

KT budget

(continued from page 1)

an invitation he made at the hearing for suggestions from the public. "Believe me, I'm not proud," he said. "I welcome any input from citizens."

Already axed from the preliminary figures are the entire recreation department, crossing guards, the spring cleanup and any contribution to the Back Mountain Memorial Library.

Driving a 3.2 percent increase in anticipated general fund expenditures are salary hikes and insurance costs. The police contract calls for 4.75 percent raises this year, and other personnel were slated for 3.5 percent.

On the other side of the ledger, general fund revenues are projected to increase only 1 percent.

The township, one of the fastest-growing in the region, has been hit hard by the sluggish economy, its revenue depressed by weaker than expected income tax collections and interest payments.

The effect of the economy is evident in projections for zoning fees and other services associated with home construction. Engineering fees, budgeted at \$15,000 in 2003, are running at less than \$5,000 this year. The tentative budget for 2004 is \$7,500.

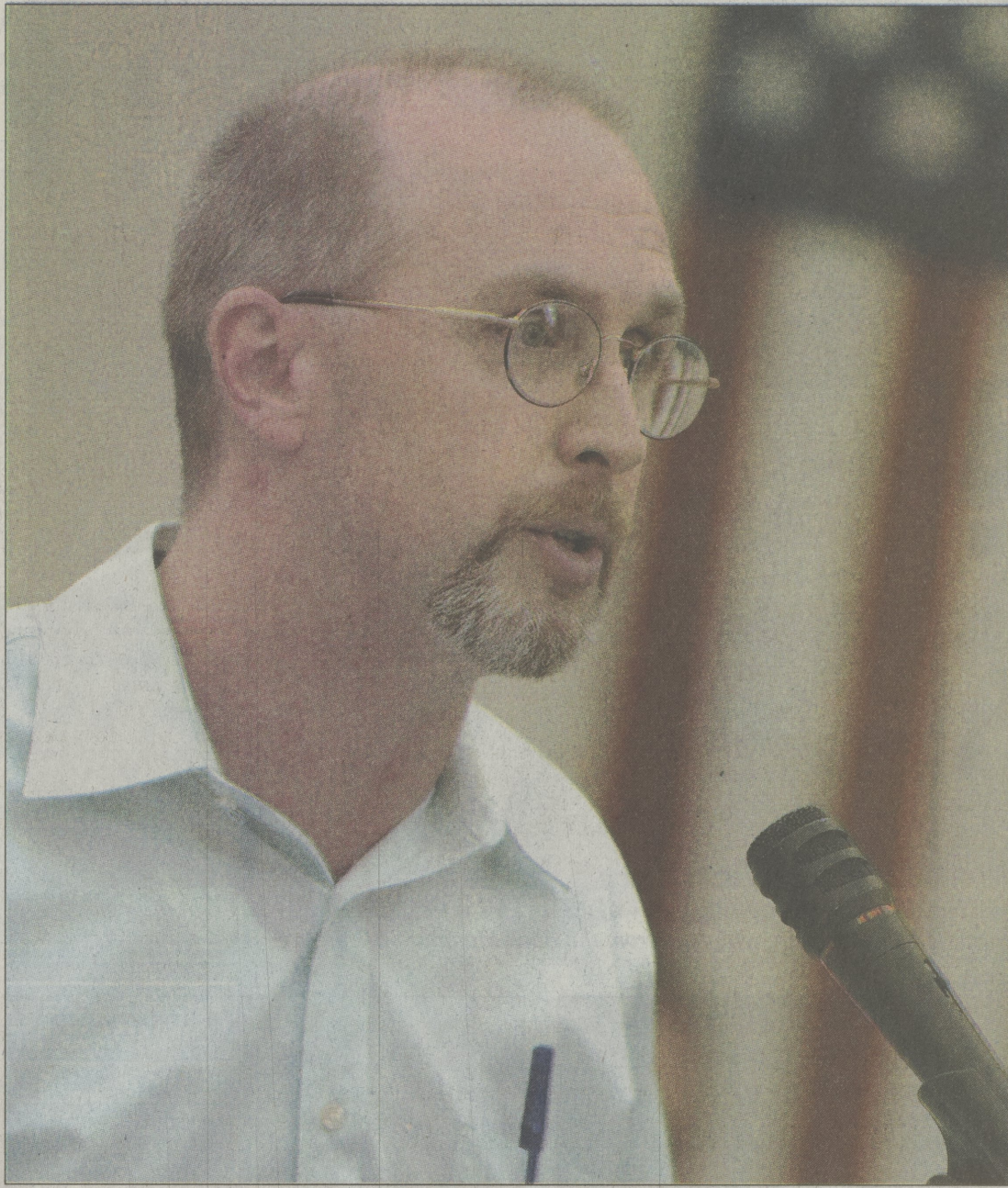
"I warned all year long we were going to have trouble with our budget," said Supervisor Chris Yankovich. "Now we have serious problems .. and we're taking away services from people in the township."

Yankovich said the Green Road paving project, which is costing \$50,000 a year for seven years, was an unnecessary strain, and future costs to repair the Center Street bridge would only add to the budget crunch.

In 2004, the township is committed to replacing the dilapidated bridge, at a cost of \$100,000.

At the October 28 budget hearing, several residents called for the supervisors to give up their township-paid health care insurance to help close the \$400,000 gap.

Kingston Township pays the entire premium for all partici-



Dan Tuck was one of several township residents who chastised the supervisors during Tuesday's budget hearing.

pants. "We already took a cut in our health care," said Paul Sabol, Chairman of the Supervisors, to which Jeff Doggett of Ivy Drive responded, "How about to?"

Supervisors Neil Allen and Yankovich do not participate in the township's health care plan, while Supervisor John Versari acknowledged that both he and his wife are covered by it.

Sabol cited a 30-year career as a police officer and chief, saying, "I think I earned it."

Sabol and his wife are covered under the plan.

Carl Goodwin takes individual coverage.

The total expense to the township for supervisors' insurance in 2004 would be \$21,445 if coverages remained the same. That does not include dental and vision plans, which all supervisors take, at a cost of less than \$3,000 a year.

The 2004 Kingston Township budget will get a preliminary reading at the November 12

meeting of Supervisors, which begins at 7:30 p.m. in the municipal building.

Changes can be made until final adoption, which is likely to take place at the December 10 meeting.

What's up ▲ and down ▼ in the 2004 Kingston Township preliminary budget

Here's a summary of some items making significant moves.

REVENUES	'03 Budget	'03 YTD	'04 Budget
Interest and Earnings	\$12,000	\$3,751	\$5,000
▲ Pension State Aid	28,000	34,126	38,000
▲ Foreign Fire Ins. Tax	36,000	43,449	45,000
▼ Engineer Fees	15,000	4,793	7,500
▲ Total General Fund	\$1,910,627	\$1,527,143	\$1,929,738
▼ Total Capital Fund	105,000	2,120	93,000
EXPENDITURES	'03 Budget	'03 YTD	'04 Budget
▲ Police Salaries	383,871	308,286	417,634
▲ Road Staff Salaries	289,328	228,021	301,446
▲ Debt Principal	134,068	160,000	205,000
▼ Debt Interest	114,288	78,760	87,617
▲ Hospitalization Ins.	210,000	154,130	225,000
▼ Engineer Salary	\$32,000	\$12,906	\$25,000
▲ Natural Gas	19,800	21,189	25,500
▲ Contributions to Fire & Ambulance*	48,000	53,449	57,000
▼ Spring Cleanup	11,050	10,470	-0-
▼ Recreation	24,345	23,391	-0-
▼ Library	4,500	-0-	-0-
▲ Worker's Comp	58,000	71,427	75,000
▲ Total General Fund	2,070,326	1,713,081	2,138,353
▲ Capital Construction	90,000	-0-	190,000
▲ Capital Purchases	-0-	-0-	40,000
▲ Total Capital Fund	167,000	29,729	301,100

*Mostly paid from Foreign Fire Ins. Tax

Money lost, and found at tax agencies

At one point in Tuesday's hearing, Supervisors Chairman Paul Sabol blamed some of the budget woes on an overpayment of tax receipts the township received in 2001, while Jeffrey Box was still manager. "We had no idea that wasn't our money," he said. "We were put in a bind."

Current Manager Edmund O'Neill said that money was sent to the township improperly by the Don Wilkinson Agency. About \$90,000 of it was received in May through July, 2001 and the rest in December, 2001, but the township wasn't made aware of the error until late 2002, a year after Box had left.

The township still owes about \$93,000 of that to the tax agency. Also in late 2002, the township hired an auditor who found \$103,000 in taxes that were due but were never forwarded, offsetting most of the earlier phantom payments.

This year the auditor found another \$98,000 in payments on the earned income tax that hadn't been paid to the township yet, O'Neill said. Playing it safe, O'Neill is including only an additional \$75,000 in revenue from that figure.

Public has a lot to say at hearing

When Benjamin Jones III, Solicitor to the Board of Supervisors opened the October 28 budget hearing to public comment, residents trooped up to the microphone to offer lots of criticism, a dash of praise and their help, even to the point of a willingness to pay more for services.

Several residents expressed dismay at the state of affairs in the township and attacks on former township Manager Jeffrey Box. Box resigned the position in October 2001.

"This whole situation is becoming a disgrace," said Dan Tuck, Midway Manor. "I would just like to see the political barbs come to an end."

After complimenting Supervisor Chairman Paul Sabol for his many years of service to the community, Tuck suggested it may be time for Sabol to step aside.

Kathryn Butruce and others pleaded to save the summer recreation program. "That program is for all of our children, and that is our future," she



Ben Jones III, solicitor to the board, announced Tuesday that no lawsuit will be filed against former township Manager Jeffrey Box. A motion to do so had been made and seconded at Monday's meeting.

said. Township Manager Eddie O'Neill said the program costs about \$20,000 a year and that only an average of 40-45 of the 130 children who sign up for it attend any given day.

Butruce offered that parents might be willing to pay more than the nominal fees now in place if they were asked to do so.

Dave Broadhead, Midway Manor, had a similar take on the spring cleanup. Sabol said the supervisors hadn't consid-


ered charging for the annual service as a way to preserve it.

Rosario Shaver, who led a petition drive against a proposed ban on burning, made her pitch for allowing controlled burning. Shaver alleged that the supervisors acknowledge only one side of the issue and have held off a decision until after the November 4 election.

Sean McAndrew, a member of the planning commission also weighed in on the burning ban. McAndrew denied that the idea originated with the planning commission and said the supervisors asked commission members to review a ban.

Atty. Donald Brobst, who lives in the township and also was at the meeting to represent Box, said the factors that drew him to the township 12 years ago seemed to be in decline.

"I thought Kingston Township had the best local government I had seen in Luzerne County," Brobst said. But he now observes "political infighting that can only lead to a degeneration in the quality of government."

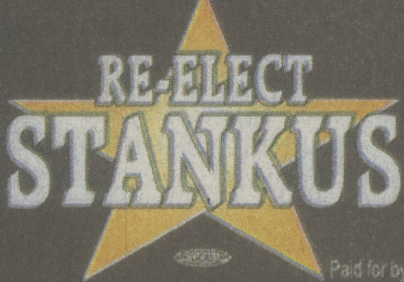


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- THE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE? I DO!**
-That's why our Deputies are serving more PFAs on weekends and evenings.
- THE FELONS ON YOUR STREETS? I DO!**
-That's why our Deputies work with US Marshals to serve more warrants.
- YOUR FAMILY'S WELFARE (missing or lost)? I DO!**
-That's why we've implemented a K-9 Search & Rescue Unit for ALL citizens throughout Luzerne County.
- THE SAFETY OF OUR OLDER CITIZENS? I DO!**
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