'Productive' talks on merging police in townships

By DANNY ADLER STAFF WRITER

NEWTOWN TOWNSHIP/UPPER MAKEFIELD

A Newtown Township official described a recent sit-down with Upper Makefield officials about regionalizing police departments as "a good discussion, a very productive discussion."

Newtown Township Supervisor Matt Benchener made the comment during last week's board of supervisors meeting about an informal Feb. 5 chat that included him, Newtown Township Supervisor Chairman Rob Ciervo, Upper Makefield Supervisor Chairman Conrad Baldwin and Upper Makefield Supervisor Dave Kulig.

"We talked through some options and it does look like there may be some common ground for us to stand on," Benchener said. "It looks like some sort of combination + down the road may be able to save money and increase efficiency for both townships. However, we need to work out details on how to get that done and make sure we're taking into account coverage levels and safety."

It was "a good discussion, a very productive discussion, but still very much in the preliminary stages," Benchener added.

Ciervo said Monday that different options were discussed, but declined to get into specifics. He said it is his understanding that Upper Makefield officials will see if they want to pursue any options and then the towns would have formal public talks on regionalization.

Kulig declined comment when contacted by the newspaper Monday, saying he wanted to hear for himself what Benchener said at the supervisors meeting.

Baldwin also declined comment, saying he and Kulig need to inform their board of the discussions.

Officials from Upper Makefield reached out to Newtown Township about the possibility of creating a regional force last month. Newtown Township officials were quick to say they're willing to listen.

Officials from both towns have stressed that the talks are "conceptual" as of now.

The talks come as both towns are looking for ways to cut spending.
The Upper Makefield Police Department, with a $1.9 million budget, has 16 officers. Newtown Township has a $3.9 million budget and a 28-member police force. Newtown Township also contracts its police services to adjacent Wrightstown for $494,948 a year.

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