

# MAIN LINE TIMES

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## LM votes to hire more police

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Having hired an unusually large class of 13 recruits five months ago, Lower Merion Township is taking steps to fill more police vacancies.

In a committee vote July 25, township commissioners agreed to recommend extending conditional offers of employment to enough new officers to bring the department to its authorized strength of 136. The full board was expected to confirm the action at its final meeting of the summer Aug. 1.

Five positions are vacant, as the department continues to see the retirement of veteran officers.

The hiring is timed so that the new probationary officers can enter the next Montgomery County Police Academy class Oct. 1.

Waiting for the next academy class next February could see the department further reduced, as more members become eligible for retirement, and could result in the loss of top candidates, Superintendent Michael McGrath said.

McGrath said that prior to hiring the 13 officers in February, the township's Civil Service Commission had certified 15 candidates from the most recent recruitment campaign.

Since then, background investigations have been completed for all remaining candidates, providing a list of 12 qualified candidates.

Even with new officers from this round of hiring, McGrath said the department could be below authorized strength again before the end of 2012. That is a possibility because 16 officers will be eligible to retire

by the end of the year, with a dozen eligible now. Four more officers become eligible in 2013, part of a cycle that began with the hiring of large classes of officers in the 1970s and 1980s, but which McGrath said would now begin to level off.

As a part of that cycle, earlier this summer, the department promoted eight officers to command or front-line supervisor rank to fill positions at those levels.

Noting that the current authorized strength of 136 is down by eight with the elimination of some positions since 2003, McGrath said that waiting to hire officers next year might not only lead to the necessity to begin a new recruiting campaign, with its expenses, but cause "our ability to deliver the high standard of police services expected in this township [to be] negatively impacted."

In other action last week, the committee recommended advertising an ordinance amendment for a vote in September to change the signalized intersection of Bala and Union avenues in Bala Cynwyd to a four-way stop.

The change is sought in connection with the Bala Avenue Streetscape Project that includes sidewalk, crosswalk, landscaping and lighting improvements for Bala Avenue. The project, which is being managed by the City Avenue Special Services District, is out for construction bids.

Traffic counts in preparation for the project indicated that its existing traffic signal is not warranted, and in fact may contribute to drivers rushing to beat the light at an intersection where many people are walking across to the Bala Gym.

A four-way stop is anticipated to both

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enhance pedestrian safety and traffic flow at the intersection, McGrath said, in recommending the change.

After some discussion, PennDOT has approved the request for the change. However, rather than remove the existing signals – certainly at some significant cost – the signal posts and lights will remain in place, set as a permanent four-way flashing red light, to "enhance" the message of the new stop signs.

A vote on adoption of the new four-way stop regulation at Bala and Union avenues will be scheduled for Sept. 19.