



GLSD school board OKs increased tax collector compensation

BY GREG REINBOLD
Bulletin Staff Writer

The Greater Latrobe School Board at its regular meeting Tuesday approved increasing the commissions paid to elected tax collectors in Unity Township and Youngstown Borough beginning with the 2022-23 school year.

The commission increases for the elected tax collectors in both municipalities cover a four-year term and range from 2.5% to 2.53% per year for the Unity Township position and 2.81% to 3.22% for Youngstown. With the increased commission rates, the Unity Township tax collector would be compensated between \$69,638 (2022-23) and \$75,038 (2025-26) per year over the four-year term, while the Youngstown tax collector would be compensated from \$4,385 (2022-23) to \$4,805 (2025-26).

The resolution does not include changes to the compensation level for the tax collector covering the City of Latrobe, as that position is appointed by Latrobe City Council rather than elected and the school district does not set the compensation level for the position.

Greater Latrobe Business Administrator Dan Watson in his recommendation to the school board noted the elected tax collectors' workloads have increased over the past several years because of new requirements, including a state

law requiring school districts to allow for real estate taxes to be paid on an installment basis and the inception of Homestead and Farmstead exclusions for residential properties.

Watson noted the compensation level for Unity Township's elected tax collector is comparable to a Pennsylvania Economy League Central Division study of 81 school districts that found the average cost to collect real estate taxes was 0.24% of collections. GLSD currently compensates the elected tax collector for Unity Township at 0.28% of collections. For Youngstown Borough, by far the district's smallest tax collection area, Watson noted, a compensation package based on state or countywide averages would make it difficult to fill the position.

The tax collectors for Unity Township and Youngstown Borough combined to collect \$23,437,532 in real estate taxes for the district for the 2019-20 school year, according to Watson's recommendation to the board, and were compensated \$70,003 (0.30% of collections) to do so. The commission increases approved Tuesday by the board would keep compensation rates at the same percentage of collections over the next four years, assuming "a modest increase in real estate tax collection amounts," over that term, Watson noted.

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Testimonies wrap up in Unity couple's appeal to keep their chickens

BY ZACH D'AMICO
Bulletin Staff Writer

Proponents of enforcing Unity Township's current zoning ordinance which bans raising backyard chickens on residential properties testified during a public hearing Tuesday.

Three residents of Lawson Heights testified before the Unity Township Zoning Hearing Board against Jeff and Kristin Kuhns' appeal of a zoning violation the couple received in July regarding the 20 chickens they raise on a 0.46-acre lot along Range Street.

The Kuhnses are seeking a zoning variance which would allow them to keep their birds.

At the two previous hearings — each curtailed due to time constraints — only witnesses who supported the Kuhns' appeal testified.

Zoning hearing board members Jim Kelley, Jackie Nindel and Tim Thomas are expected to make a decision on the couple's appeal as early as March 23, though township officials said the decision could come at a later special meeting.

By that point, township solicitor Gary Falatovich and attorney David Toal, who is representing the Kuhnses, are to have submitted findings of fact and a suggested decision to the zoning hearing board based on testimonies from the public hearings regarding the Kuhns' appeal.

Township zoning officer Harry Hosack testified on Tuesday that he helped write the provision

banning chickens on properties having less than two acres when the township enacted the current zoning ordinance in 1991.

After receiving complaints from neighbors, Hosack said he investigated the Kuhns' property and subsequently issued a notice of violation. He informed the Kuhnses of their options, which included appealing the violation by filing for a zoning variance — or finding another place to keep the birds.

The zoning ordinance violation dated July 13 cited from the 1991 ordinance, which states: "Chickens are considered farm animals and are not permitted to be kept on properties having less than two acres."

The Kuhnses had 20 days to get rid of the fowl or potentially face a minimum \$300 fine if they chose not to appeal.

James Ross, a resident of Range Street for more than 16 years, testified against the couple's appeal for a variance. He said he learned of the Kuhns' chickens about eight to 10 months ago.

"I heard them, I could smell them," he said.

Ross alleges that on Nov. 29, he witnessed a hawk fly into the fencing around one of the chicken coops.

The following afternoon, Ross said he saw Kristin Kuhns holding the hawk "belly up" and put it into a cage with a blanket overtop.

(See Testimonies on Page A3)

Too doggone cold for a swim? Not at this pool



Photos by Jim Bates

Darlene Schmucker, owner of B & D Creekside Activity Center, Avenue B, Latrobe, prepares to cut the leash for the recent grand opening of the Creekside Lagoon doggy swimming pool. The 30-foot pool in the ArcMaster Building is the newest addition to the venue and it is designed to teach dogs to swim and as an introduction to dock diving and water games. The heated pool also can be used for injured or overweight dogs and swim therapy, since dogs can use it to exercise without stress to their joints. In the right photo, Debbie Thir of New Alexandria lets her dog Rusty, a 5-year-old cattle dog, check out the pool for the first time. The water is warmed to 90 degrees and there is a drying station for the animals.



No new COVID-19 deaths reported Tuesday in county

BY GREG REINBOLD
Bulletin Staff Writer

Westmoreland County's coronavirus (COVID-19) death total remained steady again on Tuesday — the fourth day in the last five without an increase — while new daily cases remained in double-digits for a 13th straight day, according to Pennsylvania Department of Health data.

With 98 new coronavirus cases reported in Tuesday's update to the state health department's COVID-19 Dashboard, there have now been 25,993 coronavirus cases in the county since the start of the pandemic — 18,506 confirmed cases and 7,487 probable. So far, there have been 84,598 negative tests in the county.

There have been 6,660 coronavirus cases reported in Westmoreland County so far this year for an average of 141.70 reported per day in 2021.

The county is averaging 80.62 new cases per day so far in February.

Westmoreland County has added fewer than 200 new

coronavirus cases each day since Jan. 14, and has had fewer than 175 new cases in all but one of those days. Since the start of February, the county has had fewer than 120 new cases each day, and has been below 100 new cases in 14 of the 16 days this month.

With no new coronavirus deaths reported for Westmoreland County on Tuesday, the county's total since the start of the pandemic remained steady at 648 and the total in 2021 stayed at 225.

The virus-related death rate in Westmoreland County has slowed since December, which was the county's worst month of the pandemic with 224 deaths reported (7.2 per day) and more than 10,000 new cases.

The first coronavirus deaths for Westmoreland County were reported April 5, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

The county coroner's office on Tuesday also showed no increase in its coronavirus death total since its last update at

11 p.m. Monday. Prior to that update, which saw the total increase to 408, the coroner's count had remained steady at 404 since its previous update at 11 p.m. Feb. 8.

The coroner's total includes coronavirus deaths that occur in Westmoreland County, regardless of the deceased person's county of residence, while the state health department's coronavirus death figures include any person considered a resident of Westmoreland County, regardless of where their death occurred.

The youngest person to die of COVID-19 in Westmoreland County was 36, according to the county coroner's office, and the oldest was 109.

Statewide, coronavirus cases reached 899,237 as of Tuesday's update to the Pennsylvania Department of Health's COVID-19 Dashboard. That case total includes 777,177 confirmed cases in the state and 122,060 probable cases. So far, there have been 3,783,099 negative tests in the state.

(See No new on Page A3)

Kelly Tua Hammers seeking nod for Derry Twp. district judge

Derry attorney Kelly Tua Hammers plans on seeking to fill the seat of retiring Mark Bilik as district judge in Derry Township.

Hammers, 49, has served as Westmoreland County's assistant district attorney since 1997.

A Democrat, Hammers plans on running in both the Democratic and Republican primaries on May 18.

"I am no stranger to the Derry community or to our proud history," she said. "From my education, experience and high ethical standards as an attorney, I am also no stranger



KELLY TUA HAMMERS

to working hard and making difficult decisions. I want to bring my public service to make a difference in my hometown where it matters to me."

As assistant DA, Hammers has worked on special assignments including sexual assaults for adults and minors, civil asset forfeiture and juvenile cases.

A 1989 Derry Area High School graduate, Hammers received a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh and a law degree from Dickinson School of Law.

(See Kelly on Page A3)

Amy Altman McChesney joins Derry Twp. district judge race

Amy Altman McChesney has announced her candidacy to succeed retiring Mark Bilik as district judge in Derry Township.

McChesney, 42, of Derry Township has previously held positions in the Westmoreland County Clerk of Courts office as well as a district judge's office.

She said she "intends to bring a common sense approach to the common man's court."

McChesney, a registered Republican, will seek both the Democratic and Republican nominations in the May



AMY ALTMAN MCCHESENEY

primary. The open seat oversees court cases in Derry borough and township, and New Alexandria.

"I am experienced, knowledgeable and familiar with criminal and civil procedures and protocol in the magisterial court as well as the Court of Common Pleas," she said.

A 1996 Derry Area graduate, McChesney continued her education at St. Vincent College where she studied psychology and general administration of justice.

(See Amy on Page A3)

TODAY'S WEATHER
Mostly Cloudy

HIGH 26° LOW 22°

Classified A11
Comics A9
Crossword/Sudoku A9
Entertainment A10
Health A4
Lifestyles A6

Local News A1, A3, A5
Lottery Results A3
Obituaries A2
Sports A7-A8
TV A10
Dear Abby A9



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