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October 23

Hazleton postpones vote on constables

Further discussion needed between police chief, constables, city officials.

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Staff Writer

HAZLETON – City council on Wednesday tabled a controversial proposed ordinance on using state constables, ended health care coverage for council members and increased certain parking violation fees.

The constable legislation, introduced by Councilman Tom Gabos, basically laid out services that state constables can provide under state law, such as prisoner transport and serving warrants and protection from abuse orders, and it stated that the city can use constables for those purposes.

City council candidate Jean Mope spoke in favor of the ordinance, saying it could clear the way for the city to use constables in certain situations to help ease the workload for city police. She said constables could be paid on a commission basis or through fees tacked onto fines.

She also suggested that they could help the city's lone code enforcement officer to enforce city code.

City police Detective Ken Zipovsky, president of the Fraternal Order of Police Power City Lodge 18, said it was "bad legislation. There's no reason to make a law for something that already exists."

Zipovsky said state law already allows constables to perform these duties anywhere in the state, including in the city of Hazleton.

Zipovsky and Mayor [Lou Barletta](#) also raised the point that there is a backlog of arrest warrants waiting to be served from District Judge Joseph Zola's office, and arresting those alleged criminals who would have to pay fines would mean more revenue brought into the city.

Craig Budde, whose wife, Vilmarie Budde, heads the Hazleton Chapter of the Guardian Angels, said Angels and members of crime watch could take note of code violations in the city and provide that information to the city code official and police for enforcement.

Council decided the subject of constable use required some discussion between Police Chief Robert Ferdinand, interested constables and city officials, and voted 3-2 to table the ordinance.

In other business, council members unanimously passed an ordinance abolishing city-paid health insurance for themselves. The mayor proposed the ordinance to save the city money; \$8,400 was budgeted in 2009 for council health insurance premiums.

Council also unanimously passed an ordinance resetting fees for some parking violations.

Fines for those who illegally park in a handicapped parking space or in a fire zone increased from \$20 to \$75. The same fine was added for vehicles parked on a city street without a valid inspection sticker or registration sticker. The cost jumps to \$100 if the fine is not paid within five days.

Parking meter fines remain the same at \$10 if paid within five calendar days and \$20 if not. Those fines also apply for vehicles parked outside the boundaries of lined parking spaces.

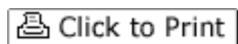
Council set a \$30 fine for the following violations: double-parking, parking in a bus zone, within 20 feet of an intersection, opposite the flow of traffic, facing the wrong direction, in a lane of traffic, more than 12 inches from the curb, at an improper angle, in a posted no-parking zone, in a manner that obstructs a crosswalk or sidewalk, in front of or in a private driveway, on a curb or sidewalk, in front of a garage, in a manner that obstructs or blocks pedestrian traffic or in an area designated as prohibited parking by temporary signs.

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