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Dillon Davis - April 7, 2026

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While voters in Orange Township will see a new fire levy on the May 5 primary election ballot, township officials want to ensure the community understands the levy is simply a continuation of what was previously on the books.

The levy, at a rate of 2 mills, has been filed as a new levy but would only replace the 2-mill levy approved by residents in 2023. That levy expired at the end of December, and because state law now prohibits replacement property tax levies, the township must submit the levy as a new tax.

Should voters approve the levy, the Orange Township community will add the 2-mill levy to the existing 7-mill levy that has been on the books since 2013 and will return to the ballot next year after last being renewed in 2024. The new levy would cost an estimated $210 annually for a home valued at $300,000, and is expected to generate approximately $4.56 million annually.

"It's for everything that is involved with operating a fire department and making sure that we are maintaining the levels we need to maintain and that our residents desire in a growing community," Orange Township Fire Chief Nathan McNeil told The Gazette.

McNeil said the state's prohibition on replacement levies has done the township no favors in educating the community on what the "new" levy means — and doesn't mean — for their future tax bills.

"It's confusing because people hear 'new' and are thinking it's the old 2 mills plus another 2 mills," he said. "No, that first one has expired. I really wish they would have left replacement levies alone because it's so much easier to call them replacements. Now that they've eliminated replacements, people get confused and think we're asking for the 7-mill levy with an additional 4 mills. But that first 2-mill levy is now gone, and this one would replace it. We're constantly trying to get that across to people."

A lone change to the new levy would be the duration of its cycle. While the expired levy lasted for two years, the new levy would cover five years. McNeil said that by extending the levy for five years, it would last the township until 2030, when it plans to decide whether to combine the longstanding 7-mill levy with the 2-mill additional levy.

As for how the additional funding would be used, McNeil said there isn't an aspect of the department that doesn't cost more to operate than it did when the 2-mill levy was first approved in 2023.

"Everything from maintenance costs to fuel costs, everything to keep the trucks going," McNeil said of how rising costs are impacting the department. "The cost of equipment has gone up. Fortunately, we don't have to buy any vehicles this year, but they've gone up a couple thousand dollars compared to the last time we bought. The last engine we bought was in 2017, and that was about $800,000. That same engine today would cost about $1.2 million. All the costs of operations have gone up, which is what everyone is experiencing in their daily lives."

In addition to costs associated with vehicles and equipment, McNeil noted that personnel costs are on the rise as well.

"To be able to keep up with having enough members to staff the vehicles we need to have for a growing community, we've had to add more people onto the floor," he said. "And then the cost of a firefighter as a whole, not just their paycheck, but health insurance, retirement, and everything has gone up."

McNeil went on to say he wants people to understand the fire department is trying to be a good steward of the resources it's been afforded, while also knowing people don't want to hear about levies every year.

“We’re trying to break it up where we know next year will be our big renewal for our 7-mill levy,” he said. “And then in 2030, our goal is to look at where we’re at and how things are operating with the new station and different things, and then be able to say where we need to be.”

He added, “We have the rollback with the 7-mill levy. There is talk of the rollback going away in the future. I don’t know if that’s true or not, but if that did go away, that might push us one way or another with how we deal with our levies. But our goal is to give us five years to really look at where we’re at with the rising costs. We’re hoping at some point, we’ll plateau a little bit with the economy, and we’ll be able to get a good understanding of where we’re at and be able to make good decisions on where we need to be.”

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