



Morris Township decides which employees will be laid off

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Tomas Dinges / For the Star-Ledger

MORRIS TOWNSHIP — In April, 60 township employees were told their jobs were in danger. On Thursday night, the axe fell.

"Thanks for making me homeless," yelled one building department worker when his name was read. He stormed out.

People at the emergency meeting sat in benches or stood in the back. Knees bounced nervously and hands were held to foreheads.

Others cried as business administrator Fred Rossi read the names of employees to be laid off in somber succession.

The 16 layoffs announced touched almost all parts of the municipal government.

Four code inspectors were let go, partially because of the drop in construction activity. Two out of the 22 full-time firefighters are slated to be laid off. Assistants with decades of experience were relieved of their duties in the administration, fire and sewer departments. Personnel were cut in five other departments as well, from tax assessment to health.

This past week, Morris Township police Chief Timothy Quinn received notice this past week that he too could face furlough.

"We have never seen anything like this in the past," Quinn said. The budgetary environment from March to now is like "night and day," he said.

Many slated to be let go were long-time employees, Mayor Scott Rosenbush said.

"Most of them have been here longer than me," he said. "I can't replace that experience."

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The township is facing an unprecedented \$3.5 million shortfall in revenue, said Rosenbush.

The proposed \$33.4 million budget for 2010 raises municipal taxes for the average property valued at \$380,000 by \$133. There will be an increase in the local tax rate of 6.2 percent.

Revenue loss came from a \$1 million cut in state aid, \$2 million of surplus funds from commercial property tax appeals and \$500,000 from reduced municipal fees and investment interest.

To make up for the lost revenue, committee members raised fees on municipal services, cut capital improvement projects and increased the tax collection rate. Even with those measures, the township faced a shortfall of \$1.3 million. A reduction in labor costs was the last remedy, Rosenbush said.

Committee members expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of time the budget process has taken, as well as the tools used to forecast the economic position of the township.

Township officials will meet with negotiating units for police, fire and other departments to look for ways to lower department budgets and coordinate furloughs.

"There is opportunity still for people to come forward with plans and ideas to save jobs," said committee member Ronald Goldberg, who is also on the finance committee. The final public hearing on the budget is July 14.

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