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Richland budget to triple tax rate

After 19 years without an increase, hike likely to be 7 mills.

By Melinda Rizzo

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Richland Township supervisors unveiled a \$7.2 million budget for 2009 that more than triples property taxes, freezes salaries and new hires, and delays fire equipment purchases for at least a year.

Supervisors will vote Dec. 30 on the spending plan.

"We have not had a tax increase in Richland for 19 years. Three years ago, we knew this day was coming," said township Supervisor Richard Orloff.

A Richland taxpayer with a property tax assessment of \$24,000 pays about \$60 in township taxes. The proposed increase, roughly \$168 more, would bring the total tax bill to about \$228 per year. The tax rate would rise from 2.5 mills to 9.5 mills.

A mill is worth \$1 for every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value.

Orloff said the 7-mill increase could be offset in 2010 if the township moves to hire one trash hauler.

"What would happen is that we could get a better rate, and the increase in taxes to pay for trash collection could be deductible on state and federal income taxes," Orloff said.

Orloff said a referendum on whether or not the township should mandate trash collection services could be on next year's ballot.

Orloff said the township's fund balance is also down about \$1 million from 2007.

Construction in Richland has slowed because of the sour economy and a Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority moratorium placed more than a year ago on new sewer hookups.

Orloff said supervisors would request that the police department, which is part of a collective bargaining union, participate in the wage freeze. "We are taking a 10 percent cut for our stipend as supervisors, which is not a lot of money, but we wanted to send a leadership message that all of us have to make sacrifices," Orloff said.

Supervisor Mike Zowniriw suggested financing the shortfall, rather than raise taxes.

"It's never a good idea to finance your daily expenses. When you do that, you place today's burden on future taxpayers," said Township Manager Stephen Sechriest.

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