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RIVERDALE - Cost of living increase on on municipal budget cusp

(by Leslie Scott - Staff Writer - February 04, 2009)

RIVERDALE - The governing body is preparing employees and volunteers that receive annual financial awards for the possibility of not getting an increase in 2009.

During the Jan. 19 Borough Council meeting, Mayor William Budesheim announced the grim news to Fire Chief Mike Norton after the council discussed approving the 2.8 percent cost of living increase for the 2008 Length of Service Awards Program. LOSAP gives annual awards to those who volunteer in emergency services like fire and first aid squads.

The mayor told the fire chief that the emergency services might not get a cost of living increase in the 2009 budget.

"I don't know where our budget is going to end up and I thought it would be fair to let the Fire Department know that," the mayor later said.

LOSAP provides tax-deferred income benefits, which are distributed once a year, to active volunteer members of the fire and first aid organizations.

This 2.8 percent increase would increase the maximum pay out for 2008 to \$1,481.

Chief Norton said the amount distributed is based on how active an individual member is.

Budesheim said other non-contractual borough employees could also experience this.

"This is something we are considering. Again, we have to look at the whole picture. We are looking to avoid this. We are not in any way looking to hurt the employees because they have families to provide for," Budesheim said.

If this becomes a reality, contractual employees, such as the Police Department, would be excluded.

Borough Attorney Bob Oostdyk explained that through its contract with the police, the borough has already agreed to provide a raise to the officers.

Oostdyk said the only way police raises could be avoided would be if the officers "voluntarily agreed to it."

Norton said he would like to see an increase go through in 2009.

"I haven't sat down and had any budget meetings yet," Norton said. Once these meetings are held, he said, "I will have a better understanding of what will happen."

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