

# Amity lays off police officer, budget deficit blamed

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AMITY — One of the 12 officers in the township police department will lose his job effective Sept. 1 due to an anticipated budget deficit of \$153,000.

The layoff was approved by the Board of Supervisors, who held an executive session to determine which officer may be let go.

Prior to the board's vote, it reviewed a preliminary 2013 budget that includes the new, arbitrated police contract increase of 3.5 percent that is retroactive to Jan. 1.

Board Chairman Robert R. Yanos said all of the township's revenue from the Earned Income Tax — approximately \$700,000 — has annually paid the department's salaries, but the EIT revenue has been steadily decreasing.

Yanos said although the independent arbitrator was informed of that during the recent police contract arbitration, the police received the 3.5 percent pay increase. The board approved that contract on June 6.

The contracted salary increase is on top of a 4 percent increase the police department arbitrated three years ago. That contract expired Dec. 31, 2011.

Negotiations on the current contract began in March 2011, and the police requested arbitration in September.

Yanos said June 6 that without a new, large revenue stream, the township's options for 2013 with this increased expense would be to increase taxes or reduce the police force.

He said neither the township's office staff, road crew or professional staff received salary increases for 2012, and one staff person was laid off in 2012.

Board members said during the July 18 meeting they didn't see any alternative to reducing the township expenses other than reducing the police department; township staff couldn't be reduced further but one police salary could reduce the deficit.

They said health care costs have also increased by 15 percent this year.

Yanos said the township should be proactive now and lay off one officer instead of being reactive years from now and laying off possibly three.

Yanos, Gokey and Supervisor Kimberly J. McGrath voted to lay off one officer effective Sept. 1.

"No one is willing to accept lower public safety," said Supervisor Terry L. Jones of the residents he spoke to. "I would be better able to serve the residents in October with better numbers."

"I'm not sure why you hired me," said Police Chief Kent A. Shuebrook after the board's vote to lay off an officer.

He said FBI surveys in 2009 indicated that communities with populations of 18,000 to 25,000 have 2.1 officers per 1,000 people, but Amity Township has .89 officers per 1,000 people for its population of 12,500 in a 19-square-mile area.

"I thought you hired me for a professional police department," said Shuebrook. "I had 15 officers when you hired me."

He said the result of 11 versus 12 officers is that traffic details won't get done, police won't monitor school bus stops, and the safety of the remaining officers and the public will be at risk.

"Future officers will leave because of their future being in question," said Shuebrook. "I get it that you don't want to raise taxes, but if you want to wait 45 minutes for a police officer - you're cutting resources to the bare bone. I'm the second officer most times, but I'm not out there but doing databases. If things go south, I'm out there."

After Shuebrook left the meeting room, Yanos said the new police contract also includes the use of "comp time" in lieu of overtime pay.

"There will be less officers on the street with the addition, now, of comp time," said Yanos.

Yanos said the police had also tried to negotiate for additional sick, personal and vacation time.

"(Former) Supervisor Gene Hafer had said (in early 2000's) we're going down a slippery slope by hiring new police officers with grant money," said Gokey.

Board members said the township may have never been able to sustain 12 to 15 police officers, which are paid completely from the township's EIT.

"We're not in downtown Pottstown or Reading," said Gokey about the effectiveness of 11 officers in the township versus 12. "There is a difference in where you live, and we're in a rural, fairly safe area."