

Police union asks court to step into pay dispute

Union sues council over denial of employee pay raises

by Erin Cunningham, Staff Writer

The Montgomery police union claims the county government did not have the legal authority to strip officers of pay raises this year.

In a lawsuit filed June 24, the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge No. 35 asks the court to force the council to reverse its decision not to fund the pay raises, which amount to about 3.5 percent for most officers.

The union also is asking the court to award other unspecified damages, according to the complaint filed in Montgomery County Circuit Court.

The county's elected leaders, however, said Tuesday the complaint has no merit because the council is the county's fiscal authority and can defund employee contracts if they are unaffordable.

"I think the FOP is wasting its members money by challenging the authority of the council to approve appropriations needed to implement collective bargaining agreements," said Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg.

Union President Marc Zifcak, who is listed as one of the plaintiffs, did not return a call for comment. The union's attorney, William Chen Jr., declined to comment.

"The council has the final authority on any budget, so I'm not sure that there's any merit to the claim," said County Executive Isiah Leggett (D).

The county budget, adopted in May, does not provide pay increases for any government employees.

Montgomery union leader Gino Renne said Tuesday that his union has hired a team of attorneys and political consultants to research legal and legislative solutions to what he describes as a disregard for collective bargaining in the county.

"If this council believes that they are going to continue to unilaterally ignore collective bargaining, disrespect the work force, but more importantly continue to unnecessarily impose economic pain on our members, they don't know me and they don't know our local [union]," said Renne, who leads the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1994/Municipal and County Government Employees Organization, which represents about 10,000 employees in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

County's property tax bills delayed

The release of some 2011 property tax bills in Montgomery County will be delayed by about two weeks, spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield said.

The bills typically are available July 1, but will now be available on the county website by July 15, after the county has received and processed billing data from the state.

Printed versions of tax bills are expected to be mailed one or two weeks after that.

The delay is caused by a technical upgrade at the state level, Lacefield said, but county officials do not expect the delay to have a significant effect on collections. Most people pay their taxes in September, when they are due, Lacefield said.

County earns praise for management, condition of public housing

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has ranked Montgomery County's Housing Opportunities Commission among the best housing authorities in the country.

The local agency was rated as a "high performer," based on the physical condition of public housing, financial condition of the agency, management and resident satisfaction.

The county agency owns and operates 1,556 public housing units.