Police merger moving forward

By Bill Devlin Staff Writer

The borough’s public safety committee recommended council continue with plans to merge its police department with three others.

Doylestown is continuing its pursuit of a regional police force.

Council’s public safety committee Wednesday night recommended that the borough maintain participation in plan to merge police departments in Doylestown, Doylestown Township, Warwick and New Britain.

New Britain Borough Council voted Tuesday to keep the plan moving forward.

About 20 people attended the Doylestown meeting. The audience was a mix of residents, officials and police officers from the participating municipalities.

Police Chief James Donnelly, who explained the details of the regionalization plan, was asked by resident Lisa Crawford if the merger would destroy the small-town feel of the borough police force.

"My children grew up knowing the police chief and the police officers," said Crawford.

Donnelly said that feeling would not be sacrificed with the regionalization.

“This community is going to know the police officers,” said the chief.

A state study indicated that more than $370,000 would be saved in the first year of the merger.

However, Doylestown’s savings would amount to only $10,989.

Borough council President Det Ansinn said he was surprised that the borough would realize any savings in the first year. He said the cost of law enforcement is increasing at a great rate and being able to stabilize the cost without giving up the level of service is a plus.

According to the state study, regionalization would save Doylestown Township $17,901, New Britain, $102,592, and Warwick, $246,978.

Donnelly cautioned that those numbers will change as a contract is hammered out with the various police unions.

The chief added that all four unions are in support of the merger. He said the regional police force will have 55 members, down from 61 among the four departments. He said the reduction will come from attrition, including the retirements of the police chiefs in Doylestown Township and Warwick. The merged department will be headquartered in both Doylestown Township and Warwick. A new building will be constructed within five years.

Donnelly said that January 2012 is the target date for the new force. He said Doylestown and New Britain will merge even if the two townships opt out.

Concerning a timeframe, Borough Manager John David said the first step will be to establish a commission to handle the details of the regionalization.
"Once we determine who is coming to the dance, then the (participating) municipalities will come up with an agreement and decide on the make-up of the commission."

Doylestown Township Supervisor Chairwoman Barbara Lyons was in the audience. When the board meets Feb. 15, the supervisors are expected to set a date for a public presentation of the regionalization plan.

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