's assertions. "Some of the things in (Stepnoski's) agreement, like tying raises to those in the police union contract, just did not make sense. You're tying wage increases of an individual who makes a six-figure salary into a union contract where some members are

making a third to a half of that. There was absolutely no outside influence from police or anybody else that moved us to take this action."

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or cenglish@phillyBurbs.com.

"Manager's contract creating waves" Bucks County Courier Times 14 Jun 2010: B1