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Wilkins Township (Allegheny Co.) is considering amending its zoning ordinance to include language on wireless communication facilities, or the antennas that help to boost a cell phone's broadband signal.



Dan Cohen of the Cohen Law Group spoke on the matter before the board of commissioners at a Monday meeting. Mr. Cohen said that the popularity of smartphones has "led to an increased demand for wireless broadband," and traditional cell phone towers no longer can meet that need. "Cell towers provide coverage for a phone call, but not for broadband," Mr. Cohen said. Broadband requires a different antenna for phones to more easily connect to an LTE network. He said the

antennas can be cylindrical and about five inches tall or they can be flat screen-types of antennas.

Mr. Cohen said broadband providers are looking to place these antenna on either existing utility poles or possibly constructing new poles in public right-of-ways. "We recommend you beef up your old cell tower ordinance to address wireless facilities in rights-of-ways," Mr. Cohen said, adding that Wilkins' current ordinance could be deemed prohibitive to companies wanting to locate an antenna in the township.

Although commissioners did not approve a new ordinance at the meeting, the streets that broadband antennas could be permitted include township roads like Dunbar Avenue, Elizabeth Drive, Kingston Drive and Penn Center Boulevard and PennDOT/Allegheny County Roads including Brown Avenue, Larimer Avenue and Rodi Road. Commissioner Michael Boyd asked for further information on the matter and added that there were "too

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many neighborhood roads” on the list. – *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Gov. Tom Wolf said Monday he is open to hearing about state budget solutions for 2015-16 that don't require a mid-budget year tax increase, but will accept them only if he is convinced the math works. Wolf's comments came after a morning speech before a state meeting of county commissioners in Harrisburg.

Some leaders of the Republican majorities in the state House and Senate have said they think spending lines can now be completed for the current fiscal year, which runs through June 30, without any broad-based tax increases. That position is based on the notion that public schools, for example, are effectively three-quarters of the way through their academic years. That means that, programmatically, school leaders can't spend much of the increased funding Wolf has been seeking, the Republicans say. No administrator, for example, is likely to hire a new teacher to open a new classroom for the last quarter of the year.

Given that reality, and other supposed checks on non-essential spending in places like the state Department of Corrections, some of the GOP leaders believe the spending lines left unfinished by Wolf's December line-item vetoes can be completed without a change in the state's 3.07 percent personal income tax. Wolf's most recent proposal would take that rate to 3.40 percent retroactive to Jan. 1, 2016. It is a 10.7 percent increase that would raise the tax bill for a person at the per capita income of \$45,046 a year from \$1,383 to \$1,532.

He has also proposed, effective April 1, applying the state's 6 percent sales tax to basic cable television services and movie theater tickets, and a \$1-per-pack increase in the state's cigarette tax, among other revenue-raising measures. And starting in July, the state would add a new 6.25 percent statewide tax on natural gas extraction from the Marcellus Shale.

Wolf told the commissioners Monday those tax increases are needed to re-balance the state's budget, or else Pennsylvania will be staring at an operating deficit of at least \$1.8 billion that would likely force cuts in county-level human service programs and schools. "It's a bad place," Wolf said. "But it will get so much worse if we don't do something about it now. We need to change our bad habits in Harrisburg." He also urged completion of at least the 15-16 plan by the end of May, when he said Pennsylvania could face another costly round of credit downgrades.

Asked afterward about the GOP's interest in getting through at least the current fiscal year without a broad-based tax increase, Wolf said he's open to hearing the argument, if not optimistic. "I would have to be convinced in a way that I am not right now that the 15-16 budget can actually be a real budget with real numbers that add up," the governor said. "I hate to be a stickler here, but if we don't get this right, even in 15-16, we're looking at \$300 (million) to \$500 million of cuts," Wolf told reporters. "Where is that going to come from?"

All sides have, at this point, made clear they would like to complete the 2015-16 fiscal year budget before they plunge into Wolf's \$33.2 billion spending plan for 2016-17. The General Assembly is back in session this week. – *Harrisburg Patriot-News*

