Committee questions figures on police merger

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By Bill Devlin, staff writer |

Warwick - The amount of savings, funding for pensions, retirement ages and other factors were cited as obstacles to combining with Doylestown, New Britain and Doylestown Township.

Warwick’s participation in a regional police force is far from a slam dunk.

After hearing some of the concerns about the venture from their financial advisory committee Monday night, it’s possible that the township supervisors may not even take a shot.

Board Chairwoman Judith Algeo indicated that the board is going to move cautiously in making a decision about participating in the plan to merge its police department with those in Doylestown, New Britain and Doylestown Township.

A state study indicated that more than $370,000 would be saved in the first year of the merger. Warwick savings would be the greatest - $246,978. However, Algeo has doubts about those figures, noting that questions concerning pension plans and other costs need to be addressed.

"It's misleading to say that it (the merger) is going to save money when these things still must be considered," said Algeo.

Finance Advisory Committee member Katerina Simonetti said that the discrepancies among the four departments' pension plans must be resolved. She said the state doesn't address whether a combined plan must be fully funded at the time of the merger.

That would pose a problem for Warwick because township Manager Gail V. Weniger said that the pension plan now is underfunded by $1.25 million.

In addition, Simonetti said that Warwick’s retirement age is 55, whereas the retirement age in two of the partner municipalities is 50. She said that issue must be resolved because of the financial implications.

Simonetti told the board that an actuary would have to be hired to provide the figures on what the real cost will be to combine the four pension plans.

The advisory committee also questioned the state numbers regarding the cost of building a new police headquarters as well as the state's figures on vehicle expenses, uniforms and supplies.

They said the state study's allotment of $38,000 to pay a person to assist the chief in the financial operations of the department is unrealistic. Simonetti likened the post to a company's chief investment officer.

"The salary for what is similar to a CIO is too low," she said.

Simonetti said the biggest obstacle is the composition of the (regional police force) board. She said just how much each municipality will have on the board is a critical question that must be answered.

Algeo said that Warwick and the other municipalities must meet again and "we will bring our questions" to that meeting.

Weniger said no date has yet been set for a meeting of the four municipalities to discuss regionalization.