

City, union strike deal

Published: Wednesday, April 06, 2011

By PATRICK H. DONGES, The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Tuesday night, the Saratoga Springs City Council unanimously approved new four year contracts, 2009 to 2012, for the city's Department of Public Works and City Hall employees CSEA units.

Union members voted to approve the new contracts last month; the previous contracts had expired at the end of 2008.

"I think at the end of the day we came together on this issue," Mayor Scott Johnson said after the vote of the new memorandums of understanding initially agreed upon at a March 22 arbitration hearing on the unions' grievance against Johnson's proposed health insurance consolidation plan.

The new agreements will discontinue arbitration on the matter and allow the plan to consolidate the options offered by four health insurance providers — MVP, CDPHP, Blue Shield and Empire — and instead offer coverage solely from MVP.

"That is significant cost containment for the city," Johnson said, reiterating the stance he has taken since the unions filed a grievance against the consolidation, which had initially been scheduled to go into effect last April.

In addition to the consolidation, those hired before contractual language required a percentage of health care premiums to be paid by employees (on or before Dec. 21, 2001, for City Hall workers and on or before June 5, 2001, for DPW employees) will now contribute \$500 per year toward health coverage.

"Any concession to start paying toward health care is viewed as a favorable thing," Johnson said.

Employees will also be offered annual monetary incentives, distributed quarterly, not to sign up for the city's health care plan (\$3,000 for family, \$2,500 for two person and \$2,000 for individual coverage) and future retirees will now be required to pay the same premium as they paid during their last year of employment to stay on the plan with a new option to spend accumulated sick leave pay toward health care.

The city will also make up the difference on any co-pay increases created by the plan switch; an expense Johnson said was justified given the substantial savings created by the consolidation.

Union employees will receive wage increases under the new plan this year and next year with no retroactive raises for the years a contract had not been in place.

City Hall employees will receive a 2 percent across the board increase effective immediately (April 1) and a 2.25 percent increase effective Jan. 1, 2012.

The second increase will be coupled with a freeze on "step increases," raises built into the contract that are given regardless of whether a contract is expired. There are ten step increases in the City Hall contract.

DPW workers will receive two 2 percent raises, one effective immediately and one on Jan. 1, 2012, with no step increase freeze. Their contract only stipulates three step increases.

"I think it's a good contract," said Public Works Commissioner Anthony "Skip" Scirocco during brief discussion on the contracts.

"It's been a long process and I'm glad to see it all come together," said Finance Commissioner Kenneth Ivins Jr. before voting to accept the contracts and thanking union officials, Johnson and his staff and Deputy Commissioner of Finance Kate Jarosh.

After the vote, CSEA City Hall Unit President Kathy Moran said the new contract was fair and that the arbitrator made both sides understand each other's needs during the negotiation process.

The next City Council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. April 19 in the council chamber of City Hall.