

Budget

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cept a higher co-pay for prescriptions that he said would save \$26,000 in annual premiums.

Yankovich responded by asking O'Neill to ask the police union to reopen its contract and reduce its raise to 3.5 percent. O'Neill said he had tried that once without success, but would ask again.

Even if a final budget is adopted, it appears unlikely to hold up much past January 1, since incoming supervisor Jeffrey Box expects to reopen the document once he takes office.

"It's very obvious this budget will need major revisions when the new board is seated," Box said after Monday's special meeting.

That was the fifth meeting since late October at which the budget was the main topic of discussion. As presented before the most recent changes, the general fund budget called for spending of \$2,168,019 and revenue of \$1,929,738, with the difference made up by drawing down the township savings account from \$350,000 to just under \$112,000.

O'Neill raised the possibility of increasing the prescription co-pay in order to reduce health insurance expenses. Employees now pay \$8 per pre-

"If you're going to give it to one, you need to give it to both."

Chris Yankovich
Township Supervisor

scription; O'Neill said increasing that to \$10 would save \$5,000 and to \$15 would save \$26,000.

Again, Yankovich asked if the changes would apply equally to the police and other employees. Because the police have a labor contract, their co-pay could be raised only by their consent.

Donald Fritzges, Road Superintendent, objected to a two-tiered plan. "I don't think it's fair," he said. "Are they first-class and we're second-class?"

In the end, the supervisors voted unanimously to table any consideration of a change in the co-pay until the police union was approached about acceptance of the plan. By a 5-0 vote, the board also asked O'Neill to seek to reopen the contract with the police.

Gary Beisel urged the supervisors to think "outside the box," and get away from focusing on cuts. "You really

need to come up with some revenues," he said, suggesting raising existing permit fees and adding new ones, such as for burning.

Two revenue items did make it into the budget, a new tax on businesses and fees for spring cleanup.

Goodwin proposed an annual business privilege tax on each commercial entity in the township. He feels businesses benefit greatly from township services such as police and fire protection and road maintenance.

Allen seconded the motion, and suggested a fee of \$500 to \$600 per business. "I think \$600 a year is quite modest," he said.

Using O'Neill's estimate of 145 businesses in the township, the tax could generate revenue of up to \$87,000 to help offset the projected \$236,000 deficit. Only Yankovich voted against the tax, which must be the subject of a public hearing before adoption.

The supervisors unanimously approved fees for the spring cleanup on the order of \$5 per car, \$10 per SUV and \$15-25 per pickup truck load.

Allen also advanced the prospect of charging higher fees for the summer recreation program, but did get a second for his motion.

Paid departments seen as impractical, unaffordable

While it may be several years off, the possibility exists for the Back Mountain to one day be served by a paid, regional fire and ambulance department.

Dallas Fire and Ambulance now spends about \$90,000 a year to staff its station from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays and 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekends. Kingston Township Ambulance has a similar arrangement, and the two departments team up on weekends to provide quick response.

Brett Slocum, the Dallas chief, thinks more cooperation is coming.

"At some point, you're going to have to combine emergency services," he said Tuesday. But whether that will be through paid personnel is another question.

"It would probably be impossible to go to a paid department," Slocum said. Mark Van Etten, treasurer of the Dallas department, offered the example of Plains, which has an annual payroll of about \$750,000, bloated by union staffing requirements.

Jack Dodson, Chief of Kunkle Fire and Ambulance, thinks a volunteer department is best, and it keeps the community involved with the people who provide vital services. He has been encouraged by an adequate supply of volunteers, who must spend

hundreds of hours — and sometimes their own money — on training.

"Our area is very fortunate" to have excellent volunteer departments, he said.

But Dodson doesn't rule out the possibility of mixing paid and volunteer personnel, as Dallas and Kingston Township are doing.

The Kunkle department is the first call for northern Dallas Township and shares duties in Monroe Township, Wyoming County, with the Noxen department.

Most departments are supported in part by an annual subscriber fee, usually in the range of \$25 per household. Aside from raising funds for equipment and training, the fee protects subscribers from additional charges beyond those paid by their insurance. Van Etten estimated that 65 percent of households in the Dallas department area pay the fee, and Dodson said the rate was even higher in Kunkle's zone.

Slocum said few insurance companies pay the full cost of service by the BLS (Basic Life Support) unit and paramedics, and the charge to the patient could be in the range of \$600 if they were not a subscriber. The Dallas and Kunkle departments honor each other's subscribers, since they often are called outside their primary area.

Green Road

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complete the project, and Mark Kravits collected a petition supporting the project from 11 of the 13 families that live on the unpaved portion.

Aside from safety and convenience, Kravits said the township spends a considerable amount of money and time each year maintaining the road in passable condition. He also questioned whether emergency vehicles could safely negotiate the road, which has existed for decades.

Before voting to complete the project, the supervisors discussed the possibility of scaling back the work, or postponing it. Solicitor Ben Jones said that was easily done, since the contract with Laguna Construction Services contained a clause allowing the township to terminate the contract for "convenience."

"You have the clear right without cause," Jones said, although the township would be liable for expenses already assumed by the contractor.

Pressed to put a figure on the liability, Christopher Borton, engineer

for the project, estimated the charges as "probably around \$5,000 to \$10,000," since no work has yet begun. The township has also paid about \$25,000 in engineering fees to Borton's firm.

Borton also offered to reduce the scope of the work. "We can cut back on the job," he said, and lower the cost by \$100,000 by not doing the final paving work. It would cost approximately \$200,000 to clear trees, grade the roadway and install new drainage and piping, Borton said.

Any money saved on Green Road could be put toward other capital improvement projects, including renovation of the Center Street bridge, but could not be used to bolster the general fund.

Township Manager Eddie O'Neill said he was confident that at least \$85,000 would be left over from the Green Road project, and that money could be used for the bridge. He said the township borrowed about \$500,000 to fund the project and a conservative estimate of its cost is \$415,000.

Kingston Township Budget at a glance

These were significant items in the 2004 Kingston Township budget as it was proposed before the November 24 meeting.

GENERAL FUND

Revenues	\$1,929,738
Expenditures	2,168,019
Deficit	238,281

Beginning Fund Balance	\$350,000
Ending Fund Balance	111,719
Reduction	238,281

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND

Revenues	\$93,000
Expenditures	254,600

Beginning Fund Balance	\$250,000
Ending Fund Balance	88,400
Reduction	161,600

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Responders

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days at the Dallas garage and Sunday at Kingston Township.

State regulations require that an EMT and another person certified in advanced first aid be available at an emergency scene.

Slocum said the Dallas paid EMTs are also certified as firefighters and drivers, allowing them to take an ambulance, fire truck or both to an incident, while volunteer personnel respond directly to the scene.

The addition of paid weekend coverage was spurred by decreasing availability of volunteers who are often busy with jobs, sports or family activities, Van Etten said. Now, instead of having to wait for two volunteers to arrive at the station, the paid crew can respond immediately.

The new arrangement has resulted in a small change in the call sequence for backup. On weekend days, Kingston Township is now the first backup — or "second do" in the parlance of emergency response — for the Dallas department in the southern part of the township and in Dallas Borough.

Kunkle Fire and Ambulance, which is located in the northern section of Dallas Township, had been in that position since 1992, and remains the second call at times other than weekend days.

"Kunkle has always been our second

do, and still is," Slocum said during a November 6 meeting with the Dallas Township supervisors. "We've worked with them for 50 years."

"Nothing has changed except for 20 hours on the weekend."

Van Etten said only about one or two ambulance responses are needed on a typical weekend day. "There's a lot of downtime," waiting for calls, he said.

Slocum said it is unusual to have competing calls on weekends, and estimated that only occurs four to six times a year.

While he is annoyed that the change was not communicated better, Jack Dodson, Kunkle chief, does not want the new lineup to become a problem.

"Our main concern is we don't want to damage the relationship" with Dallas, Dodson said Tuesday. "We don't want to upset the apple cart."

Still, Dodson feels his department has been left somewhat in the dark about the change. "We have not been officially notified," he said, and he hasn't talked to anyone from the township or the Dallas department since expressing his concerns at the November Dallas Township Supervisors meeting.

At that meeting, Frank Wagner, vice chairman of the supervisors, assured Dodson nothing would be done without Dodson's knowledge.

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