

Mountville councilman suggests need for fire tax

BY DEAN LEE EVANS, Correspondent

A Mountville councilman hinted Monday that a fire tax might be necessary to fund the borough's fire department operations.

Francis Zimmer, chairman of the public safety committee, suggested the possibility of a fire tax in response to the fire department's 2012 budget. The \$167,000 spending plan projects a shortfall of about \$23,000.

"It's a consideration for (discussion) next year," Zimmer said of a fire tax.

After Chief Dean Gantz outlined the budget, Zimmer asked questions about low expectations for the fund drive and fundraising events.

"Are these realistic numbers?" Zimmer said.

Gantz confirmed that they were, and he added that this year fundraising profits and contributions "have fallen off quite a lot."

Fewer than 19 percent of residents contributed to the fire department this year, he said.

"It's unfair for one resident to support four other residents," the chief said.

He did not take a position on Zimmer's suggestion of a fire tax.

In addition, he said fundraising resulted in poor returns. For example, Gantz said only 64 people participated in bingo games last month.

He said the department could spend \$17,500 putting a fundraiser together but only bring in \$21,000 in returns.

"We only make \$4,000 off fundraisers," he said.

Gantz also said the department revenues declined its lost of coverage area in Manor Township in 2010. The area is now covered by Blue Rock Fire Rescue Department.

Gantz said residents of that area contributed about \$24,000 to the fire department's budget in fund drives and fundraisers.

Blue Rock Fire Rescue was formed last year when four volunteer fire companies -- West Lancaster, Millersville, Highville and Washington Boro -- merged to improve services and control expenses.

Last month, Manor Township approved the implementation of a 0.48 millage fire tax for 2012 as part of its preliminary budget.

East Petersburg Borough and Manheim Township are the only municipalities in the county with a fire tax in place, and East Hempfield Township recently announced that it may have to implement a fire tax after 2013.

(SOURCE: Lancaster *Intelligencer Journal*/New Era – December 21, 2011)