

City officials, unions meet over health care grievances

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — City officials and representatives of the Saratoga Springs Police Benevolent Association and Firefighters Local 343 unions met Friday to provide testimony at an arbitration hearing on the unions' grievance against Mayor Scott Johnson's proposal to consolidate the city's health insurance plans.

"I felt good overall with the testimony taken," Johnson said, noting that testimony will be transcribed in the next 30 days, after which the state's arbitrator will have 30 additional days to rule on the challenge.

The city notified employees last April of the plan to stop offering coverage from four providers — MVP, CDPHP, Blue Shield, and Empire — and instead offer two coverage options from MVP.

The switch was set to take place July 1, but in June a Saratoga County Court judge issued a temporary restraining order preventing the changes from taking effect. Both the public safety unions and CSEA units representing both City Hall and public works employees filed grievances against the plan.

Johnson said Friday that the decision would be based on whether or not increases on co-pays for doctors' office visits from \$10 to \$25 and a new \$240 co-pay for hospital admission were deemed acceptable based on additional coverage provided in the new contract.

He noted additional medical, dental and eye coverage as well as a two fold increase in the number of days of skilled nursing home care, from 60 to 120 days, added to the plans.

"That can be a very expensive item," he said of the home care.

Johnson has estimated the savings realized from the consolidation at between \$800,000 and \$1 million per year.