

Today's Obituaries

Obituaries appear on Page D3 for Carmella Alleva, Jane Strode Dornes, Michael C. Findley, Walter R. Otto, William H. Puglisi Sr., Joseph P. Rochford, Joseph Richard Sapone, Harry D. Skelton and David R. Slith.

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Wallace opts for its own police

After a well-attended public hearing, township supervisors decide to move ahead with pursuing independent police coverage

By DANIELLE LYNCH
Staff Writer

WALLACE — After roughly 3½ hours of public comment, township supervisors decided to pursue the creation of a police force.

The decision was made in a special public meeting held immediately after a public hearing Thursday.

Residents packed into the township building to ask questions and raise concerns.

"If this ordinance passes tonight, it's not the end of public input," Supervisor Rob Jones said.

Supervisors said options they could pursue include a full-time township police force or contracting with state police.

Although the supervisors said they do not favor full 24/7 coverage from state police at Embreeville, they'd consider using state police coverage between 2 and 6 a.m.

The cost of the various police force options range from about \$532,000 to \$829,000, township officials said.

Supervisors said start-up costs have yet to be determined, but Wallace would receive one-third of all assets once dissolution of the Brandywine Regional Police Department is complete. Assets include four police cars and weapons, officials said.

Supervisors hired West Vincent's Police Chief Michael Swininger at \$75 an hour in June as a police consultant. He has prepared a 2009 police budget for township officials and guided them through the process.

Some residents and regional police officers who attended the meeting questioned the township's hiring of the consultant and asked why township officials did not seek help from the current regional police Chief Mark Kocsi.

Township Solicitor Stephen Siana said it was paramount for the township to seek help from an independent consultant.

Some residents at the meeting supported the idea of starting an independent police force.

"We're not getting our money's worth," said resident Bob Ray of the regional agreement. "I'm in favor of our own police department."

Other residents worried about the possible changes in the police coverage and the potential increase in taxes.

"My husband and I moved to this area because of the low crime rate," resident Susan Potts said. She said she worries that upcoming developments in the township may increase the crime rate.

Jones said safety is the highest priority of township officials.

"To me, starting our own police force gives us complete control

over finances and levels of coverage," Jones said.

Officials from East Brandywine and Wallace said last week the issues between them are irresolvable. Wallace notified East Brandywine about its intention to split back in March. Sticking points between the two townships have been finances, inequity on the police commission and the police station headquartered in East Brandywine's township building.

Regional police officers who have attended Wallace meetings over the past four months said they are worried about losing their jobs.

East Brandywine officials said they will retain two-thirds of the 15 full-time officers for their own township police force. Kocsi said he has had verbal discussions with East Brandywine Supervisor David Kirkner about the desire for East Brandywine supervisors to retain him as chief and also retain the po-

lice's department lieutenant. In addition to the chief and lieutenant, eight other officers will likely go to East Brandywine, which leaves a remaining five full-time officers that may need jobs, according to Kocsi.

Wallace officials have said at township meetings that they intend to give employment preference and priority to officers working for the regional police force. But Wallace officials also say the hiring process is dependent on a need to have officers with different levels of experience.

Wallace is accepting applications for the police chief through Aug. 22. Jones said that once the new chief is hired, he will advise the board on how to move forward with the township police department.

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