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## **Extra pay for helicopter officers in new police contract**

### **Plans for chopper unit stalled**

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County police who are part of a nonexistent Police Aviation Unit would receive additional pay under a newly bargained police contract.

However, a majority of the County Council appears opposed to an aviation unit, an idea that was proposed informally by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) last year.

On Monday, Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said he is considering a budget resolution to ensure that taxpayer money is not spent on police helicopters in fiscal 2011.

Andrews has opposed a police aviation venture from the start, saying it is unnecessary and could put taxpayers on the hook for millions of dollars in the future.

A possible resolution would effectively shut down effort to get a helicopter program running in fiscal 2011 and make the Fraternal Order of Police contract language unnecessary.

"I'm going to do what's necessary, and we'll find out along the way what that is,"

Andrews said.

The Fraternal Order of Police Lodge No. 35 contract for fiscal 2011 calls for pilots and co-pilots to receive an additional \$3,500 annually and for observers and flight officers to receive an additional \$1,500.

However, county spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield says plans for the aviation unit, which would consist of one police helicopter, have stalled.

"We did not get the support of the majority of council members for it," Lacefield said.

"At some point we'll get back to it."

Lacefield said Leggett was not considering any specific date to return to the issue.

If the aviation unit is created, the cost of higher pay for trained officers would be \$10,200 annually, according to the county's Office of Management and Budget.

"The contract provision is premature because there is no helicopter unit," Andrews said.

"There's not likely to be for at least a while."

The county has received two former military helicopters for free, and Leggett has said a police fund will be the primary source to pay for a two-year evaluation of the program.

Police spokesman Capt. Paul Starks has said that the first two years of the program could cost about \$1 million.

There is no deadline by which the county must use the federal grants, Lacefield said.