Police merger wins backing

By FRED A. SAVANA Staff Writer

New Britain

The borough voiced its support to merge its police department with three neighboring communities.

Although residents expressed some concern, there was overall agreement in New Britain on Tuesday to go ahead with plans to merge the town’s police force with three surrounding departments.

The borough council voted unanimously to keep the emerging plan moving forward after James Donnelly, who serves as chief in both New Britain and Doylestown, discussed the proposal with the community.

“We’re going to save a lot of money,” Donnelly told the dozen or so people at the meeting. Based on a state study that examined the merger among the two boroughs and Doylestown Township and Warwick, about $387,000 could be saved annually among the four towns.

Without a cost-saving consolidation, Donnelly warned, “we’re going to price ourselves out of policing.”

According to the merger proposal, the police chiefs from each community would develop a structure for the regionalized force. A commission, with representatives from each municipality, would run the new police department, headed by one chief.

“We’ll be a much more effective and efficient police force if we’re combined,” said Donnelly. Through attrition and retirements, the unified department would shrink from 64 officers to 55.

Marie Esher Cola, a New Britain resident, asked if the regionalized department would need a new centralized building. Donnelly said, yes, eventually.

To start, the regionalized force would rent 10,000 square feet from Warwick where patrol officers would be headquartered. The investigative and administrative departments would rent another 8,000 square feet from Doylestown Township, said Donnelly.

In five years, he said, a new building would be needed.

“Warwick is far from New Britain,” said Cola, who expressed concern about proper coverage for New Britain.

Donnelly reassured her the consolidated police force is one that provides full coverage in each community. A “checkerboard” approach that merges the towns into sectors, means officers will overlap their coverage.

“You will get larger effectiveness on all patrols,” said the chief.

Borough resident Joseph Cangelosi asked about detectives being available and if there will be 24/7 coverage.

Donnelly said the merger will mean the availability of six detectives for all the towns but no municipality has 24-hour coverage. A Bucks County radio room is on-call around the clock to dispatch officers where they are needed.

“There will always be a supervisor on duty and back-up will always be available,” said the chief.
New Britain's council president, David Donahue, applauded the consolidation and said, in his opinion, regardless of what Warwick and Doylestown Township decide, New Britain and Doylestown will become one department.

"We're committed to merging our efforts," said Donahue.

"For us, it takes our department to a whole other level; one we could never afford otherwise."

Furthermore, said Donahue, the regionalization will be a model for the state and one that will be copied across Pennsylvania.

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