

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FOREST HILLS COUNCIL TAKES STEPS TO BALANCE BUDGET**  
**AND MANAGE POLICE OVERTIME**

On July 21, 2010 at 7:00 PM, Forest Hills Borough will hold its monthly Public Meeting and will invite comments from the public at the end of the regular business meeting regarding Borough Council's recent 6-1 vote to only allow police overtime that is contractually obligated. Frank Porco, Council President, will provide a statement that addresses the issue.

The meeting will take place in council chambers located at the Borough Building, 2071 Ardmore Boulevard, Forest Hills, PA.

"Forest Hills is faced with a difficult challenge," states council President Frank Porco, "how do you keep providing the services, meet the financial obligations required to deliver those services and still manage to stay on budget? The problem is not unique to Forest Hills Borough. The County's decision to keep assessments at 2002 valuations while very popular politically, have made budgeting and planning for small municipalities extremely difficult."

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Forest Hills Borough is approximately a 1.5 square mile town and has a \$5.6 million dollar budget. The police overtime budget for 2010 is \$78,000 and the overtime expenditures for 2010 to date, not including the current payroll which posts after 7.21.10, is \$72,994.79.

Forest Hills police officers' salaries over the last two years have averaged over \$87,000 per year. This figure does not include medical benefits which are valued at approximately \$14,000 per officer per year, of which our officers contribute a little over \$100 per year.

"Forest Hills increases its police expenditures every year: salary, benefits, insurance, vehicles and equipment. These costs are projected to continue to increase in to the future as well. One line item that remains consistently over budget, year after year regardless how many officers we employ, is police overtime," comments Porco.

"Can the residents of this community absorb another millage rate increase? That is the concern of this council. Our millage rate is currently 8.35 mills, while our residents are accustomed to a high level of service, it is the highest millage rate of the surrounding communities," President Porco continues, "Some people think that other services could be cut back or eliminated, but it begs the question how...Do we close the pool? Sell some of our park land to developers? Revise our snow plowing practices?"

"The only way for our community to address and resolve these issues is through a willingness to collaborate from our collective bargaining units," states Porco.

Total attorney's fees and related costs expended in the last five years to defend the Borough and the Borough uniform pension plan from financial and other claims by the police in lawsuits, arbitrations, unfair labor practices and grievances exceeded \$200,000.

Porco comments, "The money spent defending these claims on behalf of the taxpayers is far less than the money that our neighbors and residents living in Forest Hills would have spent if the Borough had not prevailed in every one of these cases."

Some solutions proposed by Forest Hills Borough Council to manage police overtime include: (1) hiring of part-time officers; (2) reorganizing the police schedules; and (3) the long-term solution of police regionalization. Forest Hills is currently working with Edgewood Borough to conduct a regionalization study of police services between the two communities and what combined services might look like for each borough.

President Frank Porco opines, "While it certainly is a complex issue with no easy solution, it is a problem that can be solved. It will require cooperation of all parties involved, a willingness to identify a solution, and a willingness to explore new ways of tackling tough problems. There is no problem that cannot be addressed – if we work together.

Forest Hills is located in the eastern suburbs of Pittsburgh, PA. It maintains its own police and public works as well as various recreation facilities and programs. Forest Hills Borough has a 7 member council of diverse ages, genders, and ethnicities.

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